Chapter 4: The collapse of the African state

Richard Cornwell

The state has been the most prominent feature of the international political system for so long that it is easy to take the permanence of its role in the organisation of society for granted. Lately, however, a growing body of literature has appeared, dealing with the erosion of the power of the sovereign state. Usually, this centres upon the impact of what is generally referred to as globalisation, and the emergence of major transnational economic and financial actors, able to shift their operations almost at will and answerable to no one nation's political masters. This has signified the removal of several instruments of economic sovereignty from the control of the state.[1] The establishment of regional groupings in parts of the world has also eroded state sovereignty.[2] At the other end of the spectrum, local particularisms challenge the authority of the nation-state,[3] and significant elements of the population even seek to evade or ignore the state's claims to authority. This latter phenomenon is also marked among the growing underclass in industrial and post-industrial societies, especially as the state's ability to fulfil its welfare function comes into question.[4]

In short, the end of this century sees the modern state, as structure, facing a number of serious challenges and a need to redefine its essential role and its relationship with its citizens. The question of state legitimacy, in the general sense, has probably not been as sharply posed since the emergence of the modern international system, and though there are few who see any other structure emerging to replace the state system as the skeleton of the international order, there can be little doubt that the state of the mid-21st century will bear only a superficial resemblance to that of the mid-20th.[5]

The world is afflicted by a growing number of intrastate conflicts, apparently of racial, religious and ethnic derivation. A growing number of civilians, as opposed to armies and security forces, are becoming involved in this violence, often for no obvious or clearly articulated political reason. Ethnic and racial cleansing combined with acute religious extremism, intolerance or pure criminality suggest a growing social crisis in the international system.[6]

These instances of turmoil are the local and particular manifestations of a common crisis of individual and group identity in the context of deepening social inequality and fragmentation. The combined effects of the weakened state administrative and policy apparatus, the current cessation of bipolar ideological competition and the accelerating and unaccountable process known as globalisation, have called some of the more fundamental and familiar premises upon which our lives and our sense of security are based into question. Prominent among these is the nation-state project. Globalisation and the expansion of economic scale have implications not only for state capacity and legitimacy, but also for society at large, as various groups and individuals seek to redefine themselves in a rapidly changing domestic and individual environment.[7] It is scarcely surprising when, in such circumstances, other certainties suddenly become negotiable.

Turning to Africa, and some other parts of the world's margins: the end of the Cold War has seen not only the dissolution of the bipolar world order, but, in some cases, the collapse of individual states. As Zartman points out in his recently edited work on the subject, the phenomenon of state collapse goes further than the overthrow of a regime. It reflects the disintegration of structure, legitimate authority, law and political order within the confines of the state. This does not imply, however, that anarchy reigns. Other actors move into the vacuum left by the collapse of the state.[8] If of local origin, these may be ethnic nationalists or simply warlords; if foreign, they generally take the form of international companies providing their own security. Zartman sees a period in which various rivals vie with each other and with attempts to re-establish central authority. During this period, the state itself, as a legitimate functioning order, is gone.[9]

Though the phenomenon of collapsed states is by no means confined to the post-Cold War environment or to Africa, it is here that it is most often encountered. Given that the modern African state is a relatively new creation, and of essentially foreign origin, this should not be surprising.[10]

It was during the period of colonial rule that modern Africa took on many of its most familiar characteristics. The imposition of alien rule, the colonial experience and the African reaction to these were by no means uniform, but, throughout Africa, the impact of these events was revolutionary, whether measured in political, economic or social terms.

Whatever the various reasons for, and the myriad local responses to the 'Scramble for Africa', one consequence was common: in Lonsdale's elegant formulation, *"... most Africans did not actually live in states until colonial rule fastened Leviathan's yoke upon them. Indeed the most distinctively African contribution to human history could be said to have been precisely the civilized art of living fairly peaceably together* not *in states."*[11]

In the brief historical space of eighty years at most – the period of effective colonial rule – the countless societies and cultures of Africa were incorporated into fifty or so states, with all that this radical transformation of political size, scale and doctrine implied. Traditional political and social structures, incorporating a moral universe often based on the assumption of the existence of kin and blood relationships with other members of the immediate community and its polity, were either overlaid or replaced by a new abstract colonial state whose extensive rights were founded on an impersonal doctrine of sovereignty quite alien to most African cultures. At the same time, they were drawn more closely into the global economy, and exposed to new technologies and ideas as never before.[12] Viewed from this perspective, it is to be expected that the modern state structure in Africa often forms little more than a thin carapace over the living social organism, and that the vital activity often takes place in the largely hidden realms of the informal economy and its companion polity. It is here that most of Africa's population struggle to make sense and to survive in a world in which crisis has become a state of being.[13]

What is interesting, in hindsight, is that the eventual leaders of the successful revolt against colonial rule made no attempt to overturn this imposed system of states or dismantle the alien political framework in favour of a return to the more 'natural' shape of pre-colonial African society. Instead, they sought to preserve the arbitrarily demarcated artificial boundaries of the

colonial period virtually at any cost, in order to seize control of the colonial state as an operating system. Indeed, the successful preservation of the imposed state structures, if not their operating systems, was one of the more striking achievements of the statesmen of independent Africa.

Part of the explanation for the survival of African states as juridical units, for all their weakness, was their usefulness to other more powerful actors in the competition for global influence.[14] As Austin has pointed out, the *"... colonial legacy prevails today because an alternative map of traditional Africa in modern guise defies belief."*[15] Most importantly, the new African states, however tenuous their administrative control over their defined territories, were received into the international system and were recognised in law as sovereign entities. It is worth noting that, even when groups and entire regions have successfully defied central governments and exercised *de facto* control over large areas, their claims have failed to win international recognition.[16]

The inherited state

Much is made in popular writing about Africa of the artificiality of its imposed boundaries. While it is true that these have created problems of a sort, it is not here that the essence of the difficulty lies, but in the nature of the state inherited by Africa's independent rulers. It is all too readily assumed that the European colonial powers simply transferred the political systems and ideas of the metropole to their African colonies. Though these concepts obviously informed the constitution-makers of independent Africa, this perspective is flawed in at least one important respect: the colonial state was **not** essentially a replica of the metropolitan power. It is in this context that the nature and internal structural problems of the African state have to be considered, for they go a long way towards explaining its brittle and essentially fragile nature.

It is true that the colonial powers transferred new concepts of statehood to Africa – some, indeed, relatively new to Europe itself – and imposed upon the continent a largely novel pattern of territoriality and sovereignty, but it should be noted that certain important parts of contemporary European state theory were not immediately transferred to Africa. For instance, the doctrines of European theory dealing with the limitations of the power of the state were not incorporated – a significant omission when one considers the subsequent move to authoritarian rule across much of independent Africa. Nor was the relatively new idea of nationhood, as complementary to the state, transferred by the colonial authorities, eager as they were to divide and rule. The trappings of independent statehood were introduced very late in the day, and sometimes not at all.[17]

It is important to bear in mind that, at root, the colonial state was based on domination, and on its ability to impose its hegemony upon the subject peoples to extract from them the taxes necessary for the maintenance of the colonial state apparatus. Even in those cases where constitutional reforms were introduced to limit the absolute power of the state, this happened only during the immediate approach to independence. Again, viewed from this perspective, it is less surprising that some of Africa's new rulers decided that these limitations could be dispensed with fairly quickly, though this was a development that helped to render the African state less flexible.

The control exercised by the colonial state was based upon its monopoly of power and its ability to use force – or the implied threat of superior force – to impose its will on people who were at odds either with the authorities or with each other. It is worth noting that the colonial administration maintained effective control over the whole state apparatus – military, police and communications systems included. In other words, there was no chance of any subordinate part of the state apparatus suddenly promoting itself as an alternative power base. There was also no chance of succession problems emerging to disturb the smooth continuity of personnel. Though there were acute differences of a personal and policy nature within the various colonial civil services, these rarely became public or were allowed to upset the routine running of the administrative machine. The colonial administration was expected, as part of the confidence trick that comprised colonial rule, to present a united, professional and assured face to its subjects.[18]

As Austin has pointed out, the accusations that many African governments are little more than continuations of the former colonial regimes, is abuse that misses the point in a singular way. *"The primary need of African leaders, in party or military uniform, has been how to keep the colonial state going ... how to recreate the mechanisms of colonial control has been a tough puzzle."*[19]

He remarks that one major difference between the colonial administrations and their immediate successors was that the former was an intrusion ruled by a foreign élite banded together under the governor by a code of behaviour, *"... a set of guardians whose strength lay in the pack."*[20]

"African governments have no such code of ethics or surety of racial solidarity. They are under party or military leaders who retain control by exercising power over their own kind. The difference can be sharply expressed at its extreme by noting that no governor ever hanged one of his colonial officers, whereas Nkrumah in Ghana imprisoned his own party colleagues, and Idi Amin in Uganda beat to death civil servants, judges, university teachers, and his fellow army officers alike.

The fundamental difference is that while the colonial state was essentially bureaucratic, the postindependence regimes have been ultrapolitical."[21]

Now the rulers of independent African states suddenly had to rely increasingly on their fellow nationals to maintain law and order, people who were full citizens of the new country – some with political ideas and ambitions of their own – for it soon became evident that the closer one was to the centre of the political apparatus, the greater the chances of material reward.

The dominance of the political

The state in 20th century Africa has been the primary arena for competition, power and influence over the distribution of scarce resources. As Jackson and Rosberg have noted:

"What the church was for ambitious men in medieval Europe or the business corporation in nineteenth and twentieth century America, the state is today for ambitious Africans with skill

and fortune. The political system in African states is more like a game or a market than a planning organization ... State power in African countries has been the major arena of privilege ... accessible to ambitious men of humble origin. The political capital of social standing and wealth has been useful but not essential to partake in the game or to win; personal strength, power, and popularity have been more important. In fact political activity has been seen by ambitious Africans as a way – indeed the most important way – of securing such capital."[22]

There was another important difference between the representative democracies of the 19th century and the new African independent states. The Western democracies emerged into a world in which they initially had to contend with a fairly limited number of government functions, and the management of fairly simple economic and political systems in a relatively spacious global system in which their technological achievements tended to give them the advantage. The new African states, on the other hand, emerged into a wholly new environment. They were asked to establish full-scale social welfare states with complicated mechanisms, at the same time as undertaking a complex drive for social and economic development, and this in a world of population explosion, widening technological and economic gaps, superpower competition and global tension and conflict. And if the resulting problems of social discontinuity, cultural strain and the pragmatic problems of development had not been sufficient to unhinge the strongest constitutional formula, there was still the additional business of national integration awaiting them.

Particularism and ethnicity as a challenge to the nation-state

Part of the problem was the difficulty experienced by many of Africa's new leaders in seeking to live up to the expectations nurtured during their fight against colonial rule. Indeed, with independence won, and the colonial power shifted from the centre of attention, it proved impossible to sustain the level of public political interest and cohesion within the new state. For many Africans, attention now reverted to the local levels in which their lives were rooted, and where the complex battle between the modern and older established values would continue to be fought. Yet, the local and traditional leaders who remained so significant to most Africans also represented an incipient threat to the would-be builders of the new nation and their tentative political legitimacy. New presidents and prime ministers regarded these local leaders with suspicion and, aware of the fragility of the machinery they had inherited, tended to regard any dissent or argument as disloyalty. It was thus hardly surprising that so many new African governments soon began to deal harshly with those whom they saw as opponents, and that human rights and political freedoms often became casualties of the new order. Accordingly, the old traditional institutions were either incorporated by the state, reduced in terms of their formal powers or summarily abolished. Sometimes the kings, chiefs and headmen were also derided as part of a backward tribal past, essentially ethnically divisive and often tainted by collaboration with the old colonial system.[23]

As the state took on the responsibility for nation-building, with all its centralising implications, the project tended to take on the characteristics of a narrow ethnic base which was identified as nationally authentic. From here it was expanded, even though this implied

the denial of concomitant status to other ethnic identities, which were given a narrow and negative tribal connotation. Not only was diversity seen as a source of dangerous weakness, but ethnic identity itself was interpreted as inimical to the state-building project. But from the perspective of a largely rural population, the idea of a common national culture made no sense, and lacked any content with which they could identify. As Laakso and Olukoshi note:

"Without an economic and social push towards the kind of national 'high culture' experienced in Europe, the idea of national unity came, paradoxically, to be reduced to an almost perfect negation of a common culture ...

Armed with the rhetoric of unity, the post-colonial African state, instead of enhancing its capacity to provide new economic and professional opportunities to all segments of the society, increasingly resorted to protecting itself against the populace. The idea of unity which leaders sought to impose on Africans ... together with the ideologies that underpinned them served increasingly to distinguish the state from society and to prevent any meaningful confrontation between the ruling élites and the masses. The character of the bureaucracy inherited by post-colonial state agencies and the persistence of the language of colonial governance exacerbated this cultural distance between the governors and the governed and further strengthened the position of those in power at the expense of the populace over whom they ruled and to whom, increasingly, they failed to account."[24]

Certainly, it seems evident that such feelings of belonging as most African peoples have, remain rooted in their local communities with their familiar bases of kinship and allegiance. No parallel community has been created at national level, and the unity of the nationalist movements evaporated soon after independence.

Nevertheless, cultural pluralism, or tribalism, or ethnicity, or whatever other label is chosen, is a far more complex and dynamic concept than many realise. The phenomenon that is addressed, is not simply a hangover of pre-colonial identities. Cultural pluralism refers to a complex and shifting interaction of affinities based on common language, ethnicity, religion and region. The simple static tribal map with its stable, distinctive and defined categories is quite inadequate to explain a complex amalgam of communal identities in a constant process of change. These group identities are fashioned and reshaped by the subjective perceptions of their members, and therefore depend to a great extent on what the members are opposed to at any given time. In Young's explanation, *"... particular categories are defined according to characteristics that differentiate them from relevant others ... [These identities are] … not defined by innate, permanent culture characteristics."*[25]

Colonial and post-colonial policy itself has had an important modifying effect on ethnic and regional consciousness. Since colonial times, the emphasis on export-oriented production has sometimes created severe regional imbalances, which may exacerbate the effects of an uneven distribution of natural resources. The siting of administrative centres and the unequal distribution of educational and health facilities and employment opportunities have exercised a profound influence on the life chances and social mobility of groups. The migration of an individual away from his traditional milieu may even have the effect of enhancing ethnic identity in a strange environment where competition for scarce resources and employment is

intense. Even education may have the effect of heightening social consciousness and lead to a more articulated cultural identity.[26]

In the political arena, ethnic consciousness also has a special importance. Aspirants to political office naturally begin by mobilising their own local clientele before casting the net wider. As a consequence, rival networks of political bosses and their clients form an interlocking web of patronage and support, affecting all sectors of society. The security services, bureaucracy and trade unions are all vulnerable to infiltration by ethnic or regional rivals to the incumbents in office.[27] Austin describes the dilemma of many African governments:

"... one section or another of the elite is often in league with its own local community against the center. The search for votes pulls national leaders apart toward rival bases of communal or regional support. Governments therefore exist precariously, and their members grow distrustful of one another. They remain in office only because the possibility of change is held in check by the very plurality of forces that makes them precarious. The dilemma is aptly contained in Nolutshungu's description of Nigeria – applicable to many African states – as held together in an uneasy balance only by 'the conjunction of negatives': the elite is too feeble to dominate, but the masses are too divided to rebel."[28]

The attempts to marginalise certain regional and ethnic groups in the period after independence also had the perverse effect of politicising ethnicity. This was serious enough in times of relative abundance, when the state was able to dispense its patronage over a broad field, albeit differentially.[29] In the current conditions of exaggerated scarcity, ethnic and regional associations have taken on a particular significance in the survival strategies of many Africans.

The exclusionist strategies adopted by many of the leaders of independent Africa and the steady concentration of political power around a coterie surrounding the president himself also worked against any consolidation of systemic legitimacy in the state as structure. In a situation where rules-based competition in the political arena had been made all but impossible, and where the spoils of office were of absolute importance in gaining access to economic power, it was scarcely surprising when new political actors made their presence felt in an unorthodox fashion, with all the implications this had for systemic legitimacy. Before long, a number of African countries had experienced their first *coups*, as the soldiers took over the government, often ushering in a cycle of *coup* and counter-*coup*, with only brief returns to civilian rule.[30]

From boom to crisis

To compound matters, Africa's political problems interacted with inherent economic weaknesses aggravated by inappropriate and poorly executed policies. Of all the parts of what is known as the 'Third World', Africa's development problems seem the most intractable. On the economic front, of course, it has long been apparent to all but the incurably optimistic that many African countries are poor simply by virtue of their modest natural resource bases and

their reliance on the vagaries of an unkind climate. From the colonial period, some inherited an overdependence on a narrow range of primary commodities for export and foreign exchange earnings, which rendered them excessively vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices.

African states also inherited from the colonial period a tradition of state intervention in almost every sector of the economy. Government administered price controls regulated or intervened in labour, mining, agriculture, manufacturing and financial markets. The public sector grew as various enterprises and institutions were brought under state control. In some countries, the mining sector was nationalised and in most marketing monopolies were given to parastatals. Foreign exchange and the import-export trade were centrally administered, and tax regimes were manipulated to favour the urban élite at the expense of the mass of rural producers.[31] Of course, this massive expansion in the activities of the state served the political élite well, providing it, in the days of relative plenty during the post-independence continuation of the post-World War II boom, with the wherewithal to create and sustain extensive networks of clients.[32]

Yet, interventionism, as it extended the state's reach throughout the economy, eventually outran the state's administrative capacity. Not only did judicial and regulatory functions deteriorate, especially because of arbitrary political interference, but the provision of public services became increasingly less efficient. As the urban bias of the state's economic and fiscal policies became more apparent, unskilled workers poured into the towns from the countryside, while expanding education services for populations growing at an unprecedented rate churned out qualified workers fully expecting to find jobs in the public sector.[33]

Even before the oil shocks of the 1970s turned global terms of trade so dramatically against agricultural exporting countries, many African states were already resorting to deficit financing to generate employment, regardless of existing capacity utilisation levels. Subsequent commodity price falls eroded the existing tax base, while heavy public investment in the boom years left governments with long term recurrent expenditure even after public spending was curtailed.[34]

Instead of allowing exchange rates to move in tune with the balance of payments crisis, most governments intervened even more strongly in currency markets, promoting the growth of parallel markets and economies, which further reduced the state's access to revenue.[35]

Growing budget deficits could be covered only by recourse to increasingly expensive foreign loans. Bureaucratic and political mismanagement, incompetence, corruption and even grand theft often compounded the problem, and most African states quickly found themselves entrapped in an ever-deepening pit of indebtedness.

As private capital inflows dried up, many African states found that their only recourse was to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which now designed new lending mechanisms. This was the beginning of a new phase in Africa's independent history which would see the imposition of monetarist philosophies that may be summed up crudely as 'the less state the better'.[36] The austerity policies which governments were required to implement

also implied a resort to greater authoritarianism on the part of governments, further undermining the social contract upon which so much of the state's declining legitimacy rested.[37]

Though it was too early to describe the phenomenon as collapse, the symptoms of a wasting disease were already in evidence.

Take for example the picture being painted by Jackson and Rosberg in 1982:

"Black Africa's forty-odd states are among the weakest in the world. State institutions and organizations are less developed in the sub-Saharan region than almost anywhere else ... Most of the national governments exercise only tenuous control over the people, organizations and activities within their territorial jurisdiction ... Some governments have periodically ceased to control substantial segments of their country's territory and population ... there have been times when Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda and Zaire have ceased to be 'states' in the empirical sense – that is their central governments lost control of important areas in the jurisdiction during struggles with rival political organizations."[38]

Writing at virtually the same time, the journalist and traveller, Marnham made the following trenchant observation:

"In many African countries the city limits mark the effective borders of the state. Outside the city official life evaporates: within is the favoured area, the place where all the money goes, the place where the entire educated community insists on living. It is the one lump of earth out of the whole inheritance which the fragile governments can make more than a pretence of governing."[39]

The transition from a chronic condition to one potentially terminal coincided with the end of the Cold War, and the bipolar rivalry that had made African states useful pawns.

'Choiceless democracy'

It was no coincidence that the debate about Africa's 'second liberation' took place once the major powers no longer needed to compete for Africa's international support. The East-West conflict had provided the first generation of post-colonial African élite with their means of survival. In the early 1990s, domestic support became more important than foreign patrons for the first time since independence. African leaders had to confront the inherent weaknesses of their regimes and consider sharing power with others. The early 1990s were uncomfortable times for Africa's rulers and their clients, for all this happened at a time of deep and structural economic crisis.

The driving force behind Africa's second experiment with democracy came both from ideological conviction and the growing impatience of an ever-bolder public consciousness, and from the related matter of the continent's prevailing economic crisis.

On the domestic front, the politically-conscious, urbanised, professional and student bodies began to rail against the continued failure of their rulers to match rhetoric and promises to economic progress. Indeed, much of Africa had suffered a steady decline in living standards through the 1970s and 1980s.

For their part, the World Bank, the IMF and other bilateral aid donors also made it quite clear that, if further financial assistance was to be forthcoming, Africa's governments had to pay urgent attention to their human rights' records. More specifically, they had to become politically more accountable to their people, and curb corruption. They were also required to adopt structural adjustment programmes and to allow market forces to send the major signals through their economies.

Structural adjustment entailed a number of things: the reduction of public expenditure, balanced budgets, economic liberalisation and currency devaluation. The course advocated, and even enforced in Africa by the apostles of the free market was not without a certain inherent paradox, however. On the one hand, structural adjustment programmes involved a sharp decline in living standards for most and a steep rise in the price of food and social services, especially in the towns. On the other, the democracy movement had locally been driven largely by popular demand for improved living standards. Structural adjustment programmes thus aggravated social welfare problems, diminishing the capacity of governments to cope with political demands. The contradiction between the imperatives of democratisation and structural adjustment soon became apparent: at the very moment when democratisation stimulated the popular demand for better social and welfare services, structural adjustment required that this be denied. In broad terms, this played a significant part in further undermining the state's claims to legitimacy in the eyes of its own citizens.

Simultaneously, the demand for government accountability and the reduction in 'corrupt' practices put severe pressure upon state-centred patronage networks. This meant that rulers had to try and build new constituencies based on consent. Inasmuch as structural adjustment created a drastic change in patterns of resource allocation, it eroded the clientelistic foundations on which most African state systems are based.

In essence, this structural adjustment/aid-linked movement towards democracy contained within itself not only the seeds of its own undoing, but a threat to the very existence of Africa's fragile state structures. It was all very well for an urban mob, a guerrilla army or a national conference to topple a dictator, it is quite another to construct a democratic polity, especially in a political environment pervaded by the intolerance and brutality of previous regimes, and by an acute shortage of material resources with which to sustain even the essential services usually associated with statehood.

The effects of the current economic and social crisis in Africa are so profound and pervasive that, in the view of Laakso and Olukoshi, they threaten to dissolve the cultural, economic and political glues that held the different elements of the African nation-state together, to such an extent that the future of the African nation-state may be in jeopardy. At the same time, structural adjustment policies undermine the basis of the social contract underpinning the

foundation of the post-colonial state structures, depriving the state simultaneously of its capacity and of the last vestiges of legitimacy.[40]

Structural adjustment programmes also contributed to the growing informalisation of the economy, further reducing the state's revenue base and thus its capacity to deliver services even of a rudimentary type. Africa's states are increasingly dependent on foreign aid, and some need to rely on expatriate and donor personnel in a manner redolent of colonial days.[41]

"In the most extreme cases, the state has, more or less, been reduced to its coercive apparatuses (army, police and prisons), which are then employed, crudely, to safeguard the authoritarian political framework within which governments, faced with a host of donor conditionalities, attempt to abide by the neo-liberal agenda for the reform of the economies – and politics – of African countries."[42]

Meanwhile, in terms of the choices to be made between alternative policies, the political space available to African politicians was largely closed down by the Washington consensus. By emptying the political arena of ideas, competition for power was reduced to its bare essentials, personality and local/ethnic considerations became paramount, and the remnants of the state were likely to fall prey to the untrammelled competition for power.

Mkandawire has coined the term 'choiceless democracies' to encapsulate the paradoxes facing African political reformists in the context of globalisation. Structural adjustment policies, the manifestation of globalisation in the African context, he argues, constrain the actions of the formal institutions of democratic rule on at least three levels: that of objectives, of instruments, and of structural constraints. The choiceless democracy that emerges, is at best a technocratic husk of the real organism, unable to respond to the needs of its citizens.[43]

Pathway to the future: Escape from the state?

Faced with this situation, many citizens sought to find solutions outside the state arena. Of the survival strategies adopted by Africans in their confrontation with the harsh realities of their condition, one of the more common is 'avoiding the state'.[44] This strategy has obvious implications for the viability of the state project, politically as well as economically. It also raises the question whether the Western belief in creating room for and strengthening African civil society will have the expected consequences: that it will help to promote the consolidation of democratic structures that reinforce and legitimise the modern state. This is a matter for debate, and the argument about the future of the state in Africa has to take cognizance of the emergence of different and particularistic forms of civil society in Africa, sometimes as alternatives to, and sometimes as adjuncts of the state and its owners.

The term 'civil society' has only recently been extended in the literature on Africa to include ethnic associations, which, with other associations of similar type, have important political functions beyond the surveillance of state agencies. In the Western political science canon, the concept 'civil society' has generally implied the opening of opportunities for individual freedom. But one should be careful not to misapply Western political constructs to African

circumstances. In Western history, the public realm has been shared between the state, other political organisations and civil society, all of which were assumed to have some concern for individual liberty, which simply is not the African historical experience. The pre-colonial African state rarely felt the need to justify its existence in terms of meeting the needs of individuals. Nor did the colonial state often include the security and welfare needs of ordinary Africans in its considerations. As Ekeh has argued, this heritage has been passed on to the post-colonial state and, as a consequence, the ordinary individual has sought to attain his security and welfare needs in ways and idioms different from those familiar in Western political thought. As has been suggested above, the principal structures with which the individual has sought alliance are kinship organisations which have expanded and developed along a path quite distinct from the European experience.[45]

"*... [T]he trend for several centuries in African history led to the creation of kinship as an alternative public institution, existing side by side with the formal state. They constitute two public realms that I identified some years ago as the* ***civic public****, operating on amoral codes of behaviour and using the apparatuses of the formal state, and the* ***primordial public*** *whose value-premises are moral, binding together members of the same natural and assumed (including ethnic) groupings. The complexity of African politics lies in the fact that they cover more diversified political space than that of the public realm in Western society. Accordingly, individual liberty and the problems of civil society in Africa pose sharply different issues from those we are used to in Western political thought."*[46]

This primordial public has the ability to withstand the intrusions of the state. Africa has a wide variety of organisations and associations occupying this space, though this is seldom recognised.

Another author who has written on this subject is Abdou Maliqalim Simone. He argues that *"[t]he definition of civil society must be expanded to include the loosely configured social practices which make up a discourse of manoeuvres on the part of peoples shut out of official economies and forms of government."*[47] He makes the point that African societies are not mere victims of Western domination, never having been fully captured, and that they are slipping further out of Western comprehension and control. They are opportunistic, but reconfigured in a sense of social connectedness. He finds it difficult to decide whether civil society's responses help empower on anything more than a symbolic level, however.

"They are certainly not revolutionary in any conventional sense, nor are they merely complicit in maintaining or revising existing forms of domination ... But they have in the past been forced to operate with relative invisibility – something which sustains the ability of civil society to resist domination but leaves it unable to socialize outlooks and behaviours explicitly within institutional contexts that are able to cohere diverse interests and agendas over the long term. Yet the responses of the civil sector do point to alternative spaces of political formation – never able to fully bring them about but, nevertheless, serve as indications that political life remains fluid and that the future in Africa is not over before it begins.

While it is clear that African states must find ways to maximize the participation of its peoples in the process of governance, the emphasis on multiparty democracy may simply

solidify their capture in an international division of labour mediated by IMF and World Bank dictates."[48]

In addressing the all-too-common assumption made by Western observers that expanding the room available to civil society in Africa will lead to democratic consolidation, Ekeh argues that the state does not occupy the total active political space in Africa, which is segmented and only partially under state control. *"The sphere of the primordial public occupies vast tracts of the political space that are relevant for the welfare of the individual, sometimes limiting and breaching the state's efforts to extend its claims beyond the civic public sphere."*[49]

Though Africa has a vast array of institutions and associations of civil society, it does not follow that these will be useful in the promotion of democracy. As Ekeh argues, African civil society is largely indifferent to the affairs of the civic public realm over which the state presides. Civil society in Africa is content to look after those affairs of the public over which the state shows little concern. This is a very important distinction between African and European society. When the African individual feels wronged in the public realm claimed by the state, he withdraws from it into the primordial public realm:

"Herein lies the problem for democracy in Africa, from the point of view of civil society. It is insufficient to argue that the mere presence and even further growth of civil society will help the development of democracy in Africa. What is needed is to search for ways that will enable the state and Africa's civil society to be mutually engaged in the public arena, lessening the claims of the state for total ownership of the political space of the public realm and encouraging the competence of the individual with respect to his view of who owns the public realm where the state operates."[50]

Ekeh warns that there are some distinctive features of these African civil society associations that have not helped in promoting democracy or in defining individual liberties or respect for the human person in abstract. Indeed, because kinship is intrinsically segmentary, they are precluded from doing so by their very nature. Many of these groups are concerned with the welfare of their 'own'. Those associations that operate in the civic public realm, such as trade and student unions, are relatively vulnerable to the state. There appears to be little sign of a reconciliation of these two types of organisation.[51]

Simone's conclusions are a little different, in that he sees a greater possibility of a creative interaction between the democratic movement and African civil society, whose variety he again emphasises.

"Democratic movements in Africa may not generate functional governance. But they may provide an opening that allows people to at least show what they are doing and how they are doing it; to be more conscious of the practices they have used to survive and, conversely, that have impeded a better way of life. Macro-level ignorance and micro-level resistance have combined to render much of what is significant in terms of how people actually govern themselves invisible – in the domain of households, neighbourhoods, institutions, dance halls, street corners, bars, shrines, churches, mosques and cafés. For it is in these places where the bulk of Africa is governed, the important decisions made.

Increasingly, African kin groups find themselves spread out over distance and continents, zones of activities and agendas, yet, in most cases, they seem to co-ordinate their efforts, come together as some cohesive body. Little is known about these efforts; given existing political climates their survival is probably predicated on little being known about them. Invisibility may have been the key to the continuation of thousands of local initiatives and organizations, but it precludes them from operating as provisional models for the generation of institutions on a larger scale."[52]

Simone concludes that the way forward may be the African state's recognition of the autonomy of the civil sector, which would imply that the latter was required to produce, mobilise and develop instead of merely acting as an escape from the state.[53]

Another, less optimistic or idealistic, view of the second polity and its links to the second economy is provided by Lemarchand. He points to the distinctions between approaches to and interest in the informal sector. Rational-choice theorists and proponents of the economy of affection approach the phenomenon of the informal economy from different directions, and view its potential from different perspectives. Whereas rational-choice theorists urge the introduction of market incentives to reduce the informal sector as a step towards restructuring Africa's economies, the supporters of the economy of affection see the informal sector as suggesting the potential for co-operation in traditional modes of production.[54]

Lemarchand also distinguishes between activities supposedly under state control but which evade the state or involve illegal use of state position, and activities which ignore the state and operate beyond its reach. The former transform the state into a market, the latter represent the withdrawal from state and market, and are quite distinct.[55]

He is also at pains to dispel certain fallacies about what is broadly described as the informal sector. One of these he describes as the convivialist view, in which the emphasis is on the capacity of individuals to beat the system with their imagination and resourcefulness. Lemarchand has some misgivings about the rosy picture painted here and tends to agree with a more depressing view of some of the informal economic arrangements which have drawn such praise. He also disputes the idea that informal economies are a transitional phenomenon which will disappear as capitalism develops. Arguing that the evidence contradicts this, he points out that the informal sectors are not only expanding in proportion to capitalist development, but they have already reached a degree of institutionalisation that makes their anticipated demise highly unlikely.[56]

The relationship between the second economy and the state is by no means clear-cut, or universal in nature. Clientelism in its most oppressive forms can enter and use the informal system. There is a seamy and sometimes violent side to this, and the penetration of society by the state may be reversed. *"What some see as evidence of new social configurations is sometimes better understood as a reconfiguration of pre-colonial social formations, whose renewed vitality stems from their partial insertion into the formal apparatus of the state."*[57] Sometimes control of the informal sector, therefore, may also derive from access to the state.

Sklar rejects the popular obsession with the need for a transition to democracy as essentially unscientific, assuming as it does the idea of a continuum of political practices.[58] He then goes on to examine the co-existence in Africa of sovereign and traditional authorities, finding here a prospect for political innovation.

"In Africa, one finds a Janus-like relationship of back-to-back dimensions of authority. The two dimensions are not symmetrical, since all but a few African countries consist of several, or many separate and distinct traditional polities. In every African country an overwhelming majority of citizens have dual political identities, but in no case does the second dimension vie with the sovereign dimension for sovereignty. Yet, as a separate source of authority, embedded in tradition, it does help to maintain social stability during the current era of turbulent changes."[59]

"The evidence ... indicates a growing propensity in African statecraft to use the troubling legacies of multiple sovereignty and dual political identity for constructive purposes. The existence of a multiplicity of states is conducive to political experimentation, including innovations influenced by custom, while dual authority is compatible with the idea, and practice, of constitutional government. To be sure, the connotations of dual authority in Africa are frequently (but not always) undemocratic, because they imply deference by citizens to traditional hierarchies. However, democracies have never been viable without substantial admixtures of oligarchy which functions to mitigate the less desirable effects of popular power."[60]

None of the above should be interpreted as subscribing to an interpretation of African political life as in some sense atavistic. Most of the associational life of Africa is essentially recent in origin, a reaction to the stresses of modernity expressed often in pseudo-traditional terms.[61]

The defence of the state's shrinking laager

The avenues of escape open to African publics are not likely to recommend themselves to those who earn their living in the wealthier parts of the economy. Certainly, there will be an interaction between the formal and informal, in economics as in politics, and in certain circumstances, various parties may seek to benefit from a condition of 'controlled chaos'. Nevertheless, a modicum of order and predictability are demanded by those who seek to hold on to the limp reins of state power, and those who seek to take advantage of their claims to sovereign status in order to exploit such parts of the national resource base as may be secured.

But increasingly, the men with the guns – and Africa is awash with them after the conflicts of the 1980s – have become important players in the political arena. The reduction in global ideological conflict has decreased the political and military incentives for outside powers to intervene on the continent; and, contrary to some expectations, an Africa omitted from the calculations of external rivals has not become a more peaceful place. That local disputes are now less globalised means that outside powers have less influence on the conduct, termination and outcome of these conflicts. Local rivalries and antagonisms are given freer rein, being more remote from world centres of power and insignificant in terms of the global system.

African states could no longer rely on outside assistance to end local wars that are no threat to vital foreign interests.[62]

External non-state actors have increasingly stepped into the void left by the international community – sometimes as proxies, sometimes as independent agents. By virtue of their wealth and command of expertise, they are able to influence events to their local and often short term advantage. It is for all the world as if Africa has returned to the 1880s, and the age of the chartered companies, marking out their enclaves in an otherwise disorderly environment. Indeed, some of the colonial states of Africa owe their origins to such companies.

This is the reverse side of globalisation. Transnational companies, having demanded a new set of global rules which have effectively undermined the state in certain of the world's margins, are now able to provide just as much of the apparatus usually reserved to the state, to carry out their businesses in relative safety and at great profit, their bargaining advantage being apparent. Their worries now focus on their competition with others of their ilk, and their relative abilities to co-opt those parts of the state's political apparatus that still have some status in law.

In effect, Africa is again divided, between those under protection and those without. The implications for the political and economic future of Africa are profound. For most of Africa's peoples, the state has long since ceased to be the provider of security, physical or social. Only the 'useful bits' will be recolonised by the forces of the outsiders.

Endnotes

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61 In a recent book on the politics of Chad, Sam Nolutshungu provided a very subtle and eloquent explanation of the interaction between identities with a 'traditional' orientation, and the modern political context. Though his description is specific to Chad, it also suggests ways of attempting to understand the complex political interplay in other African states.

"The rebellions under Tombalbaye's regime and the phenomenon of warlordism that followed its collapse had shown that Chad was characterized by a multiplicity of communities with varying degrees of political detachment from each other, sometimes represented by factional leaders in the central political competition, at other times more or less isolating themselves from national politics and authority or putting up a more or less protracted local resistance to them. The liberation movement had been little more than a coalition of militants from such semi-independent political communities. The faction leaders, when they were responsive at all, were representative of such groups. Political representation involved a dual recognition: the communities recognized themselves in their leaders, and judged their place in Chadian politics by the share of power their representatives enjoyed; on the other hand, coalition formation among leaders amounted to mutual recognition of spokesmanship of discrete community-constituencies within the shared discourse of common Chadian citizenship.

It would be misleading, however, to identify 'communities' with primordial tribes or ethnic groups, reifying such groups and imputing to them a political self-consciousness they have seldom shown. The communities in question are not coextensive with ethnic groups or clans, however defined, but consist of individuals within such larger groupings who are brought together by a common political orientation ... often no more than a combination of powerful individuals backed by a number of important, more or less closely related families. Each such community has the potential to mobilize, on a privileged basis, support from a wider group to which it belongs – in some sense – ethnically. But the boundary of belonging is an ever-shifting one defined by conflict with others and by quarrels and contentions within the group being mobilized. Success in mobilizing a wider following on ethnic grounds is not assured, nor is effectiveness in national politics, even when such support can be secured. For that reason, leading activists are always drawn toward personal alliances outside their ethnic groups, the ethnic element constantly being redefined – both as to the relevant level (tribe, clan, family) and as to the criteria of its contention (religion, language, culture or locality). Above all, in practice all the communities are fissiparous."

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the shadow of the cold war will probably be more complex, not less, and more difficult to manage, not easier ... Inevitably, global security will depend on the ability of the world's political processes to address the perceived needs, the articulated demands, and the felt insecurities of the majority of states and the majority of the globe's population, both of which lie outside the privileged group of advanced industrialized capitalist countries."