



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI
"L'Orientale"

DIPARTIMENTO ASIA AFRICA MEDITERRANEO

Practices of the State in Africa: Contested Social and Political Spaces

International Colloquium

26-27 March 2015

University of Naples "L'Orientale"

This Colloquium intends to explore how actors, spaces and practices reconfigure the post-colonial state in Africa. African states continue to play a central role in opening spaces for political interaction and negotiation between public and private actors, whether they are local, national, or transnational. This happens whether in post-conflict or in decentralised contexts of neoliberal governance. The restructuring of African states constitutes a paradox of the neoliberalisation processes of governance, particularly at the local level, whereby the state reconfigures itself and it is reconfigured by everyday local practices which reinforce and expand its presence and influence but also reveal its porous and weak sovereignty. The result is often asymmetric and hybrid policies and politics, particularly in contested social and political spaces where we witness various modes of power. Public authorities attempt to 'regulate' access to power, resources and rights, often using informal procedures, but also violent repression and coercion. The focus is on the 'real governance' of informality as a mode of political engagement between state and social actors. In this multilayered and entangled governance, the state is the central site (also the material condensation) of power relations and political (and class) struggles, but it is not the only locus of power.

The colloquium aims to analyse the relational concept of power governing the everyday politics of local realities in Africa, particularly in urban contexts where different forms of contestation emerge, articulating notions and forms of citizenship. In particular, we are interested in empirical research which interrogates the contentious politics intersecting everyday practices and the relations between state (political and bureaucratic agents) and other governance actors (private sector, trade unions, social movements).

We invite contributions that unpack the complex and ambiguous regulatory processes, practices, resources and repertoires of plural political authorities and multiple social agents which shape real governance, focusing on questions such as: who exerts power? How and where is power exerted? How a plurality of non-state actors engage multiple public authorities in different and often contested spaces and how they negotiate decision and policy making processes? Who are the actors in these processes and what are their discourses and repertoires? Who negotiates and defines statehood in contemporary Africa? How the state governs, produces policies and controls territories?

Those interested in presenting papers are invited to submit an abstract of 500 words (maximum) by 28th February to Antonio Pezzano (apezzano@unior.it; pezzanoan@yahoo.com).

This conference is organized within the National Research Project (PRIN), on "State, Plurality, and Change in Africa". Our research units – based at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" – focuses on the plurality of sub-national political authorities and social actors in the local governance processes, particularly in Northern and Southern Africa.