Pierre Englebert. *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow.* Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009. xiv + 301 pp. Tables. Figures. Notes. Acronyms. Bibliography. Index. $65.00. Cloth. $26.50. Paper.

Why don't things fall apart, at least when the "things" in question are African states? Or for some of those states, why don't they disappear, why do they still matter, even when they have fallen apart—imploded or virtually stopped providing any services or functions that are expected of even the most minimal of polities? Since Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg's seminal article "Why Africa's Weak States Persist"(*World Politics* 35 [1], 1982), scholars have had to face these questions. A recent entrant is Pierre Englebert, whose *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow* teems with insights and arguments about how states in Africa "simultaneously display decay and stability, weakness and resilience"(3). Not only wide-ranging in terms of the examples on which it draws, the book shows the author's deep familiarity with the issues and intelligence at work in the way he connects his cases to the categories that illuminate his key analytical concerns. This is a smart and engaging book, one from which you are constantly learning, whether nodding along in agreement or at times arguing back.

As many readers will recall, the core of the Jackson–Rosberg thesis (almost thirty years old now) was that African states persist because the basis of their statehood, and the reproduction of it, was juridical—i.e., sanctified by international law as part of the decolonization process. In spite of lacking the empirical attributes of statehood—either in terms of monopolizing legitimate violence or of reciprocally delivering on their side of the social contract—African states did not disappear because the international norms of recognition wouldn't let them. They continued, in spite of their lack of "state-ness," at least as this quality has been imagined in other parts of the world.

There was always something intuitively right about the thesis; it almost read like common sense. But there was also something that did not quite satisfy, and Englebert has articulated it well. What is the mechanism, he asks, that turns the juridical quality of states into the actual reproduction of state boundaries and institutions? Why do even opponents of the ruling elites of African states, and so many citizens who fail to benefit from state policies and practices, contribute to the reproduction of states rather than attempting secession or otherwise establishing their own autonomous polities? Englebert rightly argues that one cannot answer this question simply by reference to international law. This book thus focuses on how juridical matters connect with socioeconomic and political structures on the ground as well as what is in the heads of African citizens—their strategies, identities, imaginations, and emotions.

For Englebert, this connection is the relationship between sovereignty (i.e., international sovereign recognition) and the domestic politics of what he calls "legal command," defined as "the capacity to control, dominate,

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extract, or dictate through law." Legal command, conferred by international sovereignty, is "what endures of African statehood in times of weakness or failure" (62). The most banal bureaucratic procedures are thus implicated not only in the reproduction of power, but also in the idea of what power looks like and does. Englebert recounts traveling to a rebel-controlled part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and being asked to produce a document authorizing his travel: "I was perplexed that rebel authorities cared for an order of mission from the government they were fighting and whose legitimacy they were challenging, and I kept arguing that I was not on a mission from the government, so how could I produce such a document? For her part, the airport security agent was equally perplexed by my attempt at free movement without some authorization from someone" (69).

The bulk of *Africa* traces the logic of the power of legal command, showing how it helps us understand multiple cases of neglected or oppressed communities (from Zambia to Cameroon to Nigeria to DRC) whose elites and everyday citizens rarely consider secession, even when that option seems imaginable given the weakness of current state institutions. It then goes on to explore the relatively rare examples of secessionist movements in Africa—in the Horn, the Sahel, and Casamance. Englebert manages to treat these cases in ways that show deep attention to historical detail while allowing him to cast them as exceptions that prove the rule of the durability of states in their colonial form. Throughout, the author attends to the strategic environment for regional and ethnic elites, and the internal class and power dynamics within identity groups that drive many of them to seek integration (and the benefits conferred on local elites through locally delegated sovereign command) rather than separation. Violent rebellions, only a few of which are attempts at secession, are themselves strategies "either to create one's own sovereignty or to shape a local political elite capable of being a counterpart to the government and receive sovereignty benefits." For Casamance separatists, Englebert writes, the war "was as much about the formation of a local dominant political class as it was about the assertion of cultural identity" (158).

Englebert's overall emphasis on sovereignty and its relationship to authority and command varies in its power to convince when it shifts from a strict emphasis on the absence of secession to other forms of political compliance. His care with cases is not always matched with his care for concepts—the classic distinctions in political science among government, regime, and state are at times elided, and what is persuasive in explaining the reproduction of state boundaries veers problematically at times into an argument about all forms of acquiescence and the limits to contestation.

Beyond the effort to engage with "big" theoretical questions, *Africa* demonstrates a tremendous feel for the texture of everyday politics in ways that are also analytically insightful. Few books I have read combine so effectively a portrait of the plight of most citizens in most African countries, their creative responses to that plight, and a sense of how those responses

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are themselves part of the reproduction of unequal and oppressive systems. Rarely has the "agency" of everyday people been presented, far from romantically, as part and parcel of their troubles, as much if not more so than their liberation. And presented quite convincingly.

From an analytical perspective, Englebert is thus ambitious enough to trace the power of sovereign command into the motivations and intentions of nonelites in order to make an argument about compliance. As mentioned above, what exactly they are complying with—the naturalness of borders, the commands of an authoritarian regime, the legitimacy of national or local rulers—is sometimes hard to tease apart. At times, *Africa* treads into territory where the microfoundations of rule get murky. At different points, we read phrases like "submits to" and "is attached to" as if they signify the same thing, when the first is mainly descriptive of obedience and the latter imputes affect or even loyalty. Similarly, we are left wondering about different kinds of compliance, especially under conditions where the threat of violence is clear and imminent, and where it is not. Englebert has the courage to take his argument all the way to the microfoundational root, and he does so without succumbing to simple assumptions about abstract preference functions or timeless political cultures. But in casting his net so wide and trying to make his argument relevant to so many political issues, he leaves us with as many questions as answers about the sources of compliance under weak states.

These are the things that make *Africa* a great book to argue with. So is its concluding chapter, in which the author works through various scenarios that play out the hypothetical downplaying, witholding, derecognition, or conditional recognition of state sovereignty. *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow* is essential reading for graduate students and scholars working on the paradoxes of state power, in Africa and beyond.

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