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Joanne Tomkinson

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Joanne Tomkinson ⓘD

Department of Politics and International Studies, SOAS University of London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This article explores Africa's shifting international relations through two important international gateways to the continent: Kotoka International Airport in Accra and Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa. Case studies drawing on archival, fieldwork and secondary data examine the history and development of both airports, and find these gates represent a fruitful but neglected vantage point for understanding Africa's shifting connections to the wider world. Theoretically, whilst the article affirms the value of using such critical nodal points – or 'gates' – to understand the international dimensions of African politics, it also highlights the limits of extant concepts such as 'gatekeeping' and the typology of the 'gatekeeper state'. The article instead advances an alternative approach which it calls 'gatemaking' to enhance our understanding of Africa's international relations by looking at how gates such as airports help to make (and remake) Africa's place in the world (rather than looking only at how gates shape domestic state forms, as in the gatekeeper mould). Evident to different degrees in both airports, this concept foregrounds Africa as a place that both originates and shapes key dimensions of the international, contributing to emerging debates in critical approaches to international relations.

Introduction

Discourse on Africa's international relations commonly emphasises power imbalances and the determining role of outside actors in shaping the continent's international position. The 'gate' is one of the most influential metaphors for understanding the impact of the continent's international relations on its domestic state forms. Originating with Frederick Cooper's (2001, 2002) notion of the 'gatekeeper state', nodal points connecting domestic and international actors, resources and processes are placed at the centre of the study of Africa's international relations – which are said to shape state forms on the continent (Dorman 2018). However, gates such as airports remain underrepresented in such studies,[1] despite their significance as architectural and infrastructural mediations between national territories and the outside

world. Indeed, the continent's airports provide a fruitful vantage point for understanding shifting modalities of Africa's international integration, since, whilst colonialism often brought aviation to Africa, national carriers and flagship airport infrastructures underpinned post-colonial nation-building projects. More recently, the continent has been labelled 'the "last frontier" of world commercial aviation' (Pirie 2014).

In taking airports seriously to examine Africa's international relations, this article affirms the value of the gate as an important analytical starting point, yet also finds the prism of gatekeeping a limited and unidirectional tool. In looking only at how international forces shape African states, the gatekeeper paradigm overlooks how African states seek to utilise their gates to make an imprint upon the international. Instead an alternative analytical prism – called 'gatemaking' – is advanced. This focusses on how the states that control African airports use these nodal points to make (and remake) Africa's place in the world (instead of looking at how gates shape domestic state forms, as in the gatekeeper mould). This concept thus seeks to contribute to the study of processes of global significance that are initiated within Africa, responding to recent calls to reconceptualise Africa's international relations as a field of origination as well as reaction (Wai 2018).

To do so, the article examines the international dimensions of two aerial gateways to Africa, located on opposite sides of the continent: Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana, and Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (henceforth Kotoka and Bole). Whilst aviation is much studied in transport geography, it is considerably less so in international politics (Kobierecki 2021), despite substantial resonance with key themes in international relations and global political economy. This includes the role played by national flag-carriers in imperialist projects (Sampson 1984), and as symbols of national identity in the nation-building efforts of newly-independent states (Raguraman 1997; Castellitti 2019). Aviation also speaks to the myriad tensions of globalisation: enabling expanded global connectivity (Cwerner, Kesselring, and Urry 2009, Kranakis 2010) at the same time as it constrains mobility through practices of securitisation and bordering (Adey 2009). Airports, where studied in international relations, have tended to be assessed in terms of how they mediate global aviation processes (Niewiadomski 2017) and thus facilitate the insertion of territories into the international airline industry (Bowen 2000). Yet whilst the liberalisation of the sector appears to narrow the scope for action by nation states, such processes may in fact enhance, rather than corrode, state sovereignty, as exercised through airports (Chalfin 2008). Airports are thus fertile ground for examining international relations on the continent (as elsewhere).

The state-owned international airports in both Ethiopia and Ghana have a long history of enmeshment in state-led aviation projects tied to the development of national airlines. Both airports were 'home' to pioneering African flag-carriers – Ethiopian Airlines (formed in 1945 by Ethiopia's last emperor Haile Selassie I) and Ghana Airways (in 1958 by Ghana's first President after independence, Kwame Nkrumah), respectively – and connected to both pan-Africanist political projects and more domestically orientated state-building efforts. More recently the two airports have undergone major expansions, financed by emerging powers (Turkey in the case of Kotoka, and China in the case of Bole), reflecting ambitions of both states to become major African aviation hubs. Thus the interplay between three sets of domestic actors – states, airports and national carrier airlines – is a particularly important feature of the evolution of these aerial gateways.

These airports also reflect new patterns of intra-African competition and cooperation in the field of aviation, signalling the significance of these gates to contemporary efforts by

African states to rewrite their insertion into global aviation flows. Whilst Bole airport continues to serve as the infrastructural underpinning of Ethiopian Airlines (now the continent's largest airline) (AFRAA 2021), Kotoka's fortunes have been decoupled from the national airline since its demise in 2005. Plans to create a major West African hub are a more recent phenomenon.[2] Furthermore, the two countries have also recently pivoted from tentative cooperation to competition in the field of aviation, following the government of Ghana's decision to terminate a partnership with Ethiopian Airlines (FlightGlobal 2018).

To examine these dynamics, the article has four sections. The first outlines the role traditionally played by gates in understanding African politics, the limitations of extant approaches, and the alternative proposed. The second outlines how and why airports are a critical gate for understanding Africa's international relations. The third and fourth sections provide case studies of Kotoka and Bole airports. The article then concludes.

Gates and Africa's international relations

Within international relations, Africa is the centre of a debate about whether the continent is peripheral to, or constitutive of, capitalist modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). African studies, meanwhile, foregrounds concepts such as extraversion, agency and resistance in the continent's international relations (Cheeseman, Death, and Whitfield 2017) which centre the ways global actors, resources and flows shape and constrain state forms on the continent. The latter exist on a spectrum, from those emphasising steep challenges (Taylor and Williams 2006; Taylor 2016) to those foregrounding agency, strategic choices and the ways African actors 'navigate' and 'adapt' to the context beyond their borders (Brown and Harman 2014, 1). Yet, as Zubairu Wai notes, all such studies commence from a place of reaction, denying Africa the capacity to inscribe or originate world-historical processes (Wai 2018). In this they overlook the continent's capacity to commence and define (rather than just respond to) globally significant developments. Overcoming these limitations requires a more co-constitutive understanding of the connections between the international and Africa (Wai 2018).

The gatekeeper state (Cooper 2002) is one of the more influential approaches for understanding Africa's place in the world. It asserts that African states are excessively focussed on preserving control over key 'gates' that join a nation to the global polity and economy, at the expense of, and in ways that distort, the development of domestic politics and economics. The gates referenced include the physical and the fiscal, encompassing borders and their associated infrastructures, as well as customs taxes and international aid and loans. Extracting resources from these gates is thought, for instance, to occur at the expense of economy building, resulting in a lack of diversification and a high degree of dependence on export earnings from a small range of products (Hillbom 2012). It is also said to be associated with the diversion of the relatively scarce resources which come through these gates towards the economic and political agendas of those in power (and efforts designed to keep them there) (Beresford 2015). As a result, the political stakes surrounding the control of such gates are thought to be very high, contributing to political instability and civil conflict (Cheeseman, Bertrand, and Husaini 2019).

A key advantage of the concept is its avoidance of culturalist or personalised interpretations of contemporary African problems (Dorman 2018) since it assumes these to have historical roots in the patterns of state formation inherited from the colonial experience. Colonial regimes, Cooper argues, based their power around a narrow penetration of transport and

communication, but strong control over the junctures between the country and the world, such as ports. At independence, whilst deepening the domestic tax base beyond export and import duties and making the nation state a symbol of loyalty were complex and challenging endeavours, it was comparatively easier for African states to continue to base political control around extraction from such interfaces with the outside world. This gives the gatekeeper state lens its strongly spatial character.[3] However, it also risks depicting African states as a *sui generis* category of dysfunctional states within global affairs (Brown 2018). To avoid this, Cooper recently proposed a focus on 'gatekeeping practices' rather than 'gatekeeper states' (Cooper 2018). These practices, he suggests, can be found in all states where power 'derives from controlling crucial nodes in networks of unequals' (Cooper 2018, 456) – of which Africa is simply thought to be a particularly extreme example. As a result, gatekeeping practices are depicted as 'strategic responses to a situation of political boundedness of African states and asymmetrical relations with the outside world' (Cooper 2018, 455). This allows the gatekeeper concept to be applied beyond countries with the particular colonial histories the paradigm initially described (such as Ethiopia) and it is offered as a tool to understand 'Africa's place in a highly unequal world' (Cooper 2018, 455).

However, gatekeeping remains a one-sided tool, looking only at how global actors and flows impact African states, and not the impacts of these states (and gates) on the international itself. Furthermore, the focus on African states' 'strategic responses' to 'asymmetrical relations' presupposes, rather than interrogates, the nature of Africa's international relations. Drawing on Wai (2018), we can see it depicts Africa as a space of reaction, not origination. This gives the concept a deeply embedded depiction of stasis within it, foregrounding processes that *keep* African states in unequal relations, with dynamism only present in struggles for control over gates.

This article looks at African gates from a different angle – emphasising not gatekeeping but gatemaking. Gates are instead examined as sites through which African states seek to forge and reshape their place in the international (rather than simply being shaped, constrained or distorted by their international position, as in the gatekeeper mould). The proactive efforts of states to leverage these gates to forge new patterns of global and national politics are thus the focus through a gatemaking lens. In this the article answers Wai's (2018) invitation to develop more co-constitutive readings of the continent's international affairs.

Contextualising Africa's aerial gateways

Many of Africa's first airports were airstrips introduced to facilitate the movement of colonial military and civilian air traffic, seeing the aeroplane dubbed an 'agent of empire' in Africa (McCormack 1976, 89). Route development was biased towards linking colonies with imperial centres, and journeys between African countries often involved travel via European countries. As Nkrumah noted, a major legacy of colonialism in Africa was routes that 'look[ed] outward and not inward' and 'serve[d] travellers from Europe rather than Africans wishing to go from one part of this continent to another' (Nkrumah 1963, 113). The earliest aviation initiatives on the continent were thus deeply marked by colonial imperatives, and the absence of intra-African links symbolized Africa's dependence on foreign actors for aerial connections.

However, after independence Africa's new states quickly began to utilise aviation to reshape their territorial connections with the wider world. New national airlines were created

as 'symbols of national, technical achievement and even unity' (Hilling 1996, 133), with route and airport development tracing political, rather than strictly commercial, objectives. Motives included the desire to connect capital cities to major centres internally, as well as outward towards neighbours, with a discernible pan-African politics. In 1961, for instance, 10 franco-phone West and Central African nations signed an agreement, the Yaoundé Treaty, to establish a jointly owned airline, Air Afrique, which sought to establish itself as a symbol of independent post-colonial Africa both regionally and internationally (Amankwah-Amoah and Debrah 2014). In the early 1960s, Nkrumah sought to use Ghana Airways to further his pan-African agenda and deepen bonds between non-aligned countries (Hilling 1996). The spike in traffic resulting from such initiatives prompted a marked expansion of African aero-dromes (ICAO 1965, 33) which meant Africa's airport infrastructure evolved from supporting imperial consolidation to underpinning pioneering post-colonial African aviation initiatives. These efforts were extremely challenging, requiring large sums of capital and demanding highly trained technical personnel (ICAO 1965). Yet despite facing international mockery and disparagement, the fruits of this concerted state-led push were remarked upon as follows in 1964 by *The Economist*: '[a] great deal of fun has been made out of the recent proliferation of African national airlines; much of it is unfair because air transport is growing faster in this region than in any other part of the world, bar Europe' (Weeks 1965, 16).

If the post-independence period was one of proactive airline and airport building, since the global liberalisation of the airline industry in the 1970s, the continent's aviation has experienced notable turbulence. It was widely assumed in the 1990s that such liberalisation would marginalise airlines from the developing world due to increased competition from large players from major economies (Sochor 1991, Nayar 1995). These developments have certainly had negative impacts on African aviation, with many post-independence African carriers either being liquidated or struggling to be profitable (Gwilliam 2011). Meanwhile, the continent's airports have fallen considerably behind global standards (Button, Martini, and Scotti 2018b), accounting for just 2% of world passenger traffic in 2013 (ICAO 2014, 12). However, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, which disrupted aviation globally, African aviation growth was projected to be amongst the fastest in the world until the 2030s (Button, Martini, and Scotti 2018b). Considerable commercial interest in African aviation from the so-called Gulf 'aero-states', such as Emirates, Qatar and Etihad, resulted from this rapid growth (Pirie 2018). Notably, however, a raft of new initiatives in the gatemaking mould on the part of African states have also emerged, including an airport boom (Grey 2018) and continent-wide efforts to revive national flag carriers (Born 2019).[4] The continent's airports thus remain highly significant sites for the study of African efforts to rewrite and reposition the continent's place in the world, in the face of predictions of near inexorable marginalisation.

The rest of the article examines the historical foundations and contemporary developments of two African international airports, Kotoka and Bole, through the lens of gatemaking. The article draws on both primary and secondary data. Primary sources include semi--structured interviews undertaken between August 2019 and February 2020 with 29 representatives of public and private bodies involved in the expansion and operation of the two airports. This included nine current and former Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL) and Ethiopian Airports Enterprise (EAE) officials; architects and engineers employed on airport expansion projects; representatives of private sector bodies utilising the airport sites, such as airlines, real estate associations and export promotion bodies; and government officials in ministries of planning, finance and development.[5] Such primary sources were

particularly significant to contextualising the ambitions, drivers, challenges and trade-offs associated with airport development in each location. Secondary sources included official reports, grey literature and historical and contemporary media reports, which helped to map the discursive terrain surrounding the expansion of Bole and Kotoka. The case studies are offered as distinct accounts of gatemaking tendencies located in different parts of the continent and under divergent conditions, and thus demonstrations of the phenomenon in two very different aerial gateways. As a result, they are not presented as the basis for comparative analysis.

Kotoka International Airport

A new airport terminal, now known as Kotoka (originally known as Accra International Airport), was built in 1958, the year after Ghana achieved independence from Britain. It was located on the site of a former British air force base (GACL 2021). The airbase had been partially designed by British architect Maxwell Fry (a notable tropical modernist); similarly, the new terminal was constructed by Norman and Dawbarn, another prominent British firm (WABA 1961). However, under Nkrumah such expertise was instrumentalised to serve a different agenda than during colonialism. Under British rule, Ghana's links to the imperial heartland were expanded when the Colonial Office formed the West Africa Airways Corporation (WACC) in 1946 (Ogbeidi 2006). After Ghana's independence in 1957, Nkrumah terminated Ghana's participation in the colonial airway and formed a new national airline, Ghana Airways. Although initially established in partnership with the British Overseas Airways Corporation (WAAC's parent company), which held a 40% share, by the early 1960s Nkrumah made the airline fully state-owned, a move motivated by his desire for 'the minimum of foreign influence in Ghana's affairs, and [by] his regard for the nation's airline as a symbol of Ghana's national adulthood'.[6] This was matched with an effort towards the 'Ghanaisation' of the airline in terms of personnel and expertise (Amankwah-Amoah 2015). Nkrumah noted shortly afterwards that Ghana was widely disparaged for daring to establish its own airline, noting: 'it was maintained that there were enough international airlines to serve our needs', adding 'the contention that we young nations on other continents should refrain from entering this vital field of communications smacks to us of the old imperialist attitude' (Nkrumah 1963, 113). These activities were in fact pivotal to establishing new, politically motivated, routes connecting Accra to key allies, including Nairobi, Cairo, Casablanca, Khartoum and Addis Ababa (Aluko 1975). The airport in Accra was thus central to a gatemaking project with a distinct pan-Africanist agenda, focussed on disrupting the status quo inherited from the colonial period and going against the grain of international opinion.

Over time the airport and the airline's fortunes notably decoupled, although the airport remains a highly politically and economically significant structure in Ghana. From the early 1980s onward Ghana embraced a series of market reforms (Aryeetey, Harrigan, and Nissanke 2000), which, in the field of aviation, included the adoption of a liberalised skies policy in 1998 (Boachie 2003). By the mid-2000s the national airline was liquidated after a period of significant decline (Amankwah-Amoah 2015). The airport, however, remains fully state-owned and is the most important of the airports manged by the state-owned Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL). For instance, in 2011, 89% of international visitors to Ghana came through Kotoka (Government of the Republic of Ghana 2012). According to the 2014 National Airport System Plan, the significance of the airport is such that 'being the Gateway to Ghana and currently the

only international airport, the whole system is based on the success of this airport' (Government of the Republic of Ghana 2014, v). It is also a site of considerable domestic political significance, having been a key target for coup makers in the post-Nkrumah period (Chalfin 2008).

Throughout this tumult, successive administrations have sought to use Kotoka to try and reposition Ghana within African and global aviation flows. This is exemplified by the most recent airport expansion, which started in March 2016 when President John Mahama's National Democratic Congress (NDC) government began to build a new international terminal building, known as Terminal 3. Completed in 2018, the new terminal was formally inaugurated by NDC's successors, President Nana Akufo-Addo's New Patriotic Party (NPP) government. This was the first major new building at Kotoka since the 1950s and reflected several overlapping elite aspirations, shared by both the NDC and NPP administrations. This includes a strongly competitive dynamic with Ghana's West African neighbours, designed to give the country an edge by building facilities that are 'the equal of any airport in the world, JFK, Heathrow or Schipol included' (Craig 2018). Of the new terminal, which gives Ghana the capacity to handle five million more passengers per year, the President of the African Development Bank (AfDB) (which provided part of the US$275 million borrowed to construct the airport), Akinwumi Adesina, noted '[i]ts large capacity is a confident statement of intent' (quoted in Oxford Business Group 2018).

In the motivations, tensions and trade-offs associated with this expansion, considerable gatemaking is evidenced. The expansion was undertaken to allow Ghana to accommodate the country's recent growth in air traffic, which had caused overcrowding in existing terminal buildings. In 2011 a total of 1.8 million passengers (GACL 2015) travelled through Kotoka, and the number rose to 2.4 million by 2014 (AFRAA 2016). Debates within the airport company centred on whether to relocate the airport outside of Accra altogether, as, according to one former airport official, many senior decision makers felt 'the city swamped the airport'.[7] However, as with many critical decisions in Kotoka's recent development, the ultimate decision to expand rather than relocate was shaped by Ghana's highly competitive two-party electoral system. According to one former official, the most important imperative was to construct at speed since 'we were working within a political term … [and] had just three years to make it happen'.[8] A plan to build the new terminal building within just 17 months (leaving four months for design) was drawn up. One employee noted that: '[t]he new terminal was a political project … You don't do this sort of project worth $250 million without political support', adding that 'the election deadline meant [they] wanted to say "we did this", and wanted to show off'.[9] In design terms these aspirations rendered local design influences of limited concern, since, according to the same official:

> The whole idea was to provide a world-class terminal to the standards of anywhere in the world … [The Management Board had] a vision to put up a terminal befitting the statements being made about the airport, about a hub in West Africa, and a gateway in West Africa.[10]

Such speed meant a preference for commercial rather than concessional financing, with AfDB loans only secured after the project was underway. Design and construction were also packaged together to secure a rapid build. Of the three bids submitted – all from international firms (two from China, one from Turkey) – the Turkish firm, MAPA Construction (part of the MNG Holding Group), ultimately won the contract.[11] Whilst certainly indicative of the interest of emerging powers in African infrastructure projects (CCE 2018), the need for speed,

thanks to the dynamics of Ghana's highly competitive political system, was the decisive factor driving key design and financing decisions – rather than the agendas of emerging economies and their construction firms.

The specificities of the airport's development have also been driven by the specific challenges Ghana faces in trying to position itself as a West African aviation hub, particularly competition from Nigeria's Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos. According to one airport official, competition with Nigeria meant Ghana placed greater emphasis on the quality of Kotoka's facilities, to distinguish the airport within the region:

> They [Nigerians] always have numbers, irrespective of the chaos. We don't have that luxury. What they send to Mecca in a week is what we send per year. Virgin went to Nigeria because of the numbers. Our selling point should be our top-class facilities.[12]

In Accra, just three peak periods – early- and mid-morning, and evening – account for most traffic, causing the terminal to feel crowded during these times, despite being significantly under-capacity overall. One airport worker noted wryly that during the day the runway was so quiet 'you could play football on it'.[13] The reason, according to another airport official, was the schedules of the major international airlines (or 'big boys'): '[t]he big boys want to feed into their [existing] schedules. So we have these dead times because of our location, and so we have to feed into other time frames'.[14]

The dynamics of airport usage are thus as critical to gatemaking as the facilities themselves. Since completion it has become evident that new airport facilities alone are insufficient to challenge Ghana's place in global aviation flows. As a result, new efforts to rewrite this position have emerged. In 2018 the Ministry of Aviation announced plans to form a new national flag carrier (Government of the Republic of Ghana 2018), jointly owned by the government of Ghana and an established airline – a much more interventionist stance than seen in the country's recent aviation history. Former Aviation Minister Joseph Kofi Adda encapsulated Ghana's ambitions for the new airline as follows:

> The uptake in these projects [the national carrier] is in line with government's vision towards repositioning Ghana as a major aviation hub in Africa. The establishment of a home-based carrier to ensure that Ghana remains on the global aviation map … By the year 2022 … anyone flying from anywhere in Africa to everywhere in Africa, should be able to do so within Africa in less than 24 hours, without leaving the African airspace. (Born 2019)

As of 2020, Accra was the 12th best connected airport in Africa, and Ghana the 7th best connected country, yet intra-continental connectivity overall still lags considerably behind that in other parts of the world (AFRAA 2021). Taking Nkrumah's comments about the political importance of enhanced continental connectivity seriously, therefore, efforts by Ghana to overcome patterns of route development determined by big global airlines and forge a new map of intra-African connections have clear significance for Africa as a whole, particularly West Africa, where aviation is historically less developed than in southern and eastern Africa (Gwilliam 2011).

Ghana's proposed new airline speaks not only to the Ghanaian state's revived aviation ambitions, however, but also to the emergence of new forms of intra-African aviation cooperation and competition. Whilst the airline first selected as the government's partner was Ethiopian Airlines (in 2018), by 2019 the government announced that it had signed an agreement with a new partner, EgyptAir (Petrauskaite 2019). Ethiopian and EgyptAir are the two

largest African airlines by passenger numbers (AFRAA 2021), and, despite being united by an interest in capitalising on growth in continental air traffic and competing with Gulf carriers, African aviation players have conflicting agendas.[15] In a further twist, in 2022 it was reported that both EgyptAir and Ethiopian had been ruled out by the Ghanaian government – and a national partner, Ashanti Airlines, was likely to be selected instead (Jonga 2022). Regardless of the partner, however, the new terminal is evidently a fundamental enabler of Ghana's enduring hub project. According to a foreign aviation sector professional based in Ghana, '… no one comes just for the terminal … but without it, a hub would not be possible'.[16]

These plans connect to a final element of gatemaking in Ghanaian aviation: the expansion of domestic airports and connectivity. Interviewees suggested that a new airline would fly domestically to make better use of the now much underutilised domestic Terminal 2 building, and then later connect on to international flights through Terminal 3.[17] This is aligned with NPP's plans to expand Ghana's existing domestic airports (Government of the Republic of Ghana 2020). Once again there are continuities with the previous NDP government, which planned to expand domestic airports in recognition of the fact that, in the words of one former official, 'now you have the [new] airport, what are you going to do with it? You have to feed it'.[18] Under the NPP, these regional airport expansion plans were retained but rebranded and incorporated into new policy initiatives such as 'One District, One Factory', which purportedly seeks to enhance the processing of Ghana's agricultural produce and to 'move from this more raw-material-based economy'.[19] The way in which both the Kotoka expansion and the regional airport expansion project have been continued across administrations – quite notable in a context where incoming governments often wish to discontinue projects commenced by their rivals – thus evidences the high stakes that surround aviation in Ghana and the strong strain of aerial gatemaking this has produced.

In sum, the domestic dynamics of Ghana's political system have produced a modern new aerial gateway to West Africa, which exceeds its rival Lagos in terms of its cutting-edge facilities – if not yet in traffic. Indeed, persistent challenges in terms of patterns of connectivity and traffic flows through the airport have spurred a shift towards a much more interventionist stance than has been seen in Ghanaian aviation since the liberalisation of the 1990s, with plans to form a new, partly state-owned, national airline, the future trajectory of which will be significant for the region as a whole. The new airport building has thus propelled Ghana towards a new role in emerging modalities of intra-African aviation competition and cooperation, through which we can see the Ghanaian state seeking to reposition the country within the international arena, and thus reframe the contours of the international itself.

Bole International Airport

From the mid-1930s to the early 1940s, Ethiopian airspace was controlled by foreign powers – first Italy (during the fascist occupation) (Caprotti 2011) and then Britain[20] (under the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement) (Spencer 2006). Having deployed assertive diplomacy to regain control over its air space in the mid-1940s, the Ethiopian government then attempted to improve the country's aerial connectivity. Initially it tried to attract private capital to establish an airline in Ethiopia with both global and domestic reach, and, when this failed, invited existing international airlines to operate within Ethiopia (Haregot 2013). In 1945 representatives from the imperial government visited the US State Department for help getting the American Trans World Airlines (TWA) to add Ethiopia to its existing international route network (it had

recently added a stop in Cairo, Egypt) (Tekalign Gedamu 2011). If realised, this proposal would have made a foreign airline responsible for determining Ethiopia's patterns of global connectivity, rendering Ethiopia dependent on a US airline for its air connections. Crucially, however, TWA deemed Ethiopia too obscure a destination to profitably add to its network.[21] Critically, this limited international interest in Ethiopia propelled the imperial government to create a wholly state-owned national airline to counteract the country's position of relative global marginality. In the words of one former imperial bureaucrat: '[a]s it would not be commercially viable to extend TWA's route to Addis Ababa, the idea of establishing a national carrier managed by TWA seemed a better alternative' (Tekalign Gedamu 2011, 135). A wholly government-owned new national airline, Ethiopian Airlines (EAL), was thus formed in 1945 under the management of TWA, through which the imperial administration turned a situation of global disadvantage into decisive national action.

At first EAL repurposed a former military airstrip in the Lideta area of Addis Ababa as its main hub (Levin 2016) for important domestic and international connections.[22] Domestically, some airfields were built expressly to support the development of tourism, such as Debra-Marcus,[23] and others to speed exports of crops, such as coffee (Gore)[24] or chat to Djibouti (Dire Dawa).[25] Those in the Ogaden, meanwhile, had more military objectives, aimed at helping Ethiopia re-establish territorial control from British forces (Spencer 2006, 165). The airline's rapid growth meant that by 1954 EAL was carrying out 86 flights a week to 23 points within and beyond Ethiopia, including to Asmara, Port Sudan, Djibouti, Nairobi, Cairo, Khartoum, Aden and Athens.[26] This alone was a considerable feat, since TWA described these as 'some of the world's trickiest airfields'.[27] This went hand in hand with a proactive 'Ethiopianisation' agenda which moved Ethiopian personnel through the ranks of the airline (Oqubay and Tesfachew 2019).

In 1962, reflecting the airline's rapid expansion, a new airport in the Bole area of the capital was constructed. This cutting-edge airport both reflected extant patterns of Ethiopian aerial gatemaking and set the stage for Addis to emerge as a major African aviation hub. According to a former official who worked for the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority (ECAA) during the imperial period: 'They [EAL] bought the first jet aircraft but couldn't land it here [in Ethiopia], so couldn't use them until the new airport was built'.[28] The new runway at Bole thus enabled Ethiopia to enter the 'jet age' – the first African carrier to do so (Oqubay and Tesfachew 2019). Around this time, new pioneering trans-African routes were also launched. In 1960, Ethiopia signed bilateral air agreements with Ghana, Guinea and Liberia, allowing it to provide the first direct air connections between East and West Africa at the equator.[29] The airline also introduced the first jet-powered, high speed connections across the continent in 1965, linking Addis to Lagos and Accra via its new fleet (Weeks 1965). These developments also reflected some important continent-wide shifts, such as the decision of the Conference of Independent African States to support the development of air services between Africa's new nations.[30] In addition, the founding of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963, headquartered in Addis Ababa, enhanced the regional and thus global significance of Ethiopia's connective infrastructure. Bole's emergence as a major African aviation hub at this time thus reflects not just Ethiopian gatemaking but also broader African efforts to strengthen the continent's international position. Indeed, occurring at a moment characterised by a concerted push towards African independence and the rising radical political spirit of pan-Africanism, these new routes from Addis have been

described as cutting 'the umbilical cord that had tied colony and ex-colony to the metropolis' (Zewde 2001, 187).

The next major progression in Ethiopian airport gatemaking took place in the mid-1990s when the new Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime, which had taken power in 1991, embarked on a major airport renewal project. This included the construction of a brand new international terminal (Terminal 2) at Bole airport. According to one of those intimately involved in its design:

> The discussion at the time was that we don't have a port. This is our port. And this is our main point of contact with the world when foreigners come. It was the first point of entry … We wanted to impress our visitors.[31]

Yet Ethiopia had recently emerged from a protracted civil war, and the new regime faced both profound economic and social needs and a marked scarcity of resources. The new government thus faced much opposition to its airport expansion plans, both domestically and internationally. The airport had handled 1.2 million passengers in 1995 (ECAA 1997, 38), and the new terminal expanded the capacity of the airport to six million passengers per year (EAL 2016). According to one former senior official of Ethiopian Airports Enterprise (EAE), the state-owned enterprise that managed the country's airports between 2003 and 2017: 'people were asking why is Ethiopia investing in this? They were calling it just a "white elephant". The consultants were advising us to scale it down'.[32] According to another former airport company official, '[i]n the 1990s many people were sceptical of us having such a big airport at that time'.[33]

Securing financing for the project was extremely challenging. Running to a total cost of $100 million, one former senior official who worked for on the project noted that 'no bank would lend to us as Ethiopia was not considered creditworthy.[34] The airport renovation thus had to be divided into three 'work packages', each with a separate funder: one for the runway (work package one, which was given to a Korean and Japanese joint venture); one for the terminal (work package two, which was given to a Kuwaiti construction firm due to the rules of Kuwaiti financing); and another for the control tower (work package three, which was given to Siemens).[35] The government acted as a guarantor for the loans, but responsibility for future repayment was given to EAE, the new airport management enterprise created after the expansion.[36] According to a senior project manager, this arrangement posed many difficulties: 'we were building an airport but had three consultants, three contractors and three financiers. They have to work together to complement each other … We had to do double the work'.[37] For a country with limited recent experience of mega infrastructure projects (in contrast to the present day), the scale of the undertaking demonstrates a concerted state-led effort to give Ethiopia an entirely new aerial gateway.

Once completed, this highly modern new gateway quickly defied the pessimism of its doubters. Within eight years the airport was dealing with 7.3 million passengers a year, when it was projected to cater to six million within 20 years.[38] A new expansion plan, inaugurated in 2019, was put together, which has given Bole the capacity to serve 22 million passengers a year. With some 80% of the airport's capacity provided by Ethiopian Airlines (Button et al. 2018), the airport's growth has been powered by that of the airline. Between 2010 and 2018, for instance, the number of passengers flying with Ethiopian Airlines increased four-fold, from three million to 12 million (Oqubay and Tesfachew 2019). In the words of one senior aviation expert, the airline's success is also inseparable from the investment and gamble

taken by the government to expand the airport system in the 1990s: '[t]he reason EAL has become successful is because it has the necessary infrastructure to be flexible and to operate anywhere'. The latest $400 million Chinese-financed and constructed expansion project reflects these ambitions, the objective of which, according to one senior former EAE official interviewed, was to create 'the leading airport in Africa. We started with this kind of vision. The service would be global standard and the designer was trying to bring all the modern facilities to Ethiopia – not a local structure – but spacious and glassy'.[39]

The latest expansion is central to Ethiopia's new continental role as an aviation power-house – it surpassed Dubai in 2018 to become the single largest transfer point for long-haul travel to Africa (Mohammed 2018). As a result, Addis Ababa is now a major conduit for traffic between Africa and China, accounting for 25% of the direct and one-stop traffic between the two in 2014 (Pirie 2018). Notably, around three-quarters of traffic at Bole airport is also intra-African traffic (InterVISTAS 2014). In this, the expanded and modernised airport has emerged as a lynchpin of the airline's growth strategy which centres around a 'hub' model in which an airport (or airports) form the meeting point for a network of outward connections (Meichsner, O'Connell, and Warnock-Smith 2018). Signalling the airport's role as a connective node in Africa's international integration, some 70% of pas-sengers at Bole are transit passengers.[40] The airport is thus a central pillar of the airline's success, as revealed by the following comment from Tewolde GebreMariam, former Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Ethiopian Airlines:

> I am very pleased to witness the realization of a brand-new terminal at our Hub. While Addis Ababa Bole International Airport has overtaken Dubai to become the largest gateway to Africa last year, the new terminal will play a key role in cementing that position. (AJT 2020)

Notably, from 2017, Ethiopian Airlines took over ownership and management of all the country's airports, including Bole, representing the intensification of the distinctive fusion of the airport and airline in Ethiopia. According to one former senior official, '… most airlines elsewhere in the world are dictated by the airports. In our case it is the opposite'.[41]

With Bole airport at its centre, the airline has also adopted a broader Africa-focussed expansion strategy, obtaining equity shares in, or signing management contracts to run, a range of new and existing African airlines, including ASKY (based in Togo), Air Malawi, Guinea Airlines, Chad Airlines, Zambia Airways, CEIBA Intercontinental (in Equatorial Guinea), and Ethiopian-Mozambique Airlines (Oqubay and Tesfachew 2019). It is on the back of such strategies that the airline has been described as 'one of Africa's most successful companies, a symbol of Ethiopia's emergence as a regional power' (Flick and Helper 2019). This Africa-focussed strategy was also the driver of EAL's interest in the aborted partnership with Ghana, indicating the continental rivalries and tensions emerging as African airport gatemaking takes on new, twenty-first century, dimensions.

In summary, therefore, from the struggles to regain Ethiopian control over Ethiopian air space in the 1930s and 1940s, to the construction of a jet-age airport pioneering new con-tinental connections in the 1960s, through to its new position as a major gateway to Africa, Bole airport has been a central pillar of successive state-led efforts to rewrite Ethiopia's place in the world, as well as altering African patterns of regional and global connectivity. In thus going against the grain of Ethiopia's global position, confronting serious financing

constraints, and overcoming the connectivity problems associated with the country's challenging terrain, Bole airport has been the site of significant gatemaking efforts and defied the pessimism of the 1990s that African airlines would be consigned to global marginality thanks to international trends.

Conclusion

At the international airports in Ghana and Ethiopia this article has found that aerial gateways through which Africa connects to the wider world shed important light on the continent's international relations. In contrast to the gatekeeping literature, the article found important evidence of gatemaking at these infrastructural and architectural mediations between Africa and the outside world. Indeed, despite clear differences – the emergence of a highly significant African aviation hub in Ethiopia, and much more fledgling efforts in Ghana – these airports evidence concerted state efforts, both historical and contemporary, to leverage these gates to remake each country's place in the world. This fulfils the criteria of what this article has called gatemaking – efforts designed to originate globally significant changes to Africa's international politics – in contrast to reactions to the initiatives of more powerful global players in the gatekeeper mould. By looking at the airports for evidence of how domestic processes shape the continent's international relations, rather than more narrowly at how international processes impact Africa's domestic politics, therefore, the article finds the relations between states, airports and national carriers are critical to aerial gatemaking efforts in both Ethiopia and Ghana. Indeed, the turn towards the formation of a new airline in the latter can be attributed in part to the success of the former in rewriting patterns of Africa's international connectivity. Processes of initiation and innovation are thus occurring at these airports which seek to alter the modalities of African connectivity both within and between the continent and the wider world. Through thus analysing the gatemaking present at both airports, the article helps to transcend the limits of extant concepts of Africa's international relations and offers a fresh analytical lens on the global politics of the continent.

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Joanne Tomkinson is a post-doctoral researcher based at SOAS University of London. Her research interests lie at the intersection of the political economy of development, the role of the state in development, and the international political economy. She currently works on the African State Architecture project in the Department of Politics and International Studies, where her research has focussed on airport infrastructures and what the form and function of these gateway structures can tell us about African state-building efforts.

Notes

1. Notable exceptions include Button et al. (2018a), Chalfin (2010), Irandu and Rhoades (2006) and Pirie (2021).
2. In 2017 Bole carried a total of 10.2 million passengers compared with Kotoka's 2.5 million (AFRAA 2018).
3. Cooper (2018) has noted that as well as being present at ports and airports, gatekeeping can also be studied through flows such as foreign investment and remittances.
4. Countries that moved to revive their national carriers in the late 2010s include Uganda, Ghana, Senegal and Zambia, with Nigeria and Ghana exploring options to do so, and Tanzania and Rwanda planning to expand investment in existing airlines, including through partnerships with more established carriers.
5. Interview locations are mentioned in the case of Ghana but not Ethiopia, to protect the anonymity of those interviewed.
6. *Flight Magazine*, 'Ghana's status symbol', 13 January 1961, 65.
7. Interview, ex-airport official, Accra 16 August 2019.
8. Interview, ex-airport official, Accra 16 August 2019.
9. Interview, airport official, Accra, 21 August 2019.
10. Interview, airport official, Accra, 21 August 2019.
11. The global consultancy firm Arup was contracted to work on design elements of the new terminal.
12. Interview, airport official, Accra, 21 August 2019.
13. Interview, airport official, Accra, 14 August 2019.
14. Interview, airport official, Accra, 14 August 2019.
15. Further research is needed to explore the collapse of the original agreement, but media reports suggest strategic differences over issues such as routes, flight frequencies, funding, and duration of the management contract.
16. Interview, foreign aviation sector professional, Accra, 27 August 2019.
17. Interviews, domestic aviation sector professionals (multiple), Accra, August 2019.
18. Interview, ex-airport official, Accra, 16 August 2019.
19. Interview, government official involved in investment promotion, 16 August 2019.
20. Which effectively granted the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) an 'air monopoly' over Ethiopia (Spencer 2006, 142).
21. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Ethiopian Airlines Provides Major Gateway to Africa in Thirteen Years of Flying', 20(26), 26 September 1957, p. 2. Accessed via TWA Skyliner archives, hosted by The State Historical Society of Missouri < https://digital.shsmo.org/digital/collection/twa>.
22. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Haile Selassie's Visit to America via TWA Emphasizes Close Link with EAL', 17(19), 13 May 1954, p. 6.
23. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Ethiopian Airlines Provides Major Gateway to Africa'.
24. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Haile Selassie's Visit to America'.
25. Interview, ex-airport employee, Ethiopia, 1 November 2019.
26. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Haile Selassie's Visit to America'.
27. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Working Ourself out of a Job in Ethiopia, TWA Guides African Airline to Run Itself', 30(4), 13 February 1967, 4.
28. Interview, ex-civil aviation official, Ethiopia, 21 February 2020.
29. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Ethiopian Extends African Routes', 23(14), 7 July 1960, 5.
30. *TWA Skyliner Magazine*, 'Ethiopia Pioneers Trans-Africa Run', 23(24), 1 December 1960, 5.
31. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 1 November 2019.
32. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 4 November 2019.
33. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 18 February 2020.
34. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 1 November 2019.
35. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 1 November 2019.
36. According to one former senior EAE official: 'The first expansion was made at risk of the government – the government took the whole loan, which shows how the government was forecasting for the future' (interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 4 November 2019).

37. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 21 February 2020.
38. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 1 November 2019.
39. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 4 November 2019.
40. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 18 February 2020.
41. Interview, ex-airport official, Ethiopia, 18 February 2020.

ORCID

Joanne Tomkinson 🆔 http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9160-5600

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