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THE CAPITALS OF COMPROMISE AND THE PROBLEMS
OF NATION- AND STATE-BUILDING

Many historical polities were formed as unions of two or more constituent parts: ancient Egypt, the United Monarchy of Israel and Judah, Abbasid Caliphate, Rzeczpospolita (Polish Commonwealth), among other. The new capitals of these states facilitated the political unity and cohesiveness of these countries. This tradition of compromise in capital city making is evident in many modern federations (Washington D.C. in the US, Ottawa in Canada, Canberra in Australia, Brussels in Belgium, Bern is Switzerland), but it is also valuable and relevant for many ongoing nation-building projects worldwide. The article argues that this experience might be useful both for the recently emerged states plagued by ethnic and religious conflicts and civil wars and for the federated nations seeking to improve the quality of their federalism. Today, many of these states debate capital relocation solutions. The boons and potential drawbacks of the compromise strategies should be taken into account.

In time, the new capital cities often mark the historical transition: from monarchy to empire, from empire to nation and more often from the colony to independent nation. The new seats of government epitomize the new quality of the state and the people. In space, new capital cities help to establish a new bond between the constituent entities of the state. Successful new capitals also are the statements about the unity and serve as the very symbols of new nations. Like the new tablets, new capitals represent a covenant or a new contract between the subnational units which are incorporated into the union. If the capital is successful, it facilitates the integration of the constituent entities.

The new national capitals seek to reconcile and integrate two or more different constitutive units of the country: states, territories, ethnic, religious or linguistic groups, tribes and the like. In all such cases, new seats of government play an important constitutive role in the state- or nation-building process. They can promote or diminish the chances to achieve lasting peace and to reach a consensus between these units, thus overcoming their divisions and potential conflicts. Several examples both from remote and more recent history can illustrate such developments.

Historically many countries were formed as a result of the union of the two parts. Ancient Egypt emerged as a result of the merger between Lower and Upper Egypt. The name of the new capital Memphis sited between Buto in the Lower Egypt in the Nile delta and Hierakonpolis (Nekhen) in the Upper Egypt erected by the pharaoh Menes literally means "The Balance of the Lands." It is not an accident that the entire country (Eigiptos) has received its name in Greek from the name of the city that epitomized the union.

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The deities of these two cities, the snake, and the hawk, were merged in the crown of the Egyptian pharaohs serving as a symbol of the unity of the two lands and the keystone of Egypt's identity. Accordingly, the Red and White colors of the crown represented the Upper and Lower Egypt. Accordingly, the pharaoh was described as the "Lord of Two Lands."

The Israelite Kingdom (United Monarchy) was formed as a result of the merger between the kingdom of Israel in the north with its capital in Shomron and the kingdom of Judah in the south with its capital in Hebron. The new capital city of Jerusalem was a compromise between the two kingdoms.

In the 10th century, the capital of the Arab Caliphate was moved from Damascus to Baghdad. The Umayyad monarchy, essentially Arabic, was transformed into more cosmopolitan Abbasid empire, in which the Persian culture – both bureaucratic and artistic – played the critical role. *Shu'ubiyya*, the movement advocating the equality of all believers, epitomized the unity between the Persians and the Arabs as the elements of Persian culture laid the foundations of the new union. It is not an accident that the new capital Baghdad was built in close proximity to the Persian capital Ctesiphon.

In a similar vein, the capital was transferred from Krakow to Warsaw to mark a transition from the Piast dynasty of Polish monarchy that relied upon the Polish nobility, to the empire that represented the union between the kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). Warsaw was much closer to the new parts of the empire, and it was more convenient to control the territories of the empire from there. Notably, Warsaw was sited half way between the old capital Krakow and Hrodna in Luthuania, the *de facto* capital where Polish king Stephan Batory resided. Remarkably, Warsaw was located on the territory of Mazovia that had recently joined the kingdom of Poland and needed to be integrated.

Similarly, the capital of Spain was moved from Toledo to Madrid in the 16th century. Madrid was equidistant from Burgos, the capital of Castile, and Saragossa, the capital of Aragon, the two kingdoms the union of which formed the basis for the unified state. The new capital was founded between the northern kingdoms that served as the springboard of Reconquista and Andalucía in the south that was conquered from the Moors.

In more recent history this pattern of compromise capital has been reproduced multiple times by different emerging nations. In the US Washington D.C. was built on the border between the historic North and South. In Canada, Ottawa was chosen as a capital city because it was on the border between Francophone and Anglophone parts of the country. In New Zealand, the capital city was moved to Wellington as it was located on the border between the north and south islands. Finally, Canberra was selected for the role of the capital because it was located between Melbourne and Sidney and the most powerful provinces of the country that they represent. Likewise, in Belgium the com-

promise between the Francophone and Flemish parts of the country was reached through Brussels; in Switzerland, the compromise between Francophone and German-speaking parts of the country was found in Bern that is situated between them and close to their border. In 1948 the capital of the Yugoslav federation was placed in the New Belgrade between Old Belgrade, the border town of Ottoman Empire, and Zemun, the border town of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. New Belgrade was also close to the border between Serbia and Chroatia, the two largest constituent entities of the federation.

More complex model of the compromise was chosen in Netherlands and South Africa. In contrast to the nations with clearer dual constitution described above, these countries had more than two constituent entities. At the time of the arrangement, South Africa had four provinces, and Netherlands had 12 provinces. In both cases, the arrangement involved the distribution of capital city functions.

Netherlands chose to leave the nominal capital city title with Amsterdam, the capital of the Protestant North, while all real capital city functions were given to The Hague, the Catholic part of the country in the south. The smaller provinces of the country feared the dominance of North Holland, the largest and most powerful province of the United Provinces, where Amsterdam is situated, and decided that to balance the economic power of Protestant Holland, the political capital should be placed in the Catholic south.

In 1910 the Union of the four ex-colonies – the Transvaal, Orange Free State (previously, Boer republics), and Cape Province, and Natal (former British colonies) – was formed in South Africa. Each one of them aspired to make its own territory or its own capital the seat of government for the unified state. At the end, capital city functions were distributed between three provinces of the country. Executive power was housed in Pretoria, legislative in Cape Town and judicial in Bloemfontein. Natal, the fourth ex-colony, has received some financial compensation for political underrepresentation.

This type of arrangement – compromise capital – is not unique to Anglo-Saxon or other western democracies and can be brought to bear on the current experience of state- and nation-building in many African nations. The compromise strategy in nation-building described above can be especially valuable for the emerging nations that suffer from civil conflicts. It is also particularly relevant for federated nations consisting of several constituent parts, the nations that plan to build or improve the quality of their federations and federalist institutions. Such nations include Ethiopia, India, Nepal, Mexico and Bolivia. Many leaders of these nations are aware of these historical precedents; at least some of them suggest using their models for their own state- and nation-building efforts.

It should be noted, however, that compromise strategies do not always work as smoothly and do not constitute the universal recipe for success. The noble goals of peace-building and compromise making do not necessarily translate into the construction of successful and ethnically peaceful states. History is rife with precedents when the dreams of integration via the construction of the new capital failed or even exacerbated ethnic tensions.

In Nigeria, the decision to move the capital from predominantly Christian south to Abuja, in closer proximity to the Muslim north, was at least partially motivated by the need to achieve religious peace. It was also the official goal of the purpose-built capital project. However, the dominance of Muslim elites and symbols in Abuja was counterproductive and failed to deliver the expected outcome, and the bitter religious conflicts are still dividing the nation. In the Ivory Coast, the transfer of the capital from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro, closer to the Muslim North, also did not produce favorable results in terms of ethnic and religious relations. Although the Muslim-Christian peace was probably not the primary goal for Houphoët-Boigny, the first and the longest running authoritarian president of the Ivory Coast, he promoted Muslim leaders and attempted to stabilize the country. However, he saw Christianity as more progressive religion and made the oversized Christian Cathedral the central landmark building of the new capital. Not surprisingly, after his death, the old ethnic and religious rivalries sparkled to lead to a long civil war.[1]

In spite of these failures, however, the compromise strategy of capital city building should not be discounted. More successful implementations of this strategy can be found beyond the western liberal democracies. The case in point is Botswana where the new capital was built to bring peace and to consolidate the eight main tribal groups of the country. Notably, the location of the new capital is not central as Gaborone is located on the edge of the country. However, it traditionally served as a meeting point and congregation place for different tribal chiefs. In contrast to the old capital, Mafeking, which was the traditional base of *barolong*, Gaborone was in the sphere of influence of six out of eight main tribal groups of the nation. In 1858 the capital of Nicaragua was moved from Leon to Managua. It was a compromise between two major cities of the country, liberal Leon and conservative Grenada. Muammar Gaddafi sited the de facto capital of Libya in Sirte, his birthplace, centrally located relative to the three provinces of the country. Although he denounced the very concept of capital city and denied the federalist status of Libya, in essence he followed the old compromise building strategy and used the compromise capital concept to glue three provinces together. The choice of a capital city still plays a critical role in the construction of the national identity.

Today the historical precedents of compromise capitals can be useful for countries where the debates about new capital cities take place. Many of these countries currently debate the issue about most beneficial location for their

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[1] After independence, the new authorities have rearranged the power dynamics of the newly independent African countries, enhancing the significance of the oppressed under the colonial rule while undermining that of the dominant ethnic groups. Accordingly, the significance of the Christians in the Ivory Coast, of the Hutu in Rwanda and of the Muslims in Nigeria was enhanced, while the dominant positions of the Muslims, Tutsi, and Christians in these respective countries were undermined. Their capital cities were moved towards the more central position, closer to the border with the underprivileged ethnic group. It was Abuja in Nigeria, Kigali in Rwanda, and Yamoussoukro in Ivory Coast. Abuja is sited close to the border between the Muslim and the Christian parts of the country. Yamoussoukro, the new capital of the Ivory Coast, is also placed closer to the Muslim part of the country. Likewise, in Rwanda, the capital was removed from colonial and commercial Butare located on the edge of the country in the south, where the Tutsi minority was dominant. However, the compromise solution did not work out and the ethnic tensions still persist. In all cases, the formerly oppressed ethnic groups have oppressed or committed crimes against the ethnic or religious groups dominant under the colonial rule. In some cases, the conflict led to protracted and intense violence and civil wars. It is also noteworthy that the establishment of the seat of government of the US in Washington D.C. between the North and the South did not prevent the civil war between them in the 19th century.

new capitals. These countries should give most serious consideration to those cities vying for capital city status that have the highest potential to bring peace to the nation. The centrally located neutral places with thin regional identity are most suitable for this role. It might be especially helpful for such countries as Somalia, Libya, and Yemen where the devastating civil conflicts and the deep splits between different constituent units pose serious threats to the very survival of these states. This issue is also important for the emerging states like South Sudan and West Sahara, where new capital city debate is taking place.

It also might be helpful for those countries that seek to develop and enhance their existing federalist principles and to bring them to the next level. These countries include Bolivia, Nepal, India, and several African nations, notably, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia. The UK also belongs to this group of countries. Currently, they debate the issue of capital city shift in the context of introduction or improvement of the federalist system of government. The position of the capital city relative to the constituent units can help to strike a better balance in centre–state and state-to-state relations. The described patterns and precedents might offer lessons to countries that consider building new federations. For instance, the East African Federation is a proposed union of the six sovereign states in East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda). The proposed capital of this federation or confederation is Arusha, almost on the border between two most powerful members of the proposed federation, Tanzania and Kenya. In the process of nation-building, the centrality and betweenness play both practical and symbolic roles.

Clearly, the more central location of the capital by itself cannot solve the problem of ethnic division and conflicts. More should be done to defuse communal rivalries in order to move forward with the reconstruction of the nation. To weaken the ethnic fault lines, it is not enough to place the seat of government there. The emphasis in political debates needs to be shifted from the interests of different ethnic groups to the discussion of policies and common political concerns. Significant institutional changes and reforms should take place to enhance the national cohesion. However, it is clear that the capitals of compromise sited in symbolically significant places, reinforced with the inclusive symbols and iconography, can lay beneficial structural foundations for the reconstruction of the polity and for further nation-building that can facilitate these institutional changes.

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