SCHOLARLY REVIEW ESSAY

Bureaucrats at Work: African Bureaucracies and Bureaucrats from the Sociological, Historical, and Political Perspectives

Mai Hassan. *Regime Threats and State Solutions: Bureaucratic Loyalty and Embeddedness in Kenya.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 302 pp. List of Figures. List of Tables. Bibliography. Index. $99.99. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1108490856

Myra Ann Houser. *Bureaucrats of Liberation: Southern Africa and American Lawyers and Clients During the Apartheid Era.* Chicago: Leiden University Press, 2020. 342 pp. $62.50. Paper. ISBN: 978-9087283452

Erin Metz McDonnell. *Patchwork Leviathan: Pockets of Bureaucratic Effectiveness in Developing States.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. 304 pp. Methodological Appendix. Notes. References. Index. $95.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0691197357

States and their formal institutions are not unitary actors with the ability to choose when and how to act. The many small acts of governance fall to bureaucrats, who execute (or fail to execute) elected officials' policies and priorities. Understanding the subnational and temporal variations in bureaucratic execution—an outcome that we might refer to as effectiveness, efficiency, or performance—is the largest common denominator of the three estimable books reviewed here.

Patchwork Leviathan: Pockets of Bureaucratic Effectiveness in Developing States by Erin Metz McDonnell makes a significant contribution to an essential research topic: why are some African bureaucracies effective while others are not? In answering this question, McDonnell makes a compelling counter-argument to researchers who unfairly generalize that African bureaucrats are uncommitted, ineffectual, and corrupt. McDonnell's clustered distinctiveness theory (McDonnell 2017) predicts that pockets of effectiveness can

persist in an otherwise dysfunctional bureaucracy if public managers can recruit, cultivate, and protect the teams they build. This entails selecting the team members they want, promoting a subculture of impartial and effective bureaucratic practices, and guarding the team against external influences that could undermine its goals and objectives. Her sociological approach highlights the subnational variations within African bureaucracies and shows that some pieces of the state apparatus do operate effectively in the public interest.

McDonnell combines one hundred interviews with site-intensive methods to dispel the stereotype of the monolithically dysfunctional African bureaucracy. Her data draw from pockets of bureaucratic effectiveness in the form of four "unusually effective and honest" cases within the Ghanian bureaucracy (12). Two departments are public-facing: Ghana's commercial courts, which ensure the efficient and predictable resolution of business and commercial legal disputes, and the Broadband Monitoring Units within the National Communications Authority, a telecom regulator that works with businesses to grow the Ghanaian telecommunications sector. The second two cases are inward-facing: the Policy Analysis and Research Division, a respected unit of budgetary aficionados within the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and the elite Monetary Policy Analysis and Financial Stability Department, a unit of monetary policy wonks that is part of the highly respected Bank of Ghana.

McDonnell argues that researchers often fixate on how dysfunctional African bureaucracies are while overlooking pockets of excellence within the state apparatus: a "great debate of shades of violet [that] failed to observe that many states are actually concentrated clusters of blue [(representing effectiveness)] in a field of red [(representing dysfunction)]" (5). Her work proves that bureaucratic subcultures can emerge and persist if given sufficient discretion, especially with regard to personnel. Teams within agencies can cultivate and maintain a bureaucratic ethos that they can protect from environments that are dominated by neopatrimonialism. Not all roads lead to clusters of effectiveness, however. One vital insight into these pockets of effectiveness is what McDonnell terms "dual habitus": a distinctive educational profile in which bureaucrats earn their first degree from a leading local university, which signals credibility and allows for social and cultural capital, then earn an advanced or professional degree from a university abroad, where the bureaucrat develops the necessary technical know-how and tacit knowledge.

A reader's methodological training may raise concerns with these cases. The first concern is the selection of cases using the dependent variable—i.e., "unusually effective and honest" agencies (12). McDonnell anticipates and disarms this issue through her research design, which selects control units within the same parent agency as each of the four primary cases, what she calls "functionally analogous control cases" (230). The second concern is that these cases seem to require that bureaucrats possess technical expertise. McDonnell attempts to resolve this using a comparative historical

analysis of functionally dissimilar cases from Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil, and China. Still, whether a team's functionality or expertise are scope conditions for McDonnell's clustered distinctiveness theory sets a research agenda for others to answer.

Patchwork Leviathan fails to deliver a definitive answer to why some public agencies succeed while so many others around them fail—as do all other analyses that precede it. What McDonnell offers is a fresh perspective that is not about an African Big-Man's executive will, widespread public corruption and patronage, or institutional designs that allow political tampering. McDonnell offers a sociologically infused answer—one that focuses on small organizational units and the act of doing bureaucracy— as to why a patchwork of units within bureaucracies may act effectively in the public interest, even when most of the state apparatus does not. This new approach to an old question is why this book is worth buying, reading, and citing often.

Bureaucrats of Liberation: Southern Africa and American Lawyers and Clients During the Apartheid Era by Myra Ann Houser focuses on organizations and professionals that work for the public good but not as government employees. Its historical approach highlights key relationships that the other books in this review do not: the influence of international non-state actors. Houser details the transnational history of the Southern Africa Project of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (or simply "the Project") and its role in ending apartheid in South Africa (see also Houser 2020). Established in 1963 at the request of President John Kennedy and supported by his successor Lyndon Johnson, the objectives of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law included: marshaling the resources of the private bar, including its leadership, for public policy advocacy; educating the public and the bar on civil rights; enlisting the skills of lawyers as negotiators and mediators to resolve disputes; and providing pro bono legal assistance to victims of discrimination (www.lawyerscommittee.org/history/, retrieved May 30, 2020). As a public interest advocacy organization, these missionaries of the bar were instrumental in urging lawmakers to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In 1967, the Project's activist lawyers began assisting human rights advocates in South Africa. Under apartheid, the South African government utilized its capable bureaucracy as a "sadistic, often murderous, mechanism to silence dissent" (43). In 1963, South African law gave its police the authority to hold political dissidents for three months without due process (General Law Amendment Act, No. 37, which commenced May 2, 1963). The Terrorism Act of 1967 (commenced June 21 of that year) empowered the police to detain people indefinitely without a trial or court appearance. Subsequent statutes, specifically the Internal Security Act of 1982 (commenced July 2, 1982), shortened the South African detainment period to six months with renewable three-month extensions. At that time, Spain's eight-day detention without charge was the longest among Western countries. The Project's initial assistance to counteract this repressive and

discriminatory apparatus focused on supporting the few South African lawyers brave enough to represent political dissidents in court.

The Project continued its activities for three decades. During that time, it aided Namibia's liberation from South Africa and quietly helped dismantle apartheid through cause lawyering. Its role in this effort was successful because its human rights activities extended beyond the courtroom. While its lawyers argued cases, the organization utilized photography, television, the fax machine, and the media to ensure its anti-apartheid efforts "remained a fixture of the evening broadcast [and at the] centre of a global discussion revolving around the Cold War, social change, decolonization, anti-racism and human rights" (25). These tactics were critically important in the 1980s as the apartheid government revived its repressive mechanisms, including longer-running trials and violence against detainees. At this point, the Project and other lawyers started to claim that the rule of law no longer governed the country.

It is too much to credit an American advocacy organization with being singularly responsible for ending South African apartheid. Still, its cause lawyering and long-term commitment to the effort appear vitally different from the contributions of almost all other foreign organizations, public or private. *Bureaucrats of Liberation* is an inspiring, insightful examination of the role that a civil society organization played in a momentous, historic regime change. Its contribution aligns with others who have emphasized that non-governmental and civil society organizations of all shapes and sizes can aid society in big and small ways (Mutunga 1999; Brass 2016; Brass et al. 2018; Schnable 2021; Srivastava 2021). Houser's carefully constructed transnational history provides a clear example of why non-democratic governments are unwilling to welcome human rights organizations promoting democratic reforms with open arms. Viewing the Project's efforts from this perspective gives a new appreciation for how critical and improbable its successes are.

Regime Threats and State Solutions: Bureaucratic Loyalty and Embeddedness in Kenya by Mai Hassan studies African bureaucracies from a political perspective, asking, how do incumbent leaders use bureaucracies and bureaucrats to retain power? Packing the bureaucracy with loyal in-group members to repress popular uprising is one approach. Hassan points out the high risk of using this tactic when the most credible challengers to incumbents are not outsiders, but rather other elites (4–6). A more fruitful strategy for retaining power is by incorporation: sharing state spoils with rival elites and admitting their rivals' supporters into bureaucratic positions. By incorporating both loyalists and rivals into their administrations, incumbents can effectively neutralize and placate the ambitions of rival elites. The question becomes, how do winning elites use the state apparatus to retain their power when a nontrivial proportion of bureaucrats support rival elites? The solution, according to Hassan, is to wield the state, not as a sword, but as a scalpel.

Bureaucratic management theory, according to Hassan, reintroduces an elite's motives and means for interfering with bureaucratic operations and personnel (see also Hassan 2017). This theory predicts that the unevenness in

bureaucratic effectiveness is a feature, not a bug, created by deliberately assigning loyal bureaucrats to particular territories to administer specific policies. Leaders shuffle personnel assignments so that bureaucrats who are most loyal to the leader can implement and enforce policy in key localities. Meanwhile, leaders dispatch bureaucrats loyal to rival elites to areas where they can do the least damage to the incumbent's hold on power.

The loyalty, alignment, and embeddedness of three key actors—leaders, bureaucrats, and residents—determine how an incumbent executive administration strategically manages its bureaucrats. A group's alignment toward the leader informs the administration of the likelihood that local residents will launch or sustain a popular threat in the future (47–48). It is appropriate to use incumbent strongholds (aligned groups), swing districts (unaligned groups), and opposition territories (misaligned groups) as proxies for different degrees of alignment. Loyalty, meanwhile, is the bureaucrat's expectation concerning the benefits he receives if the incumbent leader maintains political control (49–50). This logic of rationality can originate from varied sources, including patronage or co-ethnicity, and creates for the bureaucrat the external motivation to comply with the government's precise policy instructions. Embeddedness represents the bureaucrat's social ties to area residents (50–51). This social mechanism establishes a logic of appropriateness that affects bureaucrats' ability, and at times throttles their willingness, to execute policy. High embeddedness complements the impartial and programmatic delivery of public service goods, but it risks making bureaucrats less willing to enforce coercive policies.

Hassan uses a multi-method research design to assemble data that is impressive in both quality and quantity, drawing on the case of Kenya, a country notable for its bureaucratic-executive state and ethnic politics, and analyzing Kenya's largest administrative and security apparatus, the National Administration (previously the Provincial Administration). Through her sweeping archival work in Nairobi, Kakamega, Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nakuru, she recreates fifty years' worth of micro-level data, detailing fifteen thousand assignments of some two thousand senior administrators and low-level bureaucrats. Knowing a bureaucrat's ethnicity is central to her research design, but the archival materials contain only names and do not identify ethnicity. To overcome this missing data problem, Hassan takes on the role of an onomastician to create an original dictionary of Kenyan surnames to discern the bureaucrats' ethnicities (24–25). Simply marvelous!

Hassan's theory predicts that a leader assigns particular bureaucrats to territories conditional on both an area's importance to the leader and its residents' support for the leader (53–54). A leader's best strategy under both autocratic and democratic regimes is to send loyalists with high embeddedness to localities where the leader enjoys support from the residents (aligned groups). Once bureaucrats are assigned, it is both rational and appropriate for them to implement non-coercive policies. Under autocratic regimes, popular threats are most likely to emerge from areas where leaders lack popular support (misaligned groups). Leaders prioritize coercive policies in

these critical areas but cannot entrust such responsibility to any bureaucrat; therefore they dispatch only loyalists with low embeddedness to enforce coercive policies. A leader assigns bureaucrats with questionable loyalties to territories where they can do the least harm to his hold on power. Leaders can reassure themselves that bureaucrats—both loyalists and insurgents—behave as expected by using short tenures and non-co-ethnic assignments to ensure that bureaucrats do not develop embeddedness that might conflict with their loyalty.

Regime Threats and State Solutions is a significant contribution that explains why and how elected leaders use the power of their position to manage bureaucrats strategically to preempt elite and poplar threats. Winning elites accomplish this by first incorporating elites and their supporters into the state apparatus. Then, these leaders send particular bureaucrats to certain territories to implement specific policies. This work provides a new political paradigm to account for why a state's capacity and ability to implement policy impartially is neither uniform across its geography nor fixed over time.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2021.102

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