

The Internationalized State
New Form of Globalization in Africa
Thierry Vircoulon

Contrary to the general perception, Africa is not on the outside of globalization but in the thick of it. Though conspicuous by its absence in studies on the subject (generally centered on the Far East, India and at times South America), the African continent is deeply affected by and contributes to the “new configuration of the world”. The Islamic Republic of the Comoros and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), both of which have emerged within the space of a few months from a delicate political transition, are a clear illustration of globalization the African way. Both these States have become internationalized in the name of two categorical imperatives of international policy (democratic globalization and good governance). Their sovereignty is now more in the realm of the many fictions of international law than reality. This unacknowledged internationalization has assumed the form of a high degree of *socio-economic extroversion* and *political dependency* structurally different from the control exercised by the superpowers in the Cold War era. The political transition of the Comoros and the DRC are not merely new examples of *aided democratization* but are a testimony to a new regime of dependence thrown up by globalization. The two States under discussion are not just placed in a network of external constraints like any other country; but the network has made deep inroads within them. Their political understanding is preprogrammed by global issues while their room to maneuver and internal functioning are “circumscribed”. This puts them in a paradoxical situation: they are both included in and marginalized by the “new world order”.

Two instances of international rescue

A priori, there appears to be nothing in common between the Republic of the Comoros and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The former is an archipelago of three isolated islands in the Indian Ocean inhabited by no more than 600 000 people with hardly any resources and completely peripheral in the international arena whereas the latter, a country-continent with a population of about 50 million, is the key to stability in Central Africa and perhaps the economic development of Africa. The disproportionate degree of interest in these two countries is in keeping with their disproportionate geo-strategic importance. The fact remains that there

are interesting structural similarities between the Central African country and the archipelago of the “Moon Islands”.

Both have a tumultuous postcolonial history. The DRC has gone through a long period of absolute and farcical dictatorship ending in an internationalized war of succession. The Comoros have been rocked by no less than twenty putsches or attempts at putsch since independence in 1975. Both countries were on the verge of breaking up in the nineties: in the Comoros, national unity was challenged by the separatist crisis and in the RDC by the Mobutu wars of succession. Both are socially and economically devastated: since the early nineties, the Congolese economy has sunk into an informalization from which it is yet to emerge. The Comorian economy, incapable of generating endogenous development and sufficient employment, has been structurally destroyed and is in a constant state of dependence on remittances from the Diaspora which nearly equal the State budget. Both in the Comoros and the DRC, the very notion of public investment has become a distant memory with the formal economy frozen for at least a decade. The two countries are thus beset with the same problems, secessionism and underdevelopment which feed each other in a vicious spiral.

Furthermore, both have stood to gain from the good offices of the “international community” which came *in extremis* to their rescue by sponsoring peace agreements and supervising the political transition. International missions were dispatched to prevent violence and organize the return to democracy: the UN missions to Congo, MONUC (in DRC) and the mission of the African Union for the support of elections, AMISEC (in the Comoros). Though the peace managers were not the same in both countries as the principle of the “Africanization of African crisis management” was applied in a strangely selective manner, what needs to be noted is that in both cases the “international community” aided transition proved to be a tentative political exercise further complicated by the temporary leaders determined to extend their mandate or better still get it renewed through the ballot. Nonetheless, in both cases the transition has been seen through to its logical conclusion. Transparent and free elections were held under international supervision. The May 14 elections this year marked the end of the interim government of Colonel Assoumani Azali and in Congo, the Congolese transition government (the Directoire 1 + 4) ended with the presidential elections in October. The return of democracy in its elementary form was thus celebrated on both sides, even though in the DRC clashes

broke out between the two main candidates for presidency after the polls.

The internationalized State, a byproduct of international interventionism

In spite of organizational differences, the two international peacekeeping/democratizing missions produced the same result: the internationalization of the State. True, the globalization of these two countries had begun even before the international community intervened: their economies had been placed in transcontinental trade networks and the ruling powers moved within the orbit of the superpowers. But international intervention strengthened tenfold this logic of political and economy dependence by making it official and giving it legitimacy.

At the socio-economic level, the already very heavy dependence on the outside world only increased further. In some cities of these countries (Moroni where the AMISEC was located and the cities where the MONUC bases were situated), the local economy was artificially boosted by the international presence. Rentals, local employment, purchase of small equipment, daily purchases, all this injected cash into the economy, revitalizing small businesses but also leading to a certain amount of inflation. Even though a UN mission does not spend more than 10% of its budget locally, this unquestionably provided an impetus to the impoverished urban economies of the Comoros and the DRC. In the case of the DRC, the UN contribution cannot be measured in financial terms alone but also in terms of infrastructure, since the MONUC reestablished, for its own needs, air links, waterways and tracks suitable for vehicles throughout the country, thus enabling trade to start again with the MONUC acting as the largest transportation agency of the country. In addition to this indirect contribution to the local economy, several social agencies of the UN (UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, etc.) also set up office along with major international NGOs. In the DRC in particular, which has experienced several humanitarian disasters since 1994, the massive inflow of international aid resulted in the *externalization of entire social sectors*. The international conglomerate of UN agencies and large NGOs which invested in the DRC during the second half of the nineties (apart from the Church) finances entirely the health and education sectors. Filling in the void left behind by a ruined Congolese State, this conglomerate, in keeping with its logic of subcontracting, encouraged the *NGOisation of society* as it needed regional intermediaries. The rapid increase in the number of Congolese

NGOs gave the impression of a vigorous civil society whereas in truth it only reflected the complete dependency of society on the “international community” and its multifarious organizations. In this perspective, even if the UN-humanitarian conglomerate is yet to arrive in the Comoros, the country’s social sector has not escaped externalization. Indeed, emigration to Mayotte and France is a form of social relocation: the families that have stayed back and the Comorian development associations receive contributions from the Diaspora and the large Muslim NGOs. Furthermore, democratization and national reconciliation go hand in hand with the accentuation of socio-economic dependency. The new president was elected on the basis of a social program the main focus of which was to improve the living conditions of the people. Now the substantial financing required for implementing the program was to come from the 200 million dollars promised during the Conference of the partners of the Comoros in December 2005. In spite of all the rhetoric of self-assertion, the country was once again looking to the outside world for help and if both sides honor their commitments, the new democratic government is likely to become even more dependent on its foreign money lenders than the previous ones.

But during the transition, it was clear to all that the dependence was more political than economic and social. Such political dependence is the inevitable ransom of multilateral democratization. As States that had failed, the Comoros and the DRC were placed in a situation of *sovereignty controlled* by those who brokered the peace agreements and who assumed the role of the guarantors of an endangered national unit. In order to remove any ambiguity, it must be noted that the regime of controlled sovereignty does not mean that the foreign powers are in command of everything and can dictate their law to the local actors (as shown by the clashes between the troops of J. Kabila and J.P. Bemba in Kinshasa the day the results of the first round were announced in August). The regime of controlled sovereignty means that the “international community” has an excessive role to play in the discharging of the law and the national affairs of these countries. In the DRC, such controlled sovereignty has been formalized by a general and inclusive agreement with the setting up of the International Committee for Support to the Transition (ICST). The latter comprised ambassadors of the member countries of the Security Council, the ambassadors of countries with a specific interest in the Congolese transition and the largest institutional money lender (the European Union). Its mandate being to support the efforts of the government throughout the period of transition, the ICST intervened legitimately each time the

transition appeared to be getting derailed before achieving the final goal, namely the holding of free and transparent elections. It condemned all the putsch attempts as well as the capture of Bukavu by military dissidents in June 2004 and brought pressure to bear on the Rassemblement du peuple congolais (RCD/G), which for a short while had suspended its participation in the transition government after the Gatumba massacre. But it extended its intervention to the management of purely governmental affairs: it compelled the parliamentary assembly to redraft the electoral law it had prepared; it established the guidelines for government work by decreeing a legislative program (enacting laws on defense, nationality, political parties, decentralization, electoral institutions, etc.). Contrary to what its name suggests, the ICST had far more than a “supporting role”; it was a full fledged actor in the transition, even its guiding force. There was no such consortium of “guardian angels” in the Comoros during its transition, but the club of friends of the Comoros and the AMISEC had a great say in local politics (the AMISEC had moreover reduced the capacity of the Comorian army to act).

International control was evident even in the electoral process, the culminating point of the transition, which was financed, planned and validated by the “international community”. In the DRC and the Comoros, the independent election commissions received foreign technical assistance without which they could not have functioned (through the UNDP and the European Union) and the funds to organize the elections were provided by the institutional money lenders. Besides, given the spread of the national territory in the DRC, the MONUC played a vital part in the electoral logistics by transporting the polling booth equipment. Security concerns were such that the national armies were disqualified from ensuring the peaceful conduct of the elections in both the countries (AMISEC and MONUC officers had asked for the confinement of the defense forces during the polls), and this task was entrusted instead to foreign powers (a European military force, EUFOR, was stationed in Kinshasa and the polling booths were guarded by South African soldiers of the AMSEC in the Comoros). Thus the financing and security of the polls were internationalized; a large contingent of international observers was present in both the countries to closely scrutinize and validate the elections. The polls which in the eyes of everyone ushered the “return to democracy” were made technically and politically possible by the “international community”. The local populations understood this clearly; they knew that the true guarantors of the elections were the “international community” and not the

supposedly independent election commission. Thus the elections which brought the transition to an end were as dependent on the outside world as the transition itself.

In both these countries, the process of internationalization encompasses not just national policy, but the machinery of state itself, namely the administration. Thus, the salary arrears of civil servants on the “Moon Islands” are paid by France, and the DRC, a typical example of a *failed state*, looks on as its State is reconstructed by a consortium of foreign powers and international organizations. Faced with a “territory without a State”, the “international community” was obliged to extend its mandate in the DRC: along with the largest *peacekeeping* operation (17 000 men and an annual budget of over a billion dollars), it has taken up the task of *State-building* in a continental country. The UNDP envisaged a minimalist reconstruction scenario for the Congolese State, in other words making the base operational again: the police, national defense, justice, taxation, the budget. The donors have divided the task among themselves, each one rebuilding a piece of the defunct State that the Congolese administration has become. This *imported state engineering* is carried out in accordance with the philosophies and methodologies of each donor: the South African training of the Congolese police force has little in common with the training given by the French. As a result, the administrative machinery of the DRC is trained according to different schools of thought without much concern for any kind of cohesion in the transfer of know-how. At the end of this reconstruction – if it ever comes to an end –, the administrative machinery of the DRC will have been completely internationalized with a plethora of technical assistants sent within the framework of various competing forms of national cooperation. The project of putting failed States under supervision is thus taking shape in distant parts of the world, the intellectual content of which is being provided by thinkers across the Atlantic. The results on the ground however are very different from those anticipated. .

Intransitive transitions

Contrary to its claims, the internationalization of the State in the wake of “natural” economic globalization, has not resolved any of the structural problems of these countries; it has only changed some of the parameters.

The privatization of the State, the sultan type “neo-patrimonialism and the “politics of the stomach”, in short the essence of what the World Bank calls

“bad governance”, have not been eradicated during the transition. Corruption and bad government have continued to thrive under the eyes of the “international community”. In the Comoros, the 40 million euros discovered recently in foreign bank accounts are proof of how Colonel Azali plundered the Public Treasury and awarded public contracts to his cronies. In the RDC, far from being a service provider, the Administration remains a social predator which takes it cut from a few profitable economic activities: in January 2005, six ministers were dismissed for corruption and in October 2005, the administrators of the two principal State owned companies were arrested for embezzling 18 million dollars of import credit. In addition, many mining contracts were given in suspicious circumstances, so much so that people in Kinshasa have started calling the transition government “Mobutism without Mobutu”. Impoverished in an impoverished economy, the State has shrunk to the extent of looking like an absentee owner. It has relinquished not just its social role but much more. Associations and religion (Islam in the Comoros and the Catholic Church in the DRC) have stepped in to fulfill the basic social functions – education and health – and compensate to a small extent for the absence of public infrastructure. The security functions of the State (justice, army and police) have been privatized and function autonomously: in both the countries, the army (or its residual) has penetrated the private sector (militarization of mining activities in the DRC and the involvement of army officers in trading companies in the Comoros).

The structures of governance have not been changed just as the economic crisis and the deep political cleavages have not been not resolved, making the peacekeeping effort of the “international community” fragile and incomplete.

In the Comoros, President Mohamed Sambi is trying to break with the practices of his predecessor, using the language of social justice and development. But divisiveness is still rampant. The ill-timed celebrations this year to mark the date of the unilateral declaration of independence show that Anjouan’s separatism has not abated, it has simply been lulled by a complex and fragile constitutional balance between the three islands, namely the “presidency rotation”. In the DRC, peace is partial with the major political players always taking recourse to violence in the electoral battle. Some rebel territories in the East continue to harbor the hope of secession (Ituri and Katanga) and the coexistence of certain populations (Kasaiens in Katanga and Banyamulenge in the Kivus, for instance)

continues to remain problematic. In the DRC as in the Comoros, the formal economy is at a standstill. Though both countries have a very different economic history and resources, their economic situation at the threshold of the 21st century is distressingly similar: the majority of the population lives below the poverty threshold; the capacity for industrial production is almost zero and there is no attempt to enhance the natural potential (mining in the DRC and tourism in the Comoros); the only activity outside the subsistence economy is import and export, mainly informal and internationalized (trade of rice and hydrocarbons in the Comoros) and often criminalized (networks control the mining of ores and the wood trade in the DRC); lastly, a sizeable part of the population would like to emigrate. The economies of both the countries are heavily indebted and non productive (agriculture is on the decline in the Comoros and mining, often referred to as a “geological scandal” is rudimentary in the DRC). They are surviving solely by virtue of their place in a network of globalized trade, completely outside the purview of State taxes and statistics, or for that matter, international rules and regulations.

As a result, there was little change in the living conditions of the population during the transition, in spite of the large flows of money generated by a substantial foreign presence. The people’s disappointment grew steadily and the high turnout in the final elections was less out of any sudden love for democracy than the desire to put an end to the temporary predatory regime that seemed to becoming a permanent feature. The peacemakers and the votaries of democracy were able to (though precariously in the DRC) ensure that the agreements signed under their aegis were respected, but the setting up of an *internationalized State*, made possible through a consensus of the major international players, did not provide the necessary answers to the structural bankruptcy of these two countries.

When seen together, the two transitions reveal the deficiencies of contemporary methods of dealing with failed States and the intense political globalization that occurs in some regions as the fallout of economic globalization.

Like the historian Niall Ferguson, for whom supervision is the answer to bad governance, the “international community” believes that in the *internationalized State* it has found the remedy to failed States and a less cumbersome form of political intervention than the protectorate (Bosnia and Kosovo). Several clone States formed just after decolonization which

“turned out badly” have already been placed under a system of controlled sovereignty. In the name of democratic globalization, they have lost control of their elections as of their economies; their administration is restructured according to the wishes of the donors; their public policies are devised abroad. Now the idea of controlled sovereignty for the failed States championed on the other side of the Atlantic is legally vague, its outcome diplomatically embarrassing and problematic. Apart from the obvious fragility of imported democracies, such undefined international supervision could easily lead to a nationalist counter reaction and/or latent resistance which would undermine any attempt to internalize democratic reform. This situation of controlled sovereignty is obviously difficult to come to terms with and triggers off *an expedient feeling of less responsibility and nationalism both visceral and strategic*. For a government placed under supervision and constrained to embark on the path of democracy being able to put the blame on the “international community” and its multiple incarnations for all the country’s ills is big advantage. Moreover, the local elite do not perceive this imported democratization as a manifestation of the political humanitarianism of the West but as a reflection of international power play. As a result, the remedy is likely to be no more than a placebo and the success of the Congolese and Comorian transitions remains conditional as long they do not prove their sustainability, in other words till such time as democracy does not take root. Evidently, this raises the tricky question of what kind of timeframe are we looking at as far international engagement is concerned, a question unanswered in many regions of the world (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan) but which will come up sooner or later (Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq).

In practice in the DRC and in the Comoros, the multilateralism of peace and democracy is one of the facets of political globalization, indicative of the current trend of the relocation of power on the international stage. In Kinshasa, the increasing influence of European foreign policy is patent. A case in point is the European Union’s decision to fly to the rescue of the transition government in Ituri with Operation Artemis and provide security for the final polls, thus playing a major role in the stabilization of this part of Africa. The African Union’s intervention in the Comoros could have well lead to it being perceived as the UN of Africa had it not been, through AMISEC, a front for the emerging regional power - South Africa -, which is also very visible in the Congolese reconstruction and peace process (it hosted the inter-Congolese dialogue at Sun City and had even attempted an unsuccessful mediation between Mobutu and Laurent Désiré Kabila!); and it

wants to make its presence felt at the level of the entire continent by playing the multilateral card in the region (through the African Union, SADC, etc.). These two transitions thus point to the emergence of new powers which want to be recognized as the official regulators, using for this purpose both bilateral and multilateral instruments. This regionalization of power – and thus of dependence – is not however not a way out of globalization. Even if such interventions are guided or influenced by the emerging powers, they are preprogrammed by the “global” issues that structure international policy (political Islamism and the war against terrorism in the Comoros, international competition for natural resources and the redistribution of the zones of influence in Africa). Moreover, the effects of this political globalization can be seen at the deepest level of local politics: is not Mohamed Sambi’s effort to reconcile western aid and political Islam an attempt at reconciling two antagonistic globalizations in the interests of the “Moon Islands”?

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The last being the one that brought Colonel Azali to power in 1999.

Unilateral declaration of independence by the island of Anjouan in August 1997.

Wars of 1996/97 and 1998 which resulted in the occupation of East Congo by foreign armies and the setting up of local rebel administrations.

This journalistic expression without any meaning only masks power play; as such I have put in italics throughout the article.

The global and comprehensive agreement in 2002 for the DRC and the framework agreement for reconciliation in the Comoros, called the Fomboni agreement in 2001.

The global and comprehensive agreement of December 17, 2002, signed between the warring Congolese, provided for a transitional period during which the RDC would be governed by a team and not one person: one president and four vice-presidents representing the various political forces in the country formed what came to be known in Kinshasa as the “presidential space”.

In spite of its violence (assassination of Lumumba and UN military intervention) and a few “White people hunts” (the secession of Katanga, the zaïrization of the economy), the decolonization of the DRC was not synonymous with a break from the western powers. The Cold War saw to it that the links were quickly renewed; moreover, it was when European and American support began flagging in the early nineties that the regime of Marshal Mobutu was weakened. As for the Comoros, the postcolonial trajectory of this Archipelago-State was closely linked to France, which carried out several military operations in the country after independence (cf. *Autopsie des Comores*, A.W. Mahamoud, Cercle Repères, Champigny).

On this point, see the excellent evaluation work by W. Carnahan, W. Durch and S. Gimore, *Economic impact of peacekeeping*, March 2006.

On the UNization of the Congolese society, see *Ordre et désordre à Kinshaha. Réponses populaires à la faillite de l'Etat*, T. Trefon, L'Harmattan, 2004.

This dependence will undoubtedly be realigned between the western donors and the affluent Muslim countries with which the new president is strengthening ties. The emirate of Sharjah has just given a grant of 120 million Comorian francs to restore public lighting. Traditionally, the Comoros has maintained close relations with Libya, Saudi Arabia and Oman, and a large Iranian delegation called on President Mohamed Sambi.

This brief suspension followed the Gatumba massacre of the 13th August, 2004 in which 160 Banyamulenge were killed, the ethnic group of which the RCD/G is the political avatar.

The Indian Ocean Commission, the International Francophony Organization, the African Union and the Arab League sent electoral observation missions to the Comoros while the SADC, the International Francophony Organization, the African Union and the European Union sent observation missions to the DRC.

The new government has just been granted a budgetary aid of 1.5 million euros by Paris.

R. Poutier, “Du Zaïre au Congo: un territoire en quête d'Etat », *Afrique Contemporaine*, No. 183, 3rd quarter 1997, p. 7-30.

To mention a few of the well-known names: Stephen Krasner, director of *Policy Planning Staff* at the State Department, recommends a regime of shared sovereignty for the weak States (S. Krasner, “Sharing sovereignty. New institutions for collapsed and failing States”, *International Security*, vol. 29, No. 2, 2004, p. 85-120); Jeffrey Herbst (“Responding to State failure in Africa”, *International Security*, vol. 21, No. 3, 1996, p. 120-144). I.W. Zartman (*Collapsed States. The disintegration and restoration of legitimate authority*, Boulder, Lynne, Rienner, 1995).

It was thus that J.F. Médard described the Mobutist State not as redistributive but as purely predatory (*Etats d'Afrique noire: formation, mécanismes et crises*, Karthala, 1991).

J.F. Bayart, *L'Etat en Afrique*, Fayard, 1989.

A parliamentary commission to examine the validity of the mining contracts signed by the government of Laurent Désiré Kabila (the Lutundula Commission) concluded that “the transition government had fared no better than those who exercised State power during the period 1996-1997 and 1998. On the contrary, the drain of natural resources and wealth of the country increased under the cover of the immunity granted by the Constitution to the government administrators”.

In the Comoros, the electrification of some villages was financed by associations of the Diaspora; at Butembo in North-Kivu, Nande traders financed the construction of infrastructure indispensable for their activities: runways, roads, hydroelectric power plants, etc.

Since the Constitution of 2001, the Comores are a “union” with a president while the islands have a “chief of the executive” and greater autonomy. In a bid to share power between the three islands, it was decided that the presidency of the Union “rotate” every four years (Anjouan holds the current presidency). In spite of the constitutional provisions, the division of powers between the president of the Union and the executive island chiefs remains problematic and is currently the subject of tough negotiations among them.

What the United Nations call the “negative forces” in East Congo consist of a heterogeneous conglomerate of armed groups that bleed systematically large zones (the Mouvement révolutionnaire congolais in Ituri, the Rwandan Hutu rebels of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda in the Kivus, the dissident Bangymulenge of General Laurent Nkunda, the Mai-Maiaux militia in the Kivus and Katanga).

The external debt of the Comoros rose from 185 million dollars in 1990 to 264 in 2004; the internal debt is about 8 billion Comorian francs; given the extent of informalization of the Congolese economy, it is not

possible to have accurate figures for the extent of indebtedness.

“The problem in Liberia, as in so many Sub-Saharan African countries, is simply bad government: corrupt and lawless dictators make development impossible and their behaviour incites the opposition to civil war. These countries will not correct themselves. They need the imposition of an external authority.” *Colossus: the price of America's empire*, Penguin Press, New York, 2004, p. 24.

In spite of a Mozambican leadership, South Africans form 90% of AMISEC.

On South Africa's assertion as a regional power, see P. Venesson and L. Sindjoun, “Unipolarité et intégration régionale: l'Afrique du Sud et la renaissance africaine”, *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 50, No. 6, 2000, p. 915-940.

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