In this chapter, we attempt to draw various comparative and theoretical conclusions from the empirical studies on state apparatuses and the public service professions in West Africa which are presented in this volume, but also from research which has been conducted in other contexts over the last ten years or so. To this end, we shall elaborate certain conceptualizations. Some of these concern the nature of the object itself: the Delivery state, the Local state, and Interface bureaucracies are all central to the topic of research in question. Other conceptualizations relate to the practices of state actors: they include the professional cultures and the practical norms on which these practices are largely based. Finally, to address issues of a more institutional and structural nature, we shall be looking at the bureaucratic mode of governance and at configurations of delivery, especially palliative delivery, in which this particular mode of governance is implicated alongside other modes of governance.

The Delivery State, Interface Bureaucracies and the Local State

The Delivery of Public or Collective Goods and Services

By 'delivery state', we mean the function of the delivery of public or collective goods and services as performed by the state. The expression 'public
or collective goods and services’ is deliberately wider than ‘public goods’
as used by economists and which corresponds to very specific criteria: it is
applied to goods that have a double property, i.e. they are ‘non-excludable’
and ‘non-rivalrous’. This definition is too deductive and restrictive, it paves
the way for normative uses, and we do not subscribe to it.

Instead, we opt for a wider and empirical use of the concept. For
us, public or collective goods and services are first and foremost goods
and services that are perceived by the vast majority of users as a social
necessity, and, either directly or indirectly, as coming under the state’s
duties towards these users. In other words, by general consensus, they
are linked to the public interest, and are therefore matters of public
concern, and thus public debate: for instance, access to drinking water,
education and health, the fight against crime, an equitable legal system
or an effective transport system are seen, in the African countries where
we have conducted our research, as ‘entitlements’ or aspirations that
are shared, whether they are articulated or not, by all users/citizens. It
is, therefore, a concept: a concept which refers to emic, tied to specific
historical and spatial contexts, and potentially including goods and ser-
vice at an international, national or local level. Such a definition allows
for the consideration of contingent factors that cause a good or service
to be counted sometimes as public and sometimes not. The concept
of a public good will therefore vary from place to place and over time.
In other words, what constitutes a public good is an object of politi-
cal struggle and public debate, depending on specific state trajectories
which are different in, say, France from those in the United States, and
different for, say, the 19th century to today (see Bierschenk and Olivier
de Sardan, introduction to this volume).

It must be emphasized, however, that the conditions under which these
goods are delivered are very largely local, even though they may involve
non-local, national or international actors (the state, private companies,
international organizations, development agencies etc.). It is, after all, at
the local level that people drink, are protected from thieves, go to school
and are medically cared for.

The delivery of some public or collective goods and services is a spe-
cific state function, which is performed regardless of the regime and
the kind of power it wields. The state can never be reduced to either
its purely repressive functions (which have already been roundly con-
demned by a whole body of literature inspired by Michel Foucault and
James Scott) or the type of regime in charge (democratic/dictatorial/
patrimonial/populist, etc.). The state is also a complex organizational