The Bright Continent

BREAKING RULES and MAKING CHANGE in MODERN AFRICA

Dayo Olopade
Two Publics

Who's in Charge?

Africa is at a crossroads. Millions share a vision of what needs doing—that is, social, economic, and civic empowerment for the historically marginalized. This includes women’s rights, fair trade, modern education, balanced consumption, and issue-based politics—as well as good roads, and rules for them. But it’s not always clear how to get from today to tomorrow, from point A to point B.

The late economist Albert Hirschman identified three possible responses to systems in turmoil. Members of a group can signal their opinion with disengagement (“exit”), with expression (“voice”), or with obedience (“loyalty”). The framework is easily applied to sub-Saharan states.

As the preceding chapters make clear, exit is a popular choice, especially in fail states. Mobile banking, private schooling, private health care, decentralized electricity, and even migration can be seen as “exports” from the institutions that obstruct progress for working families. Whereas once these opportunities to exit were confined to the wealthiest 1 percent of Africans, the new businesses and technologies we’ve discussed have made exit increasingly democratic. Millions like Gladys, Bridge Academies parents, or Somaliland patriots challenge or leave the formal system to pursue their goals.

Voice, too, can help to improve development prospects: from Villages in Action to mPedigree to the night artists painting murals in Nairobi, and new whistleblowing initiatives like “I Paid a Bribe,” some activists attempt to amplify the voices of ordinary people. But civil society in Africa is everywhere embattled. Freedom House, which tracks human rights around the world, finds the countries in sub-Saharan Africa woefully unfree. This means that groups focusing on human rights, free expression, and gender-based empowerment—among other political aims—are often an afterthought.

In most countries, the press is just as sickly. Freedom House finds only 3 percent of African media environments to be “free.” I’ve seen stenography, misinformation, and harassment firsthand. A culture of deference and fear of reprisal lead many reporters to file “who stories” (rather than “what stories”). Even liberal darlings like Liberian presi-
dent Ellen Johnson Sirleaf are guilty of enabling repressive media environments. The passage of African laws against hate speech suggests a narrowing environment for expression—even as technological tools of dissent grow more accessible.

On some level, this is an argument for protecting and strengthening the media in Africa. As a proxy for the public to which they belong, free and fair local coverage can help to keep institutions honest and break down the information asymmetries that perpetuate the fall state. Foreign correspondents, of whom I count myself a representative, are simply not capable of illuminating the depth and breadth of information across the continent. Happily, modern discourse now includes citizens, wielding twenty-first-century tools to tell stories better, longer, and with greater reach.

But voice itself is often a petition to power—dependent on the same systems that persistently fail ordinary people. And so it can fall short of our aspirations. The vulture mural, for one example, changed nothing about the practices of the powerful; just two months after inauguration, Kenyan MPs voted to give themselves a 60 percent salary hike—to roughly $10,000 a month. Many African civil society groups depend on external grant funding or compete with foreign NGOs that supplant their work. Jamillah Mwanjisi, head of State of the Union, a pan-African NGO consortium, now worries about the “shrinking space” for non-state voices.

Even where local NGOs have devised an agenda for change, formal institutions still drive action. When the African Union convened a gathering to celebrate fifty years of regional independence and map a plan for the next fifty, civil society groups were banned outright. The official rationale: outside voices presented a distraction from the high-level gatherings of diplomats. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the new head of the AU from South Africa, offered a with-us-or-against-us frame for the meetings: “We decide which ones are closed... we decide which sessions are open. And if you are not going to be participating in the discussion, why do you want to be here?”

Loyalty—belief in rather than critiques of authority—is a third way. It’s also counterintuitive; few people outside the continent’s myriad bureaucracies argue for more concentrated power in African politics. Even fewer actively rely on government to improve their lives. But establishing loyalty is a tantalizing prospect. It suggests some measure of legitimacy, and the social progress that comes with it. And while my arguments cheer on those working around distorting or extractive institutions, one need only look at the high turnout rates for some recent African elections to see that many people still hold on to the dream of competent, representative government.

The real question for Africa’s future may be: Loyalty to whom? Or what? The basic tension in development practice runs between inductive and deductive processes. The “stuff we don’t want” approach is overly deductive. Such solutions begin with external priorities and remain inflexible as they move from elite conference halls and parliaments to the population at large. At the same time, inductive, grassroots processes struggle to be recognized and to scale up.

In her office in Lagos, activist Ngozi Iwere described these “two publics” in the region today. One is “the public of the community, which is the governance at the community level that works for the people. They set it up themselves, they have their sanctions, they have their boundaries, your rights, my rights.” The other public, she says, is “modern-day Western government that pretends that this other governance does not exist.”

She’s observing a phenomenon known as legal pluralism. Systems of dueling legitimacy and authority aren’t limited to Africa; informal laws, whether customary, mercantile, religious, or clan determined, coexist with formal law in many parts of the world.* In Africa, one “public” is decidedly Western—oriented around states and bureau-

* One merchant may offer: fixed prices with tax; another may embrace the haggle economy. One family may condone alcohol consumption before the legal age, just as another may forbid drinking, even when it’s legally permitted. Islamic banking law, for another example, governs many transactions that take place in the Arab Middle East.
cracies, parliamentary democracy and the administrative state, international trade and human rights laws and GDP-centric calculations. The other public is far more decentralized and less culturally determined, comprising family hierarchies, tribal or religious laws, or even informal contract norms like the lex mercatoria that for centuries governed trade around the Indian Ocean, and inland from Asia to Europe.

Iwere is right that rule of law acolytes have repeatedly overlooked the existence, strength, and utility of the latter category in Africa. Indeed, the chief failing of development practice has been to presume loyalty to the African state or nation rather than to the shifting tools, tricks, and affiliations that make life in the other "public" viable.

But acknowledging dual norms is just the first step. Both publics have strengths and both carry dangers. At one end of the spectrum is the kanju spirit I've cheered throughout this book — playing naughty, bending rules, and devising new games entirely. At the other end of the spectrum is the strong and functional state — still rare in modern Africa.

The closest thing I found was in Rwanda, which everybody remembers for its 1994 genocide. Today, the country is among Africa's leaders in the ease of doing business, and roads that were once littered with bodies are now butter smooth, from the cities to the hinterlands. The economy continues to grow at a substantial pace — about 7.5 percent in 2010, 2 percent higher than the East African Community and more than sub-Saharan Africa at large.

I wasn't prepared for the charming calm of the aptly named "Land of a Thousand Hills." The country looks like a Cézanne landscape, a stark contrast to its sinister history of violence. And after months of sitting through white papers on bad bureaucracy, I also wasn't prepared to see a government eager to please. But just as Somali land is doggedly building institutions from destruction, the Rwandan nation is clambering out from the civil conflict that once defined it.

Since reconstituting itself in the early 2000s, the Rwandan state has enacted a series of innovative reforms. As a push to integrate the nation into the global economy, the official language of instruction and business was changed from French to English. Children are required to attend three additional years of school, and a universal health insurance scheme is in its first stages. In response to a threat of environmental damage, no plastic bags are allowed in the country. An enormous international airport is under construction, as a way of leapfrogging Rwanda's isolated central African geography. Fiber-optic data cables are being laid for the same purpose.

Also at the behest of the state, neatly uniformed women daily sweep the streets of the capital, Kigali, just as they might sweep the dust from their own homes. Even the informal-sector industries that are the backbone of African economies have been brought under the reins of the state. Motorcycle taxi drivers wear reflective vests, and they carry identification cards and a spare helmet for their passenger. Crime is nonexistent.

The level of organization and control is audacious — and even more so given the country's brutal history and particularly forsaken real estate. Rwanda is landlocked and poor, with no natural resources to speak of. Ten percent of the country was killed in the genocide, hundreds of thousands more people were forced into refugee camps, and those who were left were barely alive, inside and out. An entire generation of orphans needed homes. There was no central bank, no auditor general, and no school syllabus. Archives and documents were irretrievably destroyed, and there was no institutional memory. The fleeing Hutu militias crouched on the Congolese border threatened to return and finish what they had started.

But as with other appearances of kanju, the devastation and uncertainty produced a significant upside. For several years running, for example, the country has had the highest proportion of female lawmakers in the world. Women have run the ministries of foreign affairs, agriculture, and health. The same goes for the speaker of Parliament, the vice president of the Senate, and the president's chief of staff. This is one positive aspect of the genocide, after which female survivors found themselves alone, with a country to rebuild — and skills to contribute. "That's the secret of the nation building in Rwanda; it's the women, it's the youth, it's the marginalized groups," said Aloysia
Inyumba, the loyalist, no-nonsense gender minister who passed away in 2012. While Rwandan society is still deeply bound up in the genocide, the destruction of 1994 allowed for a partial “reset” of the social compact. It allowed Rwanda to start from scratch.

In all of my travels in the region, government has been seen as an ambiguous, often mistrusted, and mostly irrelevant participant in everyday life. By contrast, the Rwandans I spoke with — CEOs and farmers, government ministers and expatriate missionaries — are relentlessly upbeat. Many are eager to shape a new reputation for Rwanda. Few expressed anger or bitterness about the past. Somewhat eerily, multiple people told me that “the best revenge is success.” “They’re doing all these kinds of things that are extremely unusual,” says Manzi Kayihura, the one-time head of Rwandair, the national airline. “I traveled over Christmas. There’s a card that comes back from the immigration guy: ‘We wish you a joyous festive season and we hope to see you soon. It’s just so different.”

In Kigali, I stopped by the Rwanda Development Board, the government agency responsible for building Rwanda’s private sector. Its claim to fame is the ability to register a business in twenty-four hours or less. (In fail states, the process can take up to a year or more.) At the RDB, I met Pasquale Karambizi, a lanky Congolese trader who was registering his export-import business — thereby committing himself to paying taxes in Rwanda. This was novel; Karambizi was swimming against the flow of most small firms in Africa. He justified it as good business: “Here there is security — even if there are taxes. In Congo, there is not.”

This gets at one of the key justifications for loyalty to a central government: stability. Compared with the DRC, where tribalism, nepotism, patronage, and rent seeking pervade the political parties and the bureaucracy, and bursts of violence toss refugees across borders with galling frequency, Rwanda’s bland competence is a virtue. Betty Mutesi, who works with the finance ministry on the MDGs, drew a direct link between a bleak past and a bright future: “If you are running away from something, will you run faster? I think so.”

Whatever the causation, power and legitimacy are combined in an unusual way in Rwanda. For all of its scrappy successes, Somaliland is still not a state. For its hard-won partition and new nationhood, South Sudan is still years away from a stable, prosperous existence. Even South Africa, following the triumph of its liberation struggle, has deep developmental problems and still-damning racial divisions.

For the most part, Rwandan people want their government to work and, more importantly, trust that it will. Rwandan people want their government to work and, more importantly, trust that it will. “Government is to serve the people. The people now know that and they demand it,” says Clare Akamanzi, head of the Rwanda Development Board. At thirty-two years old, she is emblematic of the new boss — responsive, eager, and sharp. On occasion, she has been personally called out of her office by constituents with complaints. “When they see that you’re consistent about corruption, when they see you’re consistent about economic development, when they see they have more to eat than they have ever had, when you see all this construction happening, when you see more houses in Kigali, that hope makes everybody energetic,” she says.

The most energetic of all Rwandans may be Paul Kagame, the rebel leader who stopped the genocide and now serves as president. He was first elected in 2003 with a reported 95 percent of the vote. Previously, he had been a kind of shadow CEO, first as national liberator, then vice president, and then, beginning in 2000, unelected president. His personality casts the longest shadow in Rwanda. Locals joke that he is treated as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Barack Obama rolled into one. His critics would point to flashes of Mugabe and Mussolini, too.

The reputation is not unwarranted — since marching his guerrillas from Uganda into the Rwandan capital, Kagame has been exceptionally canny and nimble in his reconstruction efforts. He’s a magpie for innovation — he was one of the first lean economy leaders to bite at the controversial One Laptop Per Child program. He takes to the hustings regularly to explain and defend novel national policies like One Cow Per Poor Family. He is a vociferous user of Twitter and is also easily spotted at global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos or the Clinton Global Initiative in New York. He is the only African head
of state with a personal website. “He is very committed and serious, very unlike the traditional leaders who are in Africa,” said Inyumba. “This is a president who will challenge you, who will demand accountability, who will emphasize doing things right.”

Thus, the banned plastic bags are screened for at the airport as though they were shipments of cocaine. The government mandates umuganda — a ritual monthly cleaning of public streets and construction of homes. To prevent a Système D from evolving, the imposing Rwanda Revenue Authority is among the largest, most visible buildings in Kigali, and the fines for shirking tax payments are fierce — 10 percent of the bill if it’s a day late. Like Akamanzi, the bureaucracy is impossibly young, bright-eyed, and hardworking, showing up to their offices seven days a week. Contrary to the fail state tradition of recycling familiar political dynasties and repeat players, turnover in the ministries is high. Rwandan bureaucrats “don’t confuse their positions with their persons,” says Kayihura. “Six months down the road, if you’re not performing, you’re out.” Massive billboards remind the population that there will be “zero tolerance” for corruption.

Over time, the Rwandan state has provided an unexpected disruption to stale development habits — often deploying kanju logic within the state itself. Kiosks in Kigali offer free Internet access for any resident. A Ministry of Health program called Rapid SMS enables monitoring of maternal health from pregnancy until fourteen days after birth. Community health workers gather text messages from families in labor and pass word of the most urgent cases directly to district hospitals. According to Denis Murenzi, director of information and communications technology for the Ministry of Health, the deployment worked all the better after the government gave every community health worker a mobile phone.

Rwanda used the Family Map to dispense justice in the wake of the genocide. In the days of cleanup in 1994 through 2000, the gutted judicial system had processed only 3,500 out of some 130,000 accused criminals. The international tribunals that have since built cases against the worst of the génocidaires could not have handled the burden of prosecution for the tens of thousands of small-scale murderers.

Into the breach came gacaca, a traditional system of dispute resolution in which elders resolve conflicts “on the grass.” There was no impunity: criminals confessed in exchange for more lenient sentencing, and survivors received a modicum of catharsis. The docket was cleared in ten years. While the controversial system has provoked criticism from advocates for more traditional Western justice, to Akamanzi the calculus was obvious: “Do we innovate with what we have or do we risk never having justice?”

It was jarring to hear this call to kanju from the mouth of government. But Kagame has justifiable suspicions about the official global institutions and protocols that, in 1994, left Rwanda to die. While he has sent bureaucratic envoys abroad to see how other systems solve problems, his government has also rejected the basic power disparities in the donor economy. Kagame has started a domestic development fund to get Rwandan individuals and companies to fund Rwanda’s social needs. Though almost half of the budget still comes from foreign donations, today, Kayihura says, “the smart thing Rwanda is doing is saying, ‘If you give us aid, we want to do this with it.’ Traditionally they come to you and say, ‘We want to build you a bridge.’ And they say, ‘No, we don’t want a bridge, we want a school.’”

Alongside Rwanda’s unusual stance on aid and public service provision comes an unusual focus on private-sector development. A sign at the RDB offices promotes the corporate mentality in government: “Welcome to Rwanda: We value our customers.” The analogy is not so far-fetched. Just as the consumer relationship promotes accountability, Rwanda sees its citizens and investors as clients and prides itself enormously on its performance in the World Bank’s “ease of doing business” rankings. In 2013, the government successfully issued a $400 million bond to international investors at an enviably low interest rate. While the population and capital needs are too small to register on the radar of multinationals, the RDB greases the wheels for any company that does choose to play in Rwanda.

Perhaps obviously, dealing with the psychological fallout from the genocide has been the trickiest part of governing post-conflict Rwanda. National unification has required actively considered deracination
something other political systems in Africa still struggle to promote. Today, even mentioning the two dominant “ethnic groups,” Hutu and Tutsi, is a major taboo. The best trained call the cleavages “divisions,” not ethnicities. This is a reversion to proper form — Belgian ethnographic scientists arbitrarily assigned Rwandans to the groups based on superficialities like height and skin color. But it is also a shrewd way of cementing the national identity. A well-placed diplomatic observer told me that hypersensitivity to ethnic favoritism has made Rwanda’s government nominally more inclusive.

To speed Rwanda’s process of reinvention, Kagame has adopted a philosophy of agaciro, a Kinyarwanda word for self-reliance and dignity. “The agaciro I often talk of is about fighting for our integrity and our future,” he said at a leadership retreat in 2010. At a regional youth development conference in Kampala, he pronounced, “It is when you have that dignity and are prepared to protect it that you will make inventions that answer our circumstances.”

The hospital-corners approach has had mixed results. Rwanda has made comparative gains in traditional MDG indicators like maternal mortality, HIV prevalence, and primary school enrollment (for whatever it’s worth), as well as private metrics like banking services and the number of days it takes to enforce a contract. But clean water and sanitation still elude four in ten rural Rwandans, and the nation has miles to go before its stated goal of “middle-income” status (per capita income is about $1,200 a year).

The loyalty model carries promises and pitfalls, and Rwanda’s political culture is a good example of both. Reporters like to call tiny Rwanda “the Singapore of Africa.” The country has indeed aped east Asian “tigers” that have surged from poverty to prosperity. But the real similarities are less flattering: the state is heavily involved in all walks of Rwandan life, with harsh controls over public behavior and information flows. Political institutions are weak, and a growing autocracy and a cult of personality swirl around Kagame.

The president who trained as an intelligence officer in the Ugandan army, in Cuba, and in the United States before leading the Rwandan Patriotic Front from guerrilla status to ruling party is, to be blunt, paranoid. Speaking ill of Kagame has been punished with arrests among local journalists — among the least free on the continent. Rwanda has jailed individuals for failing to attend national days of remembrance. Since Kagame’s first election, anti-opposition crackdowns and allegations of vote rigging and vote suppression have been whispered and sometimes shouted. His military adventurism in Africa’s Great Lakes region is directly responsible for toppling Mobutu in 1997, and special forces under his command have destabilized the neighboring DRC ever since. The UN has released a series of damning reports about Kagame’s long-running inflammation of regional armed conflict.

As much as he represents the visionary leadership of which so many in the region have felt starved, Kagame also embodies the dangers of earlier strongmen in Africa. A young lawyer who travels between Rwanda and Uganda (where Kagame’s old friend Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986) reminded me that “in Kampala, people can criticize the president on the radio. Here, you get to the airport and people just stop talking.”

Despite underlying frailties, loyalty persists — Kagame was re-elected in 2010 with 93 percent of the vote. (In 2017, term limits will force the first real test of this remarkable do-over.) In Rwanda as in Somalliland, the specter of vulnerability in a bad neighborhood produces a strong urge for stability at all costs. Stephen Kinzer’s excellent book on Kagame and the genocide helps to explain why few Rwandans have contested the growing autocracy. Pre-1994, “organizations of civil society in Rwanda were deeply compliant with the authoritarian, centralized system, with seemingly little capacity to question Government decisions and directives.” Outside of a gutted civil society, “most are miserably poor agro-pastoralists whose hopes are concentrated on essentials like security, work, and food. Many find the idea of competitive politics terrifying. Their only experience of it was during the final period of the Habyarimana dictatorship, and it brought catastrophe. Few are eager to try again.”
Of course, fearful acceptance is a far cry from true loyalty. Durable trust in any form of authority is best earned and driven by social norms first. Individuals must identify with rules and believe them worthy of collective obedience. In this conception of loyalty, the people wield power. Mahmood Mamdani, the Ugandan academic, puts it thus: “The real custodian of democratic order was never the state but society.”

But local social norms are hard to pin down. Formal and informal frameworks present complex codes and languages that most people in Africa toggle between daily. In an effort to answer the question, researchers from Stanford and the Center for Global Development constructed a market test.

The experiment began because there are technically two legal systems in Liberia. The end of its civil war saw a host of new formal laws and statutes passed. At the same time, the country’s “Hinterland Regulations” recognize the continuing existence and influence of customary courts that empower community leaders to act as judges. (Plural regimes also exist in Uganda, where “resistance councils” have had the right to manage police, health, justice, education, and other public services since 1986, and in South Africa, where local tribal and community courts handle disputes in a similar fashion. Somalland’s unusual parliamentary arrangement adopts voting and bicameral legislation but also uses traditional clan structures of conflict resolution.)

Between filing and lawyers’ fees, petty bribes, transportation to and from remote courts, and even food for the incarcerated awaiting a hearing, formal justice in Liberia is costly. But informal legal fixes aren’t necessarily any better. The study architects determined that customary courts in Liberia and elsewhere in Africa can be “expensive, corrupted, discriminatory, and administered by local judges who have poor knowledge of the law.” As Mamdani notes, customary authorities may care more about enforcing traditions than supporting rights.

This dual arrangement enabled the researchers to track the choices of parties to more than 4,500 conflicts in Liberia, using interviews with six hundred community-based paralegals who mediated between the two systems.* Like nurse practitioners who “task shift” to cover more rural patients, the paralegals made counsel accessible across the hinterland — reaching their destinations on motorbikes at times.

Faced with land and debt disputes, petty and serious crimes, or family disagreements, some parties chose customary law, and others chose to pursue recourse in the official judicial system. Mostly, everybody valued expedience over ideology. Liberians chose the system they believed would produce a more favorable judgment. It’s why some socially powerless women chose the formal system when pursuing cases against men. Those without status thought the formal law would be more objective.

But the final tally showed informality bias: 38 percent of disputes were taken to the customary system, but just 4 percent ended up in the formal system. Another whopping 58 percent of disputes went unreported entirely, resolved by the parties to the dispute themselves. Just as many Africans choose private health care or “private school,” many Liberians opted for private law.

Many more people chose the informal system because it better reflected abstract social priorities. Where formal legal systems are designed for punishment that “provides little or no material or social gain,” the customary courts emphasize restitution, flexibility, and the well-being of a broader community. Victims turned out to be less interested in discipline than in being made whole for the crime. This pragmatism favored the customary courts. In one illustrative case, a young man killed another in a hunting accident; rather than sending him to jail and rupturing the social bonds of the community, the uncle of the deceased ended up convincing both families to settle for a sacrifice of livestock and a solemn toast.

What’s remarkable about the two Liberian “publics” is their interchangeability. At any given time, people can leap from one system to

---

* The participants with paralegals were much happier with the outcome of their disputes, and more likely to choose the dual system over the customary system alone. There’s some indication that the paralegals decreased incidences of bribery.
another. If a customary judgment is ignored, parties can pursue formal—and presumably more enforceable—remedies. Official disputes that become financially or socially costly can likewise exit the formal framework and return to community courts.

Around the world, these “two publics” are more than simultaneous—they are fundamentally codependent. The one requires the other. Some social or market-based norms, or what economist Avinash Dixit calls “private government,” depend on the existence of laws, from import restrictions to license plates to a stable currency. Likewise, some laws, like the Bretton Woods agreement that stabilized global exchange rates (for a time), or the municipal regulations that fix the price of a taxi, derive from pragmatic, informal trade practices. Both laws and norms inform everyday decision making.

But this reliance varies greatly by world region. Fat economies tend toward greater formality and stronger laws. A German car maker, for example, relies on contract laws and powerful courts that ensure investments will be executed. Customers rely on safety and emissions regulations to protect passengers and reduce energy consumption, and public-sector roads to drive on. In Africa, reliance on the fail state is weaker. In fact, some ventures need only the loosest of rules and thinnest of supports. “It’s not about direct intervention and regulation—you will remove all their creativity,” says Obiageli Ezekwesili, the former Nigerian education minister who now leads an institute committed to building private-sector capacity. “For some of these transport or retail ventures, all you need is a good road for them. Their productivity will skyrocket.”

This perspective joins an ongoing debate over the proper role and reach of government the world over. It has been nearly twenty years since The End of the Nation-State, in which Jean-Marie Guéhenno proclaimed it “time to realize that the idea of the nation that Europe gave to the world is perhaps only an ephemeral political form, a European exception, a precarious transition between the age of kings and the ‘neoimperial’ age.” He argued that economic modernity and previ-ously unthinkable mobility trump political modernity, that “the nation appears increasingly like a straitjacket, poorly adapted to the growing integration of the world.”

He made the point well before the juggernaut of globalization brought Latin America, Asia, and now Africa into a moment of simultaneity (if not equality) with fat economies. Since then, legacy monopolies on force and influence—cultural, military, and economic—have largely evaporated. A glance about contemporary Africa captures the shift: Turkish airliners, French telecoms, and Brazilian private equity funds find as much relevance in the region as American Peace Corps volunteers or Chinese day laborers.

It may be easy to read this book as a libertarian celebration of hustling, hacking, and free-form development in sub-Saharan Africa. And it is. Rwanda’s strong state is the exception, and not the rule. Public institutions are not maturing at the pace that the region deserves. Some goods, like safety and security, justice and rights to land and water, are the traditional domain of state actors. But development necessities such as health care, electricity, and education flourish outside the reach of the African state—and even roads and sanitation are increasingly the province of private ambition. There is a pronounced gap between smaller forms of organization that provide structure, finance, and services, and the political institutions that frequently fail to do the same.

The region desperately needs recognition and support for the role of informal ties, between families, businesses, landholders, young people, and information neighborhoods on- and offline. These powerful forms of affiliation have been marvelously resistant to the state cartography and bureaucracy that grid and divide the world. Understanding and accepting kanju will be exciting and transformative for global decision making.

But closing the gap also depends on hybrid commitments, from both “publics.” The Liberia study concludes that incorporating elements of formal law into informal structures, and vice versa, is a low-cost alternative to rigid formalism, with far greater potential for legiti-
macy. The same "open-source" mentality can be applied to other areas of development practice. Achille Mbembe calls for an "entanglement," an effort "to account for time as lived ... in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presences and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change." Innovations that build on both institutional and informal frameworks may be doubly effective.

The United Nations, for an unexpected example, has launched a project called Global Pulse that seeks to mine data in order to predict economic shocks. If, for example, an individual has been purchasing mobile phone airtime in denominations of $10 every month and suddenly begins to purchase denominations of $1 every week, the Global Pulse model might treat the shift as a sign of pinched income and step up a local school feeding program. If cattle begin showing up on markets (live or virtual) several weeks ahead of the season — and for below-market rates — it’s another sign of stress. Online searches for "banana rot" or "jobs in France" are similar canaries in the mine.

The program is grounded in a recognition of past malpractice. In 2008 — at the height of the food, fuel, and financial crisis — governments and development agencies around the world stood flat-footed as millions of people slipped back below the poverty line. Instead of sending bureaucrats to compile interviews with select households, or waiting for local governments to spit out household income, rainfall, or maternal death statistics, Global Pulse tries to read between the lines and act fast. By mining ambient data and passing on what is learned, the team seeks to strengthen development responses. The first of the "Pulse Labs" will be in Kampala, Uganda.

While limited in scope, similar open government and transparency movements have emerged to insist that basic information be shared among the center and the periphery. The governments of Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Ghana have committed to posting full government data sets online. The initiatives work better with an assist from civil society. Uwezo, an east African transparency organization, has been conducting a national education survey that goes beyond schools and into homes where some students had been left behind.

Some aid agencies and philanthropies leverage their grants as start-up capital for market solutions. New "public-private partnerships" fund products and processes rather than handing out basic necessities. USAID's pilot policy of loan guarantees, for example, looks more like the vision for capital discussed in Chapter 7. The World Bank, which generally sees more balance between markets and states, has created a "development marketplace" that solicits ideas through competition. The ten-year-old project is global, but in Africa it has funded projects like Seeds for Needs, designed to match female farmers in Ethiopia with locally adapted seed varieties that can improve yields and bolster traditional efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change. In contrast to the mega-millions disbursed to governments (in 2011, Ethiopia received some $3.8 billion in official assistance), this grant was just $200,000.

Slowly, some of the biggest battleships in global philanthropy are trying to turn things around. Jim Yong Kim, the newest World Bank president, was plucked from Partners in Health, one of the least deductive and most effective global charities in operation. Shanta Devarajan, chief Africa economist at the World Bank, argues that in an age of "Development 3.0," we must see the poor "as monitors and analysts as well as recipients of government assistance." A recent, anonymous World Bank report noted that "creative thinking is needed to find alternatives to nation states, that can incorporate indigenous African forms and traditions of governance." The writer's recommendation? "Looser political arrangements, to enable greater autonomy in divided societies."

While the World Bank and other institutions haven't always followed through on the suggestion, these looser arrangements have the virtue of reverting to a less determined map of Africa. In the future, regional political bodies like the African Union may enforce common rules of the road for transport, trade, technology, and security without strangling innovation, or enabling the tribal, issue-free politics of the present. AU reform will require an overhaul of Diamini-Zuma's closed-off approach. But past diplomatic successes — the quashing of an attempted power grab in Togo, for example — offer a template for a lean, inclusive, pan-African framework, perhaps like the Schengen zone established in Europe.
Smaller bodies such as the Southern African Development Community, the Economic Community of West African States, and the East African Community can also give shape to norms, duties, and affiliations that have always been transnational. The principle of strength in numbers applies: more expansive borders allow for wider migration and capital flows. Regional stock exchanges may strengthen the commercial viability of emerging businesses. More African workers can determine their own path of best opportunity.

W. B. Yeats wrote in his poem “The Second Coming” that “the centre cannot hold.” Across Africa, it turns out that the center never was. And only when the dust from the half-century of inauthentic fall states clears will a dynamic, assured, post-national public shine through.

We are beginning to see a host of hybrid institutions that work in Africa to improve lives. The lean techniques and talents of the periphery are creeping closer to the center. Large institutions playing in Africa are beginning to use more kanju tools to reach the periphery. The most innovative development initiatives are harder to characterize as public or private.

Sometimes the new maps are literal. When Google passed over Kibera, the citizens struck back with the perfect balance of engagement and independence. Kepha Ngito, one of Kibera’s estimated 170,000 residents, reminded me that his neighborhood “hasn’t been recognized by the government or anybody else. They still think of it as a forest” — the English word for Kibera. Indeed, the official Survey of Kenya has neither the capacity nor the energy to trace the slum’s constantly changing infrastructure and economy. Even a special urban planning team from the University of Nairobi threw up their hands, classifying Kibera’s jangle of kiosks and tin homes as broadly “residential.”

Against this logic, committed residents like Ngito, armed with simple GPS devices and Open Street Map — a sort of geographic Wikipedia — created not only a detailed online map of Kibera, but a business and services directory for the residents. In addition to mapping Kibera’s built environment, digital atlases layer information on health, education, security, and land use. If you want to know which clinic offers free immunizations, how many trained teachers are at a given school, or which streetlights are operational, Map Kibera will tell you. It’s Yelp for development.

The map epitomizes the new narrative of twenty-first-century Africa. It defines a universe smaller than the state — as well as a larger, potentially global community, invited into the map on the residents’ terms. As such, it’s a useful model for anyone who cares about making it in Africa: students, religious NGOs, smallholder farmers, fledgling businesses, booming corporations, and small-scale social entrepreneurs trying to make a difference.

But in modern Africa, scale is everything. Even as ordinary people rewrite stale cartography, we need allies. Good ideas that languish in local clinics or tech hubs will never reach their generative potential. These ideas are borne along diverse and complementary vectors: family, technology, commerce, nature, and youth. Like the motorcycle taxis bringing word of change across Lagos, our maps help bridge the
two publics. They can accelerate traditional efforts to build wealth, strengthen formal institutions, and aid the least fortunate. These maps change the equation for what is possible. And in most cases, their only subsidy is their utility to ordinary people. Compared with "stuff we don't want," they are elementary ingredients of Africa's bright future.