PART ONE

CITIZENSHIP, NATION AND AFRICA
INTRODUCTION:
CITIZENSHIP AND ITS CASUALTIES IN AFRICA

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At the close of the twentieth century much conventional wisdom about the trajectory of Africa was finally jettisoned by policy-makers and academics alike. African states appeared to be diverging ever more profoundly from the model of the nation-state, but without it being clear what was taking its place. To many, it seemed that the fiction surrounding statehood was finally being exposed for all to see, with much of the continent being left without functioning states or even ‘politics’ in the sense of negotiated solutions to routine decision-making. African states seemed destined to be filed in some ‘other’ category, while the rest of the world wrestled with the rather different problems of reconciling entrenched nation-statism with the pressures of globalisation.

In fact, things have not panned out as the ‘realists’ predicted. Although there has been a breakdown of order within many African countries, there have been just as many attempts to revive the state—as has been the case in formerly war-torn Mozambique or Sierra Leone. Moreover, nationalism certainly has not become a relic of the past. On the contrary, in a number of cases there has been noticeable increase in the salience of appeals to nationalism which cannot simply be regarded as opportunistic. Indeed, as Crawford Young reminds us we have seen that “states may entirely collapse without disappearing as nations from the social imaginary” (this volume: 241).

The discourses of nationalism and ethnicity have instead run in parallel within and across states, sometimes clashing and at other times cross-fertilising one another, the reason being that they occupy a great deal of common ground. The weakening of central authority might have been expected to empower those seeking to openly deploy the language of ethnicity, but when so much has been up for grabs it has been possible for actors at the margins to seek to remould nationalism in a way which re-defines who belongs and who does not, a particular

1 The authors extend their thanks to all of those who commented on this chapter, in particular to Blair Rutherford and Sam Hickey.