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Everyday Practices and Processes of Negotiation

Researching the bureaucratization of African societies in the context of a transnational research programme, based in Dakar and conducted collaboratively between two institutions – one German (German Historical Institute Paris, or GHIP) and one Senegalese (Centre de recherches sur les politiques sociales, or CREPOS) – sometimes proves to be in itself an experience of everyday bureaucratic practices[1]. As such it reveals that bureaucratic rules always have to be interpreted, negotiated, and adapted. Furthermore, bureaucrats do not hold a monopoly on bureaucratic knowledge: it also involves clients, users, and intermediaries. To navigate through an administrative process, taking the »purely bureaucratic« path is often not enough. It also requires adjusting to the context and understanding the »practical norms«[2] that apply. An organization may have a bureaucratic framework, but functions on the basis of other logics. Sometimes »parallel« bureaucratic procedures may be created. The texts say one thing, but in everyday practice another procedure is expected. Sometimes what helps to ensure the fulfillment of a request is not completing a form, but a way of speaking, discussing, and exchanging. Bureaucratic procedures can slow down or ease administrative tasks; they can create transparency and legitimacy and offer ways to assert rights, or they can obscure steps and decisions; they can be reinforced, bypassed, or discarded; but they are always interactive situations.

This collection brings together contributions from the transnational research programme »The Bureaucratization of African Societies« (GHIP-CREPOS). By »bureaucracy«, we understand the systematic use of norms, rules, and processes of standardization and categorization. They produce a mode of domination and aim to legitimize it. Bureaucracy is often associated with the state, public services, and large companies and organizations whose administration is managed by a hierarchically structured, trained, and specialized elite: i.e. bureaucrats. However, in the approach chosen for the GHIP-CREPOS research programme, bureaucratic processes and practices are omnipresent, and are not limited to such macrostructures[3]. They can be studied, for example, in associations, NGOs, cooperatives, churches, and commerce; in both

1 I would particularly like to thank Jürgen Finger for his tireless support in the preparation of this collection. I thank Thomas Maissen, Andreas Eckert, and Jürgen Finger as well as an anonymous reviewer for their very helpful comments, which contributed greatly to the reflections on and editing of the contributions in this issue. I would also like to thank all the members of the GHIP-CREPOS team in Dakar, past and present, for enriching debates and discussions, and to the two administrative teams of the research programme in Dakar and of the GHI Paris, who helped me to deepen my understanding of everyday bureaucratic logics.

2 Jean Pierre Olivier de Sardan, Les normes pratiques. Pluralisme et agencéité, in: Inverses (10 December 2013), online: http://www.inverses.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/OlivierDeSardan_Normes-pratiques-article-2.pdf (consulted on 24 September 2020); Sylvie Ayimpam (ed.), Aux marges des règles et des lois. Régulations informelles et normes pratiques en Afrique, Louven-la-Neuve 2019 (Espace Afrique, 23).

3 Béatrice Hibou, The Bureaucratization of the World in the Neoliberal Era. An International and Comparative Perspective, New York 2015; ead., La bureaucratisation néolibérale, ou la domi-

formal and informal contexts; in conflict and post-conflict situations; and at the local, national, or international level. The focus is on the »cité bureaucratique« (Jean-François Bayart) in all of its political, social, cultural, and economic facets[4]. Bureaucratization takes the form of more or less institutionalized social and political practices, but also of symbolic practices that can convey various imaginaries. The front picture of this volume (see also fig. 1) illustrates this. It is an advertisement for a copy-shop run by a student organisation on Cheikh Anta Diop university campus in Dakar. Running a copy-shop may require some administrative daily work, even though the shop's shed was not formalised and eventually teared down in 2020, while we were writing contributions for this issue. However, what is striking about this shop are the bureaucratic imaginaries expressed in the mural painting: the seal of the university, the reference to paperwork (»traitement de textes«) and the student organisation's »comité logistique« (logistic committee), which may not even exist as a formalised committee.

Importantly, bureaucratic practices are not always established from the »top down«, on the initiative of institutions and administrations. They are also invented, confronted, and reformulated from the »bottom up« by various actors in their everyday contexts. In addition, Ralph Austen draws attention to the importance of considering the view from »the middle«, of all those who act as »intermediaries« or »interpreters«, literally or figuratively[5]. Giorgio Blundo speaks of »administrative brokers«: »touts (*démarcheurs*) or *agents d'affaires*, informal customs brokers (*transitaires ambulants*)«, who, Blundo says, play a role both as »facilitators« and as a »›drawn curtain‹ between the local state and its citizens«[6]. He is referring here to the »development brokers« studied by Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan[7], who can also be encountered around large commercial enterprises, offering their services as mediators to clients as they arrive. As Béatrice Hibou put it, »to some extent [...] we are all bureaucrats«, because »we are all mediators, actors more or less aware of this process [of bureaucratization], and we play a part in spreading these formalities, even if we may simultaneously be their victims«[8].

In her research, Hibou, like many others, takes as one of her starting points the work of Max Weber, who describes bureaucracy as one form of legitimate domination among others. Weber does not present bureaucracy either as a model or as a description of a »reality«, although he has often been misinterpreted in this way. In his methodological approach, he refers to it as an »ideal type« of domination which, in the case of bureaucracy, is produced through the application of standardized rules and procedures (»regelgebundene Herrschaftsausübung«). This mode of domination is grounded in bureaucratic knowledge and know-how (»Herrschaft kraft

nation et le redéploiement de l'État dans le monde contemporain, in: ead. (ed.), La bureaucratisation néolibérale, Paris 2013, p. 7–20.

4 Jean-François Bayart, La cité bureaucratique en Afrique subsaharien, in: Béatrice Hibou (ed.), La bureaucratisation néolibérale (as in n. 3), p. 291–313.

5 Ralph A. Austen, Colonialism from the Middle. African Clerks as Historical Actors and Discursive Subjects, in: History in Africa 38 (2011), p. 21–33.

6 Giorgio Blundo, Dealing with the Local State. The Informal Privatization of Street-Level Bureaucracies in Senegal, in: Development and Change, 37, no. 4 (2006), p. 799–816, p. 803, URL: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00502.x.

7 Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, Thomas Bierschenk, Les courtier locaux de développement, in: Bulletin de l'APAD 5 (1993), online: https://journals.openedition.org/apad/3233 (consulted on 10 June 2020); Thomas Bierschenk, Jean-Pierre Chauveau, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (eds.), Courtiers en développement. Les villages africains en quête de projets, Paris 2000; Thomas Bierschenk, Jean-Pierre Chauveau, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, Local Development Brokers in Africa. The Rise of a New Social Category, Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien Working Papers, no. 13 (2002), DOI: 10.25358/openscience-589.

8 Hibou, The Bureaucratization of the World (as in n. 3), p. xvi.

Wissen«), which are based not only on regulations and the expertise of bureaucrats, but also on the centralized compilation of information. One example is the establishment of the administration of public finances and taxation. Bureaucracy as an »ideal type« is supposed to allow non-arbitrary decisions to be taken »without regard to person«. Bureaucrats process and control information, and the associated regulations. According to Weber, they combine specialist knowledge (»Fachwissen«), certified by educational qualifications, with practical knowledge acquired through experience on the job (»Dienstwissen«). The everyday practice of procedures facilitates developing a working knowledge based on records (»aktenkundig«). »Secret« or »confidential« files reinforce the power and exclusivity of bureaucrats' knowledge[9].

Domination through codified rules and the work of bureaucrats generate specific figurations of knowledge. Precision, continuity, discipline, reliability, traceability and predictability feature in this context, as much as formalization and routine themselves. According to Gerd Spittler, bureaucratic domination is based on *abstract* knowledge[10]. The processing of data held in files and compiled in archives, the technologies and materials used for this purpose – along with various tools such as statistical methods, the census, and the land register – are consequences of this mode of knowledge production, but they also frame and structure it. The GHIP-CREPOS research programme's interest centres on the actors and bureaucratic practices (such as the establishment of regulations and decrees, lists and registers, the drafting of reports and correspondence) with their various materialities (paper, binders, digital or biometric data). These practices create »bureaucratic libraries« (Elisio Macamo and Mamadou Diawara) which include not only documents, but also the ways in which they are collected, processed, categorized, and circulated – and thus ways of ordering knowledge[11].

However, as research on the »colonial library«[12] has shown, studying the »bureaucratic library« requires complex forms of analysis that trace processes in reverse and read between the lines, looking well beyond what is recorded on paper. Michel Crozier draws attention to bureaucracies' »zones of uncertainty«: all of those situations that have not (yet) been regularized within administrations, which generate tensions, confrontations, and processes of negotiation within bureaucratic hierarchies[13]. Individual strategies create informal relationships and add a dimension of unpredictability within organizations. While everything can potentially be bureaucratized, in the end not everything is. Even in the most bureaucratized organization there are always non-bureaucratized spaces. According to Crozier, the more an organization tries to reduce uncertainties, the more it favours a proliferation of rules, which in turn create new frustra-

9 Max WEBER, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie, Tübingen 2002 [1921/22], p. 551–579; see also Max WEBER, Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft. Eine soziologische Studie, in: Preußische Jahrbücher 187 (1922), p. 1–12; now in: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte. Nachlaß (Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe I, 22–4): Herrschaft, published under the direction of Edith Hanke in collaboration with Thomas Kroll, Tübingen 2005, p. 715–742; Max WEBER, The Three Pure Types of Legitimate Rule, in: Sam Whimster (ed.), The Essential Weber. A Reader, New York 2004, p. 133–145.

10 Gerd SPITTLER, Abstraktes Wissen als Herrschaftsbasis. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte bürokratischer Herrschaft im Bauernstaat Preußen, in: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 32 (1980), p. 574–604.

11 The idea of the expression »bureaucratic library« comes from Elisio Macamo and Mamadou Diawara, in a preparatory paper for the research programme on the bureaucratization of African societies.

12 Valentin Y. MUDIMBE, The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge, Bloomington, IN 1988.

13 Michel CROZIER, De la bureaucratie comme système d'organisation, in: Archives Européннes de Sociologie 2 (1961), p. 28–50; ID., Le phénomène bureaucratique, Paris 1963; ID., The Bureaucratic Phenomenon, Chicago 1964.

tions and uncertainties[14]. Moreover, not every organization seeks to multiply its rules. Once a process of bureaucratization has been initiated – through the creation of an organization, for example – actors may content themselves with applying other, mostly or entirely non-bureaucratic, practices. According to Michael Lipsky, »the line between formal and informal routines is often very uncertain«[15]. Lipsky examines public services through everyday exchanges and interactions with users, rather than legislation and the »top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators«[16]. Edward C. Page asks whether bureaucrats themselves are experts, mobilizers of expertise, or intermediaries between experts and political leaders, and between clients and companies or (non-)state institutions[17]. Other authors explore the sites where bureaucratic knowledge is produced: offices, archives, or the service counter, which are, at the same time, places »of mediation linking a bureaucratic organization and a public, managerial innovations and moral values, professional practices, managerial concerns, and principles of justice«[18].

Bureaucratization is a historical phenomenon that can be studied in an infinite number of contexts and that is expressed in a broad plurality of ways. The contributions in this special issue focus on the bureaucratic practices and experiences of actors in everyday life in African countries. On the one hand, bureaucratic practices have constituted, and continue to constitute, a massive intervention in social and political life in Africa[19]. Their origins are often linked to the establishment of colonial administrations, with their largely repressive character. On the other hand, they did not fall on an empty field, but entered into interaction with practices linked to forms of social organization that in many cases long predated their arrival. The »bureaucratic library« is not a closed space, but opens up a field of diverse social forces. Actors translate and transform social objects and ideas according to their context. Bureaucrats, users, and intermediaries act in zones of uncertainty, which require processes of adaptation and negotiation. They can simultaneously play on different registers of knowledge, nourished by various forms of cultural, economic, and social capital. In this context, bureaucratic practices function not only as working tools, but also as threats, possibilities, or promises. There are those who know how to manage or manipulate bureaucratic procedures, and those who feel excluded from these processes because they lack the mastery of regulations, files, papers, or typing. In such contexts, some use bureaucratic practices to control, monitor, or exploit other people, while others demand that bureaucratic procedures be used to create transparency, traceability, and legitimacy.

This thematic collection focuses on three aspects of bureaucratic practices: *intermediaries*, *associations*, and *technologies*. Serving as *intermediaries* is a constituent part of the work of bureaucrats acting in zones of uncertainty. In Africa, this applies both to the colonial and postcolonial periods. As European colonial administrators found themselves in contexts where they often struggled or failed to understand their surroundings, their African employees »helped to transform colonial posts, courtrooms, and palavers into sites of struggles, debates, communication –

14 Michel Crozier, De la bureaucratie comme système d'organisation (as in n. 13), p. 20, 40.
15 Michael Lipsky, Street-Level Bureaucracy. Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services, New York 2010 [1980], p. 86.
16 Ibid., p. xiii.
17 Edward C. Page, Bureaucrats and Expertise. Elucidating a Problematic Relationship in Three Tableaux and Six Jurisdictions, in: Sociologie du travail 52/2 (2010), p. 255–273.
18 Jean-Marc Weller, L'État au guichet. Sociologie cognitive du travail et modernisation administrative des services publics, Paris 1999, p. 22; see also Gianenrico Bernasconi and Stefan Nellen (eds.), Das Büro. Zur Rationalisierung des Interieurs, 1880–1960, Bielefeld 2019 (Architekturen 25) and the project of photographer Jan Banning on bureaucrats around the world: https://www.janbanning.com/gallery/bureaucratics/.
19 Veena Das and Deborah Poole (eds.), Anthropology in the Margins of the State, Santa Fe 2004.

and miscommunication«[20]. Zones of uncertainty often also constituted »contact zones«: places of cross-cultural interaction »where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other«[21]. Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan draw attention to the »dialectics of formal organization and real practices, official regulations and informal norms in organizations ›at work‹«[22] in present-day Africa, which puts the focus on actors and emphasizes their work as intermediaries between different social practices. At the same time, Mirko Göpfert raises the question of who in fact enters these contact zones, given the fact that many people in Africa rarely or never come into contact with public bureaucracies. He argues that with regard to bureaucratic practice, contact zones must be thought as contexts of both connection and disconnection[23]. Amadou Dramé's contribution on the figure of the *commandant de cercle* during the colonial period highlights these dynamics of connected and disconnected intermediaries in zones of uncertainty. Moreover, a number of contributions in this issue go beyond the »administrative building«, focusing on »development brokers«[24] and bureaucratic entrepreneurs who act as intermediaries in relations with the state or (inter)national organizations. Some adopt bureaucratic practices, sometimes in creative ways, as shown by Peter Lambertz, who illustrates how actors who seldom interact with public offices produce connectedness through the naming of their boats on the Congo River. Others use bureaucratic procedures to further their interests and careers, as highlighted in the contributions of Koly Fall on village associations in Senegal, Kamina Diallo on an organization of ex-combatants in Côte d'Ivoire, and Laure Carbonnel on cultural entrepreneurs in Mali.

Associations are an excellent arena to study processes of bureaucratization and the role of intermediaries in those processes[25], all the more so given how this context helps to uncover the overlap between »formal and informal routines«. In large part, associations follow a model propagated by laws and decrees or by NGOs and international organizations, although many associations do not obtain a *récépissé* (official acknowledgment) and others do not seek one, despite having an office and statutes. Associations contribute to the reformulation of »travelling models«[26], which Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan observe in other bureaucratic contexts, where elements invented elsewhere are »standardized, exported, and then locally adapted and adopted«[27]. The studies of Kamina Diallo and Koly Fall in this issue show how the imaginaries of bureaucratic procedures spread out into everyday life beyond the associations themselves. These travelling models enable the use of the language of the State and international organizations, helping people and groups to seek legitimacy in their relations with these structures and facilitating attempts to interact with them, to obtain resources, and to make demands. This is evidenced by two completely different contexts explored in this collection: the associations of ex-combatants in French West Africa (AOF) studied by Martin Mourre, and the associations of displaced persons analysed by Lamine Doumbia. At the same time, this bureaucratic language

20 Emily Osborn, »Circle of Iron«: African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa, in: Journal of African History 44 (2003), p. 29–50, see p. 33–34.

21 Mary Louise Pratt, The Arts of the Contact Zone, in: Profession (1991), p. 33–40, see p. 33.

22 Thomas Bierschenk, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, How to Study Bureaucracies Ethnographically?, in: Critique of Anthropology 39/2 (2019), p. 243–257, see p. 248.

23 Mirko Göpfert, Policing the Frontier. An Ethnography of Two Worlds in Niger, Ithaka, NY, London 2020 (Police/Worlds: Studies in Security, Crime, and Governance), p. 7, 144.

24 Bierschenk, Chauveau, de Sardan, Local Development Brokers (as in n. 7).

25 See also a special issue of »Émulations« (37/2021) coordinated by Laure Carbonnel, Kamina Diallo, and Lamine Doumbia: »Associations et bureaucratisation: perspectives africaines«.

26 Andrea Behrends, Sung-Joon Park, and Richard Rottenburg, Travelling Models in African Conflict Resolution. Translating Technologies of Social Ordering, Leiden 2014.

27 Bierschenk, Olivier de Sardan, How to Study Bureaucracies Ethnographically? (as in n. 22), p. 253.

must always be adapted and renegotiated within associations. Usually, intermediaries perform this role – individuals who act as relays, »brokers«, spokespersons, or chairs and secretaries. Those who are most successful in their careers in associations are often people who have not only bureaucratic knowledge, but also other forms of social and cultural capital – even more so as the former can distance them from those they claim to represent.

Bureaucracy relies on *technology* to operate. Paperwork has thus long been considered a main feature of bureaucratic practices. Questions around the production of paperwork concern the number and circulation of bureaucratic papers, how they are configured, their materiality, and their role in shaping human relations. Papers are used both to govern and to contest. They are »graphic artifacts«[28]. Kelma Manatouma's contribution on the history of identity papers in Chad offers one example. The production of these papers not only follows norms and models, it is also individual, and reflective of political contexts. On the one hand, the bureaucrat influences choices of content and form[29]. On the other hand, papers have a life after they are produced, and impact social relations. Aissatou Seck's study describes a context where individuals' entire lives can be disrupted on the basis of patient registration files. At the same time, the traceability supposedly associated with the production of bureaucratic documents is limited, either because of the sheer mass of documents produced[30], or due to the ephemeral character of their archiving[31]. In addition, paperwork may be entangled with other strategies, as Lambertz evokes with the example of vessel names following both official registration procedures and »local practical norms of naming«.

New digital forms of bureaucratic practice face similar challenges, as summarized by Ursula Rao and Graham Greenleaf: »While the new technology propels fantasies about a corruption free well-ordered society the implementation runs up against innumerable challenges«[32]. From a new public management perspective, electronic machines produce a »radical disintermediation«[33]. And yet in a study of biometric technologies, Zachary Whyte recognizes the need to explore the actors involved in biometrics (the »›peopling‹ of biometrics«) and to understand the relational nature of data: »In practice biometric systems regularly fail […] they are not infallible«[34]. With the spread of biometrics in Africa (in the context of its colonial and postcolonial history, notably with fingerprinting)[35], the regulatory framework and the diversity of actors involved (including international organizations, among them private agencies) raise the

28 Matthew S. Hull, Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan, Berkeley, CA 2012.

29 Mirco Göpfert, Bureaucratic Aesthetics: Report Writing in the Nigérien Gendarmerie, in: American Ethnologist 40/2 (2013), p. 324–334; Thomas Bierschenk, Postface: Anthropology, Bureaucracy and Paperwork, in: Journal of Legal Anthropology 3/2 (2019), p. 111–119.

30 Cornelia Vismann, Files: Law and Media Technology, Standford, CA 2008; Peter Becker, Der Staat – eine österreichische Geschichte, in: Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 126/2 (2018), p. 317–340, see p. 334–335.

31 Susann Baller, Spielfelder der Stadt. Fußball und Jugendpolitik im Senegal seit 1950, Köln 2010, p. 267–280.

32 Ursula Rao and Graham Greenleaf, Subverting ID from Above and Below. The Uncertain Shaping of India's New Instrument of E-Governance, in: Surveillance & Society 11/3 (2013), p. 287–300.

33 Patrick Dunleavy et al., New Public Management is Dead – Long Live Digital-Era Governance, in: Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 16 (2005), p. 467–494, see p. 486; see also Aurélien Buffat, Street-Level Bureaucracy and E-Government, Public Management Review 17/1 (2015), p. 149–161.

34 Zachary Whyte, Automation, Biocrats, and Imaginaries in Biometric Border Worlds. A Commentary, in: Ethnos (2020), DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2020.1736595.

35 Keith Breckenridge, Biometric State. The Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the Present, Oxford 2014; id., The Biometric State. The Promise and

Figure 1: Copy-shop of a student organisation on Cheikh Anta Diop university campus in Dakar. Photograph by the author, 2017.

Figure 2: Copy-shop of a student organisation on Cheikh Anta Diop university campus in Dakar, view from the street. Photograph by the author, 2017.

question of »gatekeepers«, and of who establishes standards and models and how they are re-adapted in local contexts. Cecilia Passanti's contribution on electoral technologies in Senegal presents reflections on this subject. Laure Carbonnel also addresses the issue of gatekeeping and models, in an analysis of how norms around what is considered a »cultural capital« city are built into the (urban) environment. This is comparable to the question of how practical (bureaucratic) norms are built into boats on the Congo River (see Lambertz). Despite the entirely different contexts that they explore, these papers (Carbonnel, Lambertz, Manatouma, Passanti, and Seck) share an interest in how bureaucratic conceptions are translated into different materialities, and how these in turn produce new bureaucratic imaginaries.

The case studies gathered in this issue contribute to a discussion of bureaucratization as a global historical phenomenon. This discussion requires a comparative approach, which includes all regions of the world and does not limit itself to state actors. The studies remind us that everything can be bureaucratized: culture, identity, land, health, boats, and even solidarity. However, although processes of bureaucratization are »ubiquitous«, it is important to recognize that they do not encompass all social practices and relationships, and that they always meet with both limits and challenges. The refusal of bureaucratization, or indifference toward it, can also be observed. The contributions in this issue offer reflections on how these processes of bureaucratization impact societies and individuals, but also on the strategies of individuals: to resist or avoid bureaucratic processes; to make complaints or interact with the State using bureaucratic practices (see Mourre, Doumbia, Diallo, Lambertz); to trust in or contest bureaucratic technologies (see Passanti); to organize, or circumvent, formalized versions of mutual aid (see Fall); to advance in new careers (see Carbonnel, among others); or to create new identities (see Mourre on African »*anciens combattants*« in Senegal, Diallo on »*démos*« [demobilized former combatants] in Côte d'Ivoire, and Doumbia on »*déguerpis*« [forcibly displaced people]). Bureaucratic identification products, such as intelligence files, identity cards, and electoral registers, can exclude some actors, but also create opportunities (see Dramé, Seck, Mourre, Manatouma, Diallo, Passanti). Laws or decrees can restrict room for manoeuvre (as in the example of eviction), but also open ways of advancing demands (Mourre, Doumbia). Regulations can create a sense of injustice and suspicion, but also of transparency and legitimacy (Passanti, Fall). While this thematic collection argues that everything can be bureaucratized, it also keeps in mind that not everything is bureaucratized. What is more, it emphasizes that any bureaucratic practice is negotiable and can create very different – and not necessarily always particularly bureaucratized – outcomes.

Peril of Digital Government in the New South Africa, in: Journal of Southern African Studies 31/2 (2005), p. 267–282.