Rethinking the concept of power in African politics
– a boundary producer –

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to revisit the concept of power in African politics. In the twenty-first century, as the world has become increasingly globalized, the political situation throughout Africa has been changing. Two decades after the end of the Cold War and the initiation of democratization in African countries, it has become necessary to review, and perhaps modify, the perception of African politics and international relations. On the one hand, we have observed significant changes in African politics; on the other hand, the some issues in African politics remain unchanged. Issues such as state building, democratization, the rule of law, and human rights continue to be the crucial political challenges for the future of Africa. These challenges in African politics unavoidably raise a question about the concept of (political) power in terms of its definition, meaning, and function. Therefore, we recognize that power is always the core (and bare) component of understanding politics in Africa, despite changes in its character according to the time and political stage. Power is not only a political engine but also the goal of political activities. The concept of power in contemporary African politics is one that has been thoroughly discussed, but is always undergoing renewal. This paper first revisits the concept of power from the general context of political science. Then the paper reflects on the meaning and function of power as a boundary producer in contemporary African politics.

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The study of politics is concerned with power. (Chabal 2009, 16)[1]

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to understand politics and politically influenced life in Africa while rethinking the concept of (political) power. In our study of African politics, must we still tackle this rather exhausted concept? We suppose that power is omnipresent in all scenes of human activity and is considered to be the catalyst, engine, or goal of a political struggle, even if it is neither visible nor measurable in a comprehensive way. Although power is indispensable for all political processes, this concept remains ambiguous in terms of its definition, function, mechanism, structure, theory, and analytical tool in the study of politics. Indeed, power has been not only the first question but also the ultimate one throughout the long history of political science.

> *Power is one of the most central and at the same time most contentious concepts in the social sciences. The debates on what is 'power', and how it can be defined and conceptualized, rank among the most enduring themes of all academic disciplines that deal with power – political science, political sociology, political philosophy, political anthropology, and so forth. Yet, there is no satisfactory outcome as to what power actually means.* (Harakova 2011, 9)

Before tackling this conundrum, we also might need to reflect on what politics is. This concept itself remains controversial in the field of political science. It is too immense an objective for this modest paper to seek a comprehensive definition of "politics." However, in this paper, "politics" is provisionally defined as human and institutional activities in which each motivated actor (individual, group, community, state, etc.) makes, maintains, and transforms symmetrical or asymmetrical relations through mutual actions with a particular goal and strategy.

Power is always the engine of political activities aimed at changing or maintaining the political order and balance. The field of political activities not only exists in the "political society"—which is composed of individuals, groups, and

1. Chabal (2009, 40) argues, "Political science is concerned with the exercise of power, which all too often is unthinkingly assimilated to authority. However, the two are different in ways that matter. Power can be approached from a variety of different angles but it essentially entails the ability to force others to comply; by coercion if necessary. Authority implies a position of trust, competence and wisdom that confers upon those who are endowed with it the force of persuasion, rather than coercion."

communities—for professionally seeking political goals but also in the "civil society"—which is composed of associations not necessarily founded for their political achievement but occasionally for their involvement in political issues. Power encompasses not only the means of carrying out objectives and implementing ideas but also the goal of political activities. In fact, we cannot pursue any political activity without grasping this invisible but certainly influential force. This paper constitutes an attempt to reflect on how political actors and people in Africa have struggled for power and remained in power or escaped it.

The postcolonial political history in Africa has been described primarily in terms of political instability. Just after African countries gained independence, rivalries and conflicts occurred among political, military, and ethno-regional groups to establish political regimes, build nation-states, and emerge victorious in elections or disrupt order. Contemporary African history is marked by millions of victims and refugees of political violence, such as military coups d'état and civil wars. In those early days of independence, political instability was the most serious concern for newly established African states, rather than political liberty or democracy. African leaders adopted a more authoritarian political system, such as a one-party system or military regime. During the Cold War, Western countries with their own interests practically allowed, and even supported, such authoritarian African regimes. Indeed, the struggle for state power is the feature of postcolonial African politics. Throughout contemporary African political history, the concept of power has remained the core issue for understanding African politics.

Throughout the history of political science, concepts and theories of the power have been repeatedly questioned and pondered by scholars and thinkers. The concept of power has long been dissected; nevertheless, it always requires a renewed and different understanding depending on the situation and era. This paper is aimed at understanding the concept of power in reflections between the general context elaborated in Western-based political thought and the realpolitik (or historicity) experienced on African soil. Thus, the paper focuses on the concept of power from various perspectives to understand political dynamism in Africa.

2. Conceptualization of power

> *Political power is much more specific. Politics is all about power: about how political agents create, compete for, and use power to attain public goals that, at least on the surface, are presumed to be for the common good of a political community. Yet just as often and more covertly, political power is used to attain*

> *private goals for the good of agents involved. Without power, political agents, especially political leaders, are ineffective and probably ephemeral.* (Kurtz 2001, 21)

We have yet to achieve consensus on any unique or final definition of "power" in political science. The confusion of interpreting power is owing to the fact that there are various ways of understanding this concept. Although this paper does not pursue the theoretical challenge of seeking the ultimate definition of power, we cannot examine how power works in African politics without a conceptualization of power. The paper first addresses the concept of power in comparison to exponent understandings. Then it demonstrates the author's understanding of this concept and point of view as an analytical framework for studies on African politics.

One of the most common and dominant understandings of the concept of power is recognized as the Weberian manner in social science. Many political scientists have been influenced by Max Weber or started thinking from/with Weber's idea. Weber (1971) defines power as the probability that an actor will be in a position to carry out his own goals in a social relationship despite resistance.

Steven Lukes (1986, 1) classifies pro-Weberian scholars who have discussed power. For Bertrand Russell, power is "the production of intended effects." Robert Dahl's intuitive and simplistic idea of power is that "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (2). These understandings of power may be traced to Weber. However, these approaches have been criticized as "misconceived or too narrow" (3) because they might neglect the uncertainty of measuring political actors' will (Sugita 2000, 13).

Lukes also classifies anti-Weberian views on the definition of power. For Talcott Persons, "Power is a system resource, a 'generalized facility or resource in the society', analogous to money, which enables the achievement of collective goals through the agreement of members of a society to legitimize leadership positions whose incumbents further the goals of the system, if necessary by use of 'negative sanctions'" (cited in Lukes 1986, 3). Hannah Arend rejects the suggestion that the question about power is who rules whom. For Arend, "power is 'not the property of an individual'; It 'corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert'" (3). For Nicos Poulantzas, "power identifies the ways in which that system (the '*ensemble* of the structures') affects 'the relations of the practices of the various classes in conflict'" (4).

Power has long been perceived as coming from the top to the bottom or radiating from the center to the periphery (Sugita 2000, 23). However, in contrast, Michel

Foucault argues that power does not unilaterally come from the center to the periphery as something that certain individuals and groups possess but is derived from the relationships among actors and is omnipresent in the non-unitary human activity space that influences human behaviors (cited in Sugita 2000, 27, 31). In addition, Foucault argues through the concept of *assujettissement* (subjugation) that a subjective actor simultaneously becomes an objective actor (11)[2]. Moreover, Etienne La Boèthie (1983) considers power as the choice to obey voluntarily or unconsciously.

Lukes (1986) categorizes power-related theories into three dimensions[3]. The first dimension is related to the study of concrete behaviors, such as observable conflicts between organized interests over a specific political issue. Most social scientists and theorists dealing with the concept of power (e.g., Weber, Dahl) view "power as domination" (Harakova 2011, 10). The second dimension of power goes beyond the analysis of observable conflicts and highlights hidden forces in nondecision-making (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). Finally, the third dimension of power "focuses on the most effective and treacherous use of power to prevent conflicts from arising" (Harakova 2011, 10).

Lukes (1986, 17) argues that "every attempt at a single general answer to the question addressing both the outcomes and the locations of power has failed and seems likely to fail". According to Seiyama (2000, 12–18), power is exercised at

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2. Harakova (2011, 12-13) mentions that "The shift from power as force, to power as everything, stems from three intellectual sources: from Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and from the conceptualizations of power by each of Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault. Gramsci's concept of hegemony aims to embrace any kind of domination, including economic, cultural, or Western hegemony…. As he (Foucault) put it: "Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere…. Bourdieu incorporated the role of power and conflict as part of political relations in a practice theory while placing politics at its centre…. Bourdieu's symbolic power is a 'top-down' model based on 'social taxonomies' which subaltern groups 'misrecognize' as legitimate by failing to recognize them as arbitrary construction serving dominant class interests."

3. According to Lukes (1986, 9–10), "The one-dimensional view of power, interests are seen as equivalent to revealed preferences – revealed, that is, by political behavior in decision making; to exercise power is to prevail over the contrary preferences of others, with respect to 'key issues'…. On the two-dimensional view of power advanced by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, one exercises power in the manner the one-dimensionalists favour, but also by controlling the agenda, mobilizing the bias of the system, determining which issues are 'key' issues, indeed which issues come up for decision, and excluding those which threaten the interests of the powerful. Here interests adversely affected are shown by politically expressed preferences *and* extra-political or covertly expressed grievances and demands that are, in various ways, denied entry into the decision-making process. The three-dimensional view incorporates power of the first two kinds, but also allows that power may operate to shape and modify desires and beliefs in a manner contrary to people's interests."

three levels: the individual level, the idealistic level, and the institutional level. However, the most common understanding of power is the first one, which reduces the power to the relationship between two individuals (also communities or states), who obviously have and exhibit a distinctive will.

Generally, we suppose violence, authority, and interest are means of wielding power. As Joseph Nye (2004, 2) mentions, "Power always depends on the context in which the relationship exists." Power never exists in a static condition or environment. It can be assumed and lost. However, we find a common objective to think about power that influences the behavior of the individual and the group. The idea that power is born, maintained, and changed through exchanges in human, social, and international relations is also broadly shared.

The author tentatively conceptualizes power as follows:

> *Power is potentiality that influences the behavior of actors (individuals, group, community, state, etc.) in relations, and it is established, maintained, and changed through mutual actions inside/outside institutions under the (mis-) perception of its resources and motives.*

Although this definition might not cover every aspect related to the concept of power, it focuses on relations among actors and actions in the location where the power is exercised.

3. Historicity of power in African politics

This part provides a reflection on how power has kept its meaning and has significantly influenced African politics. We need to think about power as being based on the historical realities of African politics, not only on an ideology-oriented theory or thought. In African politics, power is a question of historicity. According to Mahmood Mamdani (1996), when considering power in Africa, reflecting on historicity is unavoidable. Referring Bayart, Mamdani (1996, 10) argues that the political structure should be examined in a de-dramatized way, based on its own historicity, not on an analogy of historical events in the Western world. For instance, the concept of "civil society" was enthusiastically discussed in African studies in the 1990s with an ideological motive based on "anti-state romanticism" (13, 18–19, 186).

Power has created boundaries in societies and between people all over the world, throughout political history. Africa is no exception. Political power has

created boundaries in African societies in incomplete and unequal ways. These human-made boundaries have led to discrimination and segregation. However, such boundaries are often permeable and porous, not only in a geographical sense but also in a socio-political sense. Mamdani is a scholar who is strongly aware of the politically fabricated boundaries in African societies while retracing to the colonial administration for understanding political problems in postcolonial Africa.

Mamdani (1996) presents the concept of "institutional segregation" to understand how power has been structured in African societies while reflecting on colonial governance. Institutional segregation was a core methodology for colonial authorities to establish and manage colonial "indirect" rule. Institutional segregation brought about boundaries in African societies that were not only about dividing colonizers from colonized people, settlers from natives, citizens from subjects, urban from rural, and civilized from uncivilized, but also about fixing people in a defined ethnic or tribal unit as an "ahistorically" imagined social cliché (Mamdani 1996, 27, 51, 63, 79, 84, 91). This legacy of institutional segregation created "decentralized despotism" under colonial rule and was succeeded by postcolonial African countries transforming their character according to the time and political environment (Mamdani 1996, 18, 23).

Mamdani (1996, 61) argues that this system of decentralized despotism created an octopuslike structure of political power in the colonial system, where each colonial unit was autonomous, but not independent. This accompanied territorial segregation in the apartheid system of South Africa (5–6). According to Mamdani, this institutional segregation was not an exceptionally unique structure or invention of South Africa but was found in other colonial systems (7). The independence of African countries de-racialized the state. However, the independence neither democratized African states necessarily nor indigenized civil society institutions (136, 289).

Colonial rule clearly distinguished citizens from subjects, which also inflexibly categorized the local African people. African subjects were confined to, and positioned in, traditional tribal communities on the opposite side of citizenship (Mamdani 1996, 48–49, 91). Under indirect rule, tribes were actors of custom planting "indigenous" culture and authorities (51, 286). As a result, colonial rule brought about "decentralized" dictatorship with institutional force. Under this style, the chieftaincy was reformed and invented during colonial rule (Banegas 2003, 38), even if it was not a totally "colonial" fiction. Chiefs strengthened their power and status by monopolizing the legislative, judicial, administrative, and police functions under the colonial structure (Mamdani 1996, 53). Thus, the chief

became the absolute leader of a rural area (54). This decentralized despotism exacerbated the urban–rural division as well as the divisions among ethnic groups (291). Independence destroyed the chief's political power, which had been allowed and maintained on the edge of the colonial system.

The political legacy of decentralized despotism bequeathed by colonial governance affected the character of the state in postcolonial African countries. African states might be inclined to pursue management that is informal and personalized. This paper reflects on power in postcolonial African politics from the view of the human network as one that is neither necessarily center–periphery nor top–bottom in structure. The "publicness" of the state could not necessarily be presumed as an ensured condition or reality to reflect on the state in Africa. A principal feature is that the state in the African context is more a "private" (or patrimonial) institution than a public one. In African countries, the state has not only been the stage of political activities but also the goal in the struggle for power, to feed supporters and/or not to be devoured by opponents. There is still considerable room for "politics of the belly" (*la politique du ventre*) in the African state.

In the historicity of the state, the "public" space surrounded by sovereign borders, where "tradition," "custom," or "tribe" were found, fabricated, and manipulated by European colonizers and Africans leaders throughout the colonial period, has strongly affected state-building. The "reinvention of tradition" brought about the public space in the imaginary sphere (Banegas 2003, 311–12). It is likely thought in general that power has been concentrated in the hands of the head of state (President of the Republic) in African political history. The idea of "personal rule" (Jackson and Rosberg 1984) or "neo-patrimonialism" (Medard 1990) has been frequently discussed for decades. We have assumed that a president's will is carried out from the top to the bottom. However, political power does not necessarily work in such a unique or unilateral direction.

Inspired by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Jean-François Bayart reflects on the idea of a "rhizome" to decode the human network intertwined with the power relationship in African countries. The power-producing structure is neither fixed nor necessarily executed from the top to the bottom nor from the center to the periphery. According to Bayart, the postcolonial state has existed in a rhizomatous human network comprising an infinitely variable multiplicity of networks whose underground branches join the scattered points of society, rather than a typical root-modeled system. The conventional idea of this arboreal metaphor of the state exhausted theoreticians (Bayart 2006, 272–73).

Bayart (2006, 288) cites a Cameroonian proverb stating that "Goats graze

where they are attached"; thus, everyone cannot eat equally or in a unique way (325). Moreover, this famous goat proverb ontologically reflects the idea of "I graze, therefore, I am" to describe the political realities in postcolonial Africa (*Cameroon Tribune* 1988, May 8–9, cited in Bayart 2006, 325). A Beninese citizen will trust a candidate who shows respect by saying frankly what is in his belly (Xomé), and the statement resonates with an imaginary power of invisible forces that are mainly felt in the belly (Banegas 2003, 472). Manducation (the act of eating or chewing) is always fundamental to the objectives and motives in African politics.

Although a few researchers have reflected on the concept of power to decode the structure and mechanism of African politics, Patrick Chabal straightforwardly challenges this most difficult and fundamental question. Chabal's insightful book *Power in Africa* (1992) is one of the most valuable works on power in African politics. Chabal (1992, 5) argues that the minimal definition of power is "the balance between control and consent which governs the relation between ruler and ruled." He examines analytical concepts such as "political community," "political accountability," "state," "civil society," and "production" to understand political power in Africa.

According to Chabal (1992, 54, 56), political accountability determines political relations as an institutional, traditional, and symbolic mechanism and is more rooted than political legitimacy and a system of representation. Absolute power means a lack of power relations (55–56), and power is based on the material product system (5). Therefore, political power may not be produced by an ideological thought.

Similar to Mamdani, Chabal (1992, 5) insists on the importance of history to understand contemporary African politics. Political analysis is not aimed at pursuing an ideology or ethic but at understanding the reality of politics. Although a norm is necessary, it should be distinguished from analytical works. In terms of the legitimacy of power, Chabal mentions that there is little difference whether leaders seize power through an election or a military coup (212). The legitimacy of power is formed in the dialectic of the *realpolitik* between power and wealth (216).

Hegemony and counter-hegemony are intertwined to seek a portion of resource brought by power (Chabal 1992, 228). An ethnic group is not necessarily a counter-hegemonic force against the national authority, as is usually assumed by Western scholars (231). Since the pre-colonial time, African societies have neither been unitary nor static but have maintained dynamic and complex relationships between individuals and communities (40). Colonial rulers divided communities and geographic regions owing to misunderstanding and contingency (41).

Modernization had to be interpreted in the context of tradition (46). Tradition was not only sought by colonial authorities but also by nationalists struggling against colonial rule and asserting their own legitimacy (46). Slogans uttered by nationalist leaders, such as Negritude, Consciencism, and African humanity, were reinterpretations of the past in order to establish the future nation state (47–48).

It is indispensable to review the system and structure of colonial rule to consider governance in contemporary Africa. In colonial regimes, the governor of the colony was the pseudo-king (Mamdani 1996, 74), whose governance relied on a balance of patronage and coercion (Chabal 1992, 172). It would be incorrect to interpret political development as a vector from "tradition" to "modernity" (200). Colonial borders were permeable to allow massive movements of people escaping the heavy taxation and forced labor charged by the colonial authorities (102). Labor and land became commodities in a colonial economy (106). The heavy taxation and forced labor under colonial rule destroyed the political system and moral economy in Africa (105).

Chabal (1992, 11–32) examines a genealogy of concepts related to power in Africa, such as "political development," "class," "underdevelopment," "revolution," and "democratization," as lost paradigms. He points out that these theoretical frameworks are not based on the historicity of Africa. This remains an example of analogical thinking derived from Western experiences and history (Mamdani 1996, 8–9). Chabal (1992) also points out the problematic character of political development theory that lacks historical consideration of structural functionalism under a unilinear development idea. It neglects the significance of precolonial and colonial histories in postcolonial and contemporary Africa. This framework cannot grasp the context of ethnic problems, coups d'état, corruption, and dictatorship that have harassed African people (11–15).

Class theory, based on Marxism, emerged as a counter-argument to political development theory. However, Marxism and political development theory share the same problem regarding historicity. Class theory has been elaborated in the context of an "imaginary" class experienced in the Western world. In fact, historicity in Africa is more complicated than the ideal model of Marxist class (Chabal 1992, 15–19). The (meaning of the) state is always the core issue in African politics. We can never understand African politics while neglecting the historical context on the soil (68). Underdevelopment theory is also a theory-biased approach referring to Western history, but is hardly based on African historicity. It persists to understand from the world-system theory and lack of attention to the features of African politics. Therefore, underdevelopment theory is insufficient for appropriately ana-

lyzing African politics (19–23).

Revolution theory was used to support armed struggles for independence in Angola, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, and influenced African socialism in connection with Marxism-Leninism. According to Chabal (1992, 23–28), however, revolutionary theory failed to describe the process of independence and state-building due to the imaginary and confused understanding of a nationalist people's war and socialist revolution.

4. Power in contemporary African politics

The mode and style of power-related practices have been neither unique nor static but various and dynamic as the conditions of domestic politics and international relations have changed. The end of the Cold War and the wave of democratization in the Third World had a huge political impact across Africa. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Western countries drastically changed their behavior toward African countries while straightforwardly requesting political and economic reform or liberalization as a condition for foreign aid—so-called conditionality. Owing to the heavy financial and technical dependence on foreign aid, many African governments had to agree to these conditions. In addition to such external pressures, internal movements for democratization that came from outside the dominant political force increased the support from the people and civil society. African countries faced the biggest momentum for political change after independence. The beginning of the 1990s became one of the most crucial turning points in postcolonial African political history.

Although we have observed immense political momentum throughout postcolonial African history, democratization might be one of the most outstanding political events in Africa in terms of both domestic and international political circumstances. Democratization was the crucial political crossroad for African countries. These countries reached very different points after democratization was initiated, from its gradual consolidation to a return to an authoritarian regime, political instability, or civil war in extreme cases. Democratization was not only launched after enthusiastic demands from the people and civil society but was also a strict requirement from the "international community"—in other words, major Western aid donor countries. After the end of the Cold War, African countries faced a dramatic change in the world order and needed to survive in the new environment of international relations. It was almost impossible for any African leader to continue rejecting the wave of demands, both domestically and internationally, for

democratization.

How has democratization (or lack thereof) influenced and changed the political power in contemporary Africa? Democratization movements significantly destabilized the power structure of authoritarian regimes in African countries. Democratization was expected to be the "Second Liberation" of Africa at the beginning of the 1990s, replacing the previous authoritarian political structure with a more democratic political regime. However, we have observed that the route of democratization has been neither unique nor straightforward among African countries in the last three dacades.

Democratization not only changed the political structure of power but also created new politically fabricated boundaries between African countries, societies, and people. Democratization can alter or redraw boundaries relating to political power within and outside of a country. When democratization is more consolidated, political actors face more pressure to turn to voters to grant them access to state power through elections. In more democratized countries, political actors require different talents to be (re-)elected as compared to during the past one-party regime. Although it remained essential to exhibit loyalty to the state leader, this was not enough to ensure and promote one's political status. It became incumbent on political actors to evince their own popularity and financial capacity to meet the requests of their supporters and constituents as democratization progressed.

In international relations, democratization drew a boundary relating to the reputation between more and less democratization-friendly countries or opposing countries in Africa. The practice of democratic governance has been reflected in foreign aid; this was especially so in the early 1990s. However, this trend of linking democratization to foreign aid disappeared gradually during the decade after African countries began democratization, especially in the twenty-first century, with the coming of emerging countries, such as China and India, on the stage of international cooperation in Africa as giant south–south cooperation partners.

After the optimistic years of the dawn of democratization were over, the international community began to recognize the stagnation of democratization or the return to authoritarianism in politics in African countries. Democratization did not automatically bring about democratic governance as Western donor countries expected earlier. The international community, including United Nations organizations, launched a support program to push the democratization process in African countries. However, the logic of democratization assistance seemed to be biased in favor of the ideology of [linear] "political development", not based on the political reality or historicity on the ground in African countries. The approach of the

international organization led democratization support program seemed too simplistic and naive.

In addition, support for democratization has tended to focus on elites in political society, neglecting social action from the bottom while over-evaluating the pressure from the international community and depending on a theory of procedural democracy (Banegas 2003, 480–81). In fact, most democratization process trials failed or resulted in strictly surface-level change, allowing the political structure of the "politics of the belly" (Banegas 2003, 479). Democratization changed the elites' faces but did not fundamentally change actors' political behaviors (Daloz 1999, 19). As Richard Banegas (2003, 303) mentions, we might observe this as "[changing] everything not to change anything." However, democratization reshuffled the public (political) space and brought a certain political change of "governmentality" (*gouvernementalité*) between rulers and ruled people (479).

Although democratization is a rather fragile process facing innumerable challenges, the institutionalization or regular repetition of elections unavoidably influenced and changed the behaviors and strategies of political actors. On the people's side, a competitive electoral system changed their mind that they were electing their leader, especially in the case of President of a Republic. Democratization trembled and destabilized the former social order and morals of the state (Banegas 2003, 388). After the initiation of the democratization process, money became the influential factor in the political arena, especially during the electoral period. Money was able to buy people's minds (*achat des consciences*) more so in the electoral process than during the pre-democratization era (440). This could be a universal phenomenon in the first years of a democratic transition.

Principally, we expect that democratization changes the behavior of the political elite. Political analysts were likely to consider politicians and military officers as the principal actors to be examined before democratization was launched. Through the democratization process, the concept of civil society has been focused on and its involvement in nationwide decision-making has been encouraged. Thus, a new political and economic class was formed after political elites entered in NGOs (Banegas 2003, 265–67).

The political struggle between the state and civil society generated a hegemony, which is a key issue in postcolonial African politics (Chabal 1992, 81). As the spotlight was focused on the concept of civil society and its actors, the possible boundary between the state and civil society became a question in African countries.

In contemporary African countries, civil society has been encouraged against

the political totalization of the state (Chabal 1992, 135). However, the concept of civil society remains subjective, uncertain, unsustainable, and unreliable as an analytical framework in the academic domain. In addition, it remains a relative idea that can be defined in relation to the state (85). Civil society in Africa is also the "combination of tradition and modernity" (88).

Democratization-related theories are certainly meaningful for understanding African politics from a universal perspective. Democratization made a point of low politics or politics at the individual level. However, this approach exposes the insufficiency of reconsidering the "individual" in African political analysis. The concept of the individual is not necessarily similar to the Western idea. Some researchers departed from the reality in African historicity by over-considering the ideal typology of Western democracy (Chabal 1992, 28–32).

It is impossible to analyze African politics without understanding the political community (Chabal 1992, 53). Independence changed the relationship between the state and individuals (79). In postcolonial Africa, the state preceded the construction of the nation (47). The state in postcolonial Africa should be understood in terms of the relationship with other social institutions, rather than according to a static structure or ideology. The rule of law is an important element for measuring the morality of political leaders (165). This point has shown its importance in that some leaders have tried to modify the constitution to remove the article stipulating the limitation on the term of the presidency adopted after democratization started in the 1990s.

In the decentralization process undertaken for almost two decades, it seems that political resources gradually began to be deconcentrated. After decentralization started, local representatives (Mayor, members of the local assembly) were directly elected by local residents. Local politics became a more focal issue through the devolution of power and finance from the central government to local governments. In contemporary Africa, we can no longer neglect local governance when examining democratization, nor focus solely on the capital city. As Mamdani (1996, 289) mentions, democratization is inefficient without local governments' reform.

However, the beginning of the 1990s was not only known as a positive turning point in African politics but also as the coming of a decade of violence and conflicts, with some terribly tragic cases, such as the genocide in Rwanda, and the rule of warlords in Liberia and Sierra Leone, while political liberalization from apartheid and democratization were simultaneously occurring in South Africa.

Although conflict or civil war was not unique to postcolonial Africa, the character of such events changed in the 1990s, during the post-Cold War era. The

stakeholders in such conflicts became more diverse. In post-Cold War conflicts, the boundary or distinction between perpetrators and victims became vaguer. Armed fights have not only been deployed between national armies and rebel forces but also among national/rebel forces mobilizing ordinary people including children. Further, it was not only rebel forces but also national armies that were deliberately violating the rules of war and human rights, and committing crimes during these conflicts. In the Rwandan genocide that occurred in 1994, ordinary people became perpetrators and killed neighbors with whom they had lived for decades. The conflicts in the 1990s in African countries exposed that the line between state power-holders and opponents had become increasingly blurred. Rebel groups were not necessarily seeking state power by occupying the capital city as the ultimate goal of their activities.

Conflict of this new character complicated social reconstruction and reconciliation after the end of an armed battle, because ordinary people were broadly involved in the massacres, creating inerasable resentment in the minds of both victims and perpetrators. Many former rebel soldiers have been turned away from their own villages and even by their own families.

In the twenty-first century, the political situation in Africa kept changing. In international relations, the traditional framework of north–south relations became less meaningful for comprehensively understanding international relations despite the renewed "Global South" label, especially after emerging countries expanded their influence across the African continent. These emerging countries, such as China, India, and Turkey, have strongly appealed for south–south cooperation in recent years. Western countries have faced the biggest challenge against the principle of foreign aid–that is, that "rich," developed countries (practically OECD members) support "poor" developing countries. Developed countries can no longer survive without considering their relations with emerging countries. In the twenty-first century, the boundary between the aid donor and recipient persists despite the significant room for questioning or reconsidering while the world economic power balance has been fundamentally changing.

We must also point out that the sovereign borders between African states might be understood as porous and ambiguous. Since independence, African countries have been unable to exercise sufficient control over their borders due to their huge territories with poor human and financial resource. In recent years, rebel forces have been able to cross borders relatively easier than before. Furthermore, the globalization of jihadists' activities has made the border-related situation increasingly complicated and delicate. The porous and vague borders between

African states are favorable to jihadist groups, such as Al Qaeda or Islamic State, wishing to carry out and expand their operations. Rather than barriers, these borders are occasionally permeable and convenient shields behind which these groups can protect themselves. Although globalization did not remove the borders between states, it certainly changed the meaning and function of the border.

5. Conclusion: Power in African politics as a boundary producer

This paper offered an introductory reflection on the concept of power in African politics. We must be careful of this concept to avoid over-generalizing its character, function, and meaning in African politics and conveying too simplistic an understanding, because the cultural, economic, historical, religious, and social contexts are extremely diverse and complicatedly intertwined in each African country and society.

However, we have identified some common characteristics that structure the power in the political reality and historicity that African countries and people have experienced in their postcolonial history. A relatively common element on which this paper has focused is that power fabricates and manipulates a boundary in the political arena as well as in communities and societies, and even among individuals, not only in the geographical sense but also in the cultural, economic, ethnic, religious, social, and especially political senses, as a result of repeated politically motivated acts. In addition, political power has brought about segregation among people, thereby dividing the rulers from the ruled actors, citizens, and subjects, as Mamdani (1996) mentions in his idea of "institutional segregation." Power is a boundary producer in human society, while accompanying political gaps and struggles.

Although this paper proposed a tentative definition of power in the previous section, it complements an additional factor that could be helpful for developing a more comprehensively grasp of the concept of power in African politics. The author has tried to define the concept of power in politics as follows:

> *[Political] Power is potentiality that influences the behaviors of actors (individuals, group, community, state, etc.) in relations, and that is established, maintained, and changed through mutual actions and communications inside/outside institutions under the (mis-)perception of its resource and motive through incomplete information. Power enables one to draw, maintain, and transform boundaries between countries, communities, societies, and people, often accom-*

panied by inequality.

Although power draws a boundary between actors in the political arena, such a boundary is not an impermeable wall but a permeable and occasionally convenient membrane for actors working against/for/in/with power. This is a significant point when we think about power, which is used in everyday acts in African politics. In addition, African societies are highly "politicized" by/with boundaries. The idea of a "politics from below" (*le politique par le bas*), discussed by Bayart and his comrades, is keen to focus on this permeable and porous character of power derived from the boundary between how "ruled" actors eat the "established" power seeping through the political and social boundaries.

As a tentative conclusion, it is still useful and unavoidable to examine the issues of African politics in light of the concept of power, while remaining conscious of the boundaries in African societies.

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