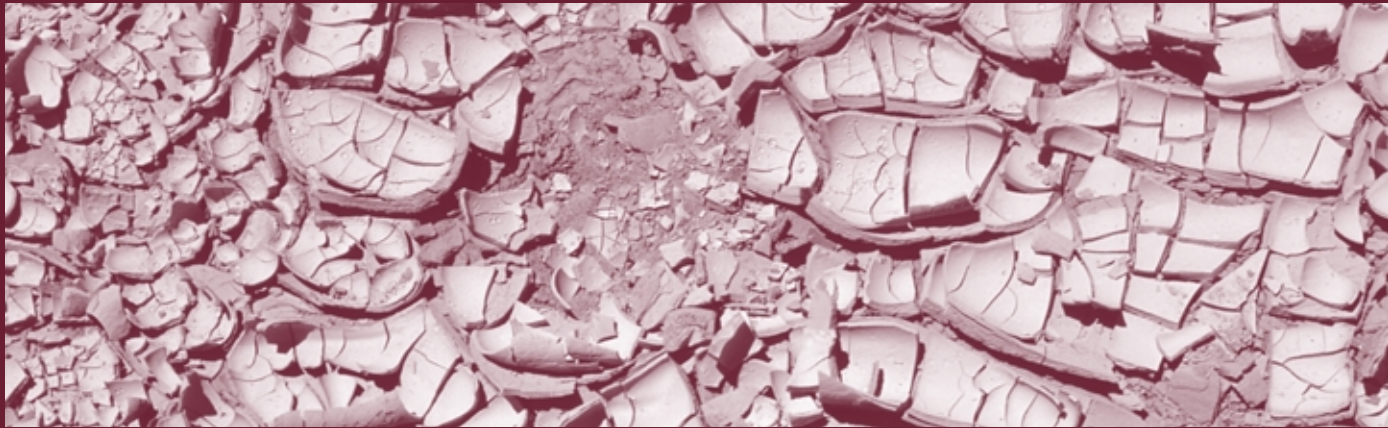


Crisis of the State and Civil Domains in Africa



Mariano Aguirre
David Sogge

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Mariano Aguirre and David Sogge

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Mariano Aguirre is co-director and coordinator of the Peace and Security and Human Rights programmes at FRIDE. He was director of the *Centro de Investigación para la Paz* in Madrid, and coordinator of programmes on peace and conflicts at the Ford Foundation, in New York.

David Sogge works as a self-employed analyst specialising on issues of aid and development policy, especially regarding civil society, drawing chiefly on research and professional experience in Africa. He is a Fellow at the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam. Among his writings is the edited volume *Compassion and Calculation. The Business of Private Foreign Aid* (1996).

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Felipe IV, 9 1º Dcha. 28014 Madrid – SPAIN

Tel.: +34 915 22 25 12 – Fax: +34 915 22 73 01

Email: fride@fride.org

(c) AYUNTAMIENTO DE CÓRDOBA

Departamento de Cooperación

Avda. Gran Capitán, 6-2ª

14071 Córdoba

Tel. + 34 957 49 99 00

Fax + 34 957 49 99 50

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Africa: The Debate on State Crisis*

Mariano Aguirre

Introduction

Whenever the debate about *fragile, weak or failed* states is raised, most sub-Saharan African countries are referred to by way of example. When the list of collapsed states is mentioned Somalia comes to mind, and in the previous decade Sierra Leone and Liberia. For some time Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were highlighted as fragmented states in which central administration did not control the national territory as a whole.

Even the so-called *big States* (Nigeria, DRC, Ethiopia, Sudan and Angola) suffer from severe structural problems.¹ Only South Africa and Botswana emerge, in general, as states with efficient administrations, although their internal problems are still serious.² The remaining states in the continent do not guarantee security or rights, and neither do they facilitate citizens' access to public and private goods. They do not control the territory as a whole from the point of view of public security, administration of justice and provision of services, and they do not have the legitimate monopoly of the use of force.

Historian Martin Meredith suggests that the majority of African states 'are no longer instruments capable of serving the public good. Indeed, far from being able to provide aid and protection to their citizens, African governments and the vampire-like politicians that run them are regarded by the populations they rule as yet another burden they have to bear in the struggle for survival'.³

The concept of the fragile or failed state became prominent in political language in the last decade. The World Bank refers to *Low-Income Country Under Stress* (LICUS) and identifies 25 states in this situation, among them Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Congo, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia and Sudan.⁴

This concept, however, is being questioned in a number of academic and political circles as incomplete and not very useful. It is seen as having the deliberate intention of imposing neo-imperial policies from outside or of exaggerating the danger that weaker states within the international system pose for the US and other Western countries.⁵ Likewise, some authors find that the paradigm of the state may undergo change and its social actors may be in the process of negotiation and

* This text, edited and updated, is based on a conference held in the Cordoba Town Hall on 27 March 2006.

¹ Marina Ottaway, Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, 'Africa's big States: towards a new realism', *Policy outlook*, Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2004.

² The list of 'failed' states drawn up by the institute The Fund for Peace indicates 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that are in a more serious situation among the 20 that are in a 'critical' state. See Index of Failed States, *Foreign Policy Spanish Edition*, August-September 2005 and June-July 2006. Critical letters about the Index by Pierre Schori and Luis Alberto Moreno in *Foreign Policy Spanish Edition*, October-November 2005.

³ Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa*, London: Free Press, 2006, p. 688.

⁴ World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, *Engaging with fragile states*, Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2006.

⁵ Stewart Patrick, 'Weak States and global threats: fact or fiction', *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2006, pp. 27-53.

that this does not imply collapse. As David Sogge, an expert in African affairs, maintains: 'Discontinuity in state-society agreements does not necessarily mean rupture'.⁶

Another criticism points out that states are penalised for their weakness without taking into consideration the implications of economic globalisation and the economic models that are being imposed. Another factor is that administrative changes are being forced on these countries, which do not necessarily contribute to peace and security for the population as a whole.⁷ Lastly, some governments regard the concept with distrust and prefer to focus their policies on problem-solving rather than categorising, as exemplified by the peace building policies of the Netherlands and Canada.⁸

The state, on the other hand, is central to almost all political, social and economic issues that are raised about the African continent. Examples are many and varied: the state is explicitly or implicitly present when the G-8 takes decisions concerning the external debt of countries on the continent; when the Commission for Africa makes suggestions about the commercial integration of the continent in the international system; when the decision was taken to transfer human rights violator Charles Taylor to an international prison: when international intervention forces are sent to the Ivory Coast, the DRC and Sierra Leone; when there is a war between factions in Somalia and Ethiopia intervenes; or in the fact that China is gaining ground in Africa.

It is the state that should implement economic policies, and administer justice, effectively or otherwise. It is the central factor when negotiating with international

actors, and it is the state that decides whether it accepts or not the presence of foreign forces in order to guarantee stability.

The issue of the state's role is not a new one in institutional debates on sub-Saharan Africa. However, in recent years the donor community and the press have tended to adopt a three-way perspective which is rather contradictory: on the one hand, sub-Saharan Africa is, according to them, a continent full of fragile, inefficient and corrupt states. On the other hand, rich countries and donors are being asked to change their policies towards 'Africa', as if it were a group of states whose governments would become effective as soon as foreign policies towards them changed. Lastly, it is implicitly taken for granted that the leaders of this group of states will administer these improved policies within the international system in a serious and non-corrupt way.⁹

The reality of Africa is probably somewhere in between. On the one hand, there are indeed a number of states that suffer severe structural problems. They are not good managers neither of their resources, nor of the rights and goods of their citizens. They take advantage of the state system in order to benefit the elite and do not represent their countries in the international community in a reliable manner. At the same time, they take advantage of their international legitimacy as being considered 'the face of the State' in order to gain access to credits and a place in the United Nations and other institutions. On the other hand, the donor community (after having preached for almost two decades about the need to reduce the state's role), together with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), now wants trustworthy governments to exist; and that these governments be good partners, with whom they could negotiate investments, aid and even peace operations and who would manage common goods for the benefit of all citizens. Yet, perhaps it is unrealistic to ask this of most states given their current situation.

⁶ David Sogge, 'Something out there. Failing States as an Imperial pretext', notes for a debate on the forthcoming collective book, to be published by the Transnational Institute, about the US and the idea of the empire.

⁷ See, for example, Susan Woodward, 'Fragile states: exploring the concept', Commentary, FRIDE, December 2005, www.fride.org. By the same author, 'Etats faillis, le poids des mots', *Enjeux internationaux*, 11, 2006, pp. 21-25, www.enjeux-internationaux.org. See also José M. Pureza, Mark Duffied, Susan Woodward and David Sogge, essays on 'Peacebuilding and failed states. Some theoretical notes', Oficina do CES, Centro de Estudos Sociais, University of Coimbra, July 2006, http://www.ces.uc.pt/nucleos/nep/publicacoes_working_papers.php

⁸ See, for example, *Memorandum on post-conflict reconstruction*, The Hague, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Economic Affairs, 2005.

⁹ Stephen Ellis, in 'Roots of African corruption', *Current History*, May 2006, pp. 203-208, points out that 'so-called failed states are not so much places where the state has ceased to exist, but where the formal trappings of statehood serve purposes of strategic deception'.

Cycles of the State

Africa is the poorest continent in the world, with severe problems of corruption, violence, illness and, in general, weak and corrupt governments. It is estimated that half the African population lives in poverty, and epidemics such as HIV and malaria kill tens of thousands of people a year. Armed conflicts caused an enormous loss of lives and destruction in the nineties. While the numbers have decreased, in the past fifteen years war has caused the death of 3.5 million people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, half a million in Rwanda, in addition to approximately 2 million in Sudan between the Muslim North and the Christian South. The unresolved crisis in Darfur has displaced over 2 million people and has caused the death of around 70,000.

In order to situate the issue of the African state in a wider context, it is essential to refer to its history. However, after September 2001, the tendency to see the reality of so-called failed states using only the most immediate data - corruption, institutional shortcomings and human rights violations - has become more heightened. This immediate and rather short-sighted view was coupled with ignoring history and, as a result, any external responsibility.

African states went through different cycles as they were formed. In the first place, was the many-faceted history of the continent, which is complex and to a certain extent unknown, previous to European conquest. This was followed by the period of slavery, the Imperial age and finally the post-colonial and independence era.¹⁰ State building began at the time of independence. At the same time, rifts appeared in the elites and corruption mechanisms were developed as an instrument of government coupled with violence.

¹⁰ See *Histoire Generale de L'Afrique*, eight volumes, Jeune Afrique-Stock-UNESCO, Paris, 1980; John Iliffe, *Africans. The history of a continent*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; and John Reader, *Africa: a biography of the continent*, London: Penguin, 1998.

External indebtedness led to the imposition of liberalisation and culminated in the current state crisis.

When focussing on the state, there are three key periods that need to be identified in the sequence of African history, while bearing in mind the inherent differences between countries. The aim is to analyse features that defined the forms of African social organisation:

- *The colonial period*, when foreign structures deriving from the European state were imposed on local forms of administration;
- *The post-colonial period* when the new elites that had achieved independence undertook *state (and nation) building processes*; and
- *The period of liberalisation and weakening of the state* which took place in the eighties and nineties.

Before Independence

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the African continent was made up of several entities, some of which were highly developed, although in general political borders did not coincide with ethnical ones and were not clearly defined. Nomadism and intense movements of population, with the resulting mix of groups, was an important component which led to the creation of major trading routes. Among the pre-colonial empires on the continent, those of Western Africa were noteworthy: Ghana, Mali, Kanem-Bornou and Zimbabwe. The spread of Islam from the year 1000 AD onwards played an important role in Eastern and Western Africa.

Pre-colonial social structure was very diverse in the continent. There were cities, kingdoms with absolute monarchies and confederations. Other societies were organised according to lineages or the clan, with complex kinship systems which were linked, at the same time, to economic structures. They all depended on agriculture while trade and urbanisation were

limited.¹¹ Some of these structures relied on strong military power, which was used on occasion by the colonial powers to establish alliances. However, the military capacity of colonial powers, even the weaker ones such as Portugal, was far superior to Africa's.

In the words of anthropologist Elizabeth Colson, the situation of the African state in the nineteenth century was as follows:

*In a few regions, simple bands with rudimentary economic institutions made a meagre living from a difficult land. Elsewhere, highly developed states supported a richly varied life. The majority of African peoples lived in societies which lay somewhere along the continuum between the two extremes although they all shared organisational forms based on corporate lineages, both patrilineal and matrilineal [...] Few of the newly expanded polities had had time to become rooted in tradition before they were engulfed by European colonialism.*¹²

The relationship between Europe and Africa is, in fact, prior to the colonial era, especially in North Africa. Three main routes linked sub-Saharan Africa with the Mediterranean and from there with other regions of the world: the Nile valley, the Red Sea and the trans-Saharan routes. Africa exported salt, ivory, spices, oil, gold and slaves. From 1415 onwards, Portugal and then the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, Spain, Germany and Italy spread throughout the continent, conquering areas of North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa first suffered exploitation of its labour force, through the system of slave trading which transported 15 million people away from its borders from 1441 onwards. It is estimated that a similar number died in

the wars to capture them and in the journeys between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, with a significant increase in the eighteenth century. In 1532, traffic towards the Americas began and 80 percent were taken to Brazil. It is calculated that around 10 million people were taken to the Americas.

Slavery was a complex system made up of African political entities which captured men and women of different ethnic groups and communities. The demographic impact was immense. Some studies indicate that population growth was reduced by 50 percent at a time when it was growing in other continents.¹³ The interaction between European merchants and the African governors who supplied slaves produced changes and crises which led to the decline of three state entities in Western Africa: The Great Jolof in Senegal, the Kingdom of Kongo, and the Yoruba Kingdom of Oyo, in the South-Western part of what is now Nigeria.¹⁴ At the same time, political-military trading units were formed, in alliance with the Europeans in Dahomey, Asante and Ndongo, among others, and internal slavery spread, especially of women.¹⁵

The history of slavery reveals alliances and interests that were forged within Africa, very often in connection with colonial agents, and it accounts for the roots of numerous fractures in African societies which were intensified in the following centuries.

¹¹ On social structures, prior to the arrival of the Europeans, from the point of view of African historiography see Ferrán Iniesta, *El planeta negro. Aproximación histórica a las culturas africanas*, Madrid: Los libros de la catarata, 1992.

¹² Elizabeth Colson, 'African society at the time of the scramble', in L.H Gann and Peter Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p.27.

¹³ John Iliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-146.

Colonial Structures

The colonial era lasted around a century, from 1880 to 1960, but it marked the continent's future in a crucial manner, especially with regards to imposing borders, implanting the modern European state model, organising human groups and defining roles for the many different colonial entities.

The carving up of Africa by the colonial powers gave rise to a series of colonial entities specialised in producing resources. Each one was connected to a metropolis. The development of the industrial and scientific revolution enabled colonial expansion by means of railways and ships (for transporting minerals and agricultural produce) and weapons. At the same time, that same revolution and the changes it produced required raw materials such as cotton and oils. Single-crop farming was linked to controlling prices on the international market.

Around 190 cultural groups were arbitrarily divided and over 10,000 political entities of many different types and importance were amalgamated into 40 European colonies and protectorates.¹⁶ States were formed according to European interests in natural resources and the organisation of communities. African social units reacted in different ways to the arrival of traders, governors, soldiers and missionaries. Some resisted, others formed alliances, some were eliminated, and all suffered profound changes.

This complex process generated illogical territorial units which, in many cases, divided communities. In the future, this would prove to be one of the most serious problems in building states that reflected unity among communities. In fact, many communities would subsequently fight to secede or gain independence.

As part of this process, some states and communal groups were strengthened as a means of forging

alliances with local actors and delegating domination. South Africa, South Rhodesia, Kenya, South-Western Africa and Algeria were favoured as sub-continental centres.

In general, the colonial state was little equipped to take control of itself, and this became particularly evident in the post-colonial era. The colonial state was interventionist, authoritarian, non-representative and acted by coercion and co-opting. These characteristics resurfaced when independent post-colonial states were formed.¹⁷

Colonial administrators recruited and trained local groups who benefited from access to power and collaborated in colonial administration through violence and the organisation of local work. They were also involved in the administration of justice and the precarious taxation system which ensured that colonies did not prove onerous for the citizens of the colonising countries. Some colonial powers used *indirect domination* and others *direct domination*. However, in either case, the presence of Africans was a reality. Members of these groups related to the colonial system formed part of elites which, from the Second World War onwards, questioned the power of their colonial masters and made a bid to restore African nationalism. These elites were inspired, in part, by the feeling of identity several communities had preserved since the arrival of the Europeans.

The colonists had no interest in preparing independent states nor did it enter into their future plans. As Gann and Duignan point out, 'The Europeans thus developed a doctrine of imperial rule which, in the Livingstonian missionary tradition, justified the white governance by linking pacification, economic development, technological innovation and moral uplift as part of a coherent philosophy'.¹⁸ In general, there was a world of difference between the moral mission and the political

¹⁷ Regarding the characteristics of the colonial system in Africa, see the excellent synthesis by Alex Thompson, *An introduction to African politics*, London: Routledge, 2004.

¹⁸ Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann (Eds), *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 24.

¹⁶ Martin Meredith, op. cit., p. 2.

practice of domination and the economic policy of extracting resources. This rift became obvious when colonial powers used repression to stay in power, as has been demonstrated by the recent investigation into massive crimes by Great Britain in Kenya against the Mau Mau.¹⁹

The links between state and society were weak and in the future they would become conflictive. The colonial entity acted by coercion in order to extract resources and had no intention of giving the citizens services or freedoms in return. The model of imperial economy did not contemplate reinvestment of profits in peripheral structures, for example, in education, health or other infrastructure other than those needed for extracting resources. Forced labour and low salaries continued. Imperial centres encouraged social divisions among ethnic groups, tribes, clans and family groups.

The colonial era left behind a level of infrastructure that enabled the development of the primary sector, and they also bequeathed knowledge and formed an elite. It was part of this elite, in fact, that rebelled and ended up forming new states. The colonial system also provided forms of institutional and labour organisation, sometimes going further than they had intended.

Building the Independent State

Most sub-Saharan countries became independent between the fifties and the seventies in the twentieth century.²⁰ When the empires left, it was agreed or imposed that in Africa the state model should be democratic, liberal and parliamentary. The social sectors that had rebelled in the fifties wanted to take over institutional power, be sovereign and have the capacity of self-determination, and to situate these new states within the international framework. To achieve these ends, they considered that they should transform multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious and, in some cases, multiracial entities into cohesive units. The post-colonial state was, therefore, a structure that integrated people of different languages, religions, traditions and notions of property.

The *imagined communities* referred to by Benedict Anderson as the basis of the Nation, were forced to imagine and accept the new post-colonial state.²¹ Nationalism, in the sense of wanting to have a state that would shelter a community that considered itself a Nation, was the ideology that informed these processes. The post-colonial state used coercion and violence in substitution of a social pact between states and citizens. And the necessary exchange and democratic tension between citizens and governments never happened.

The post-colonial state was formed without previously developing civil society and its networks. However, at the same time, the immense multiplicity of cultural, economic and political networks already existing conditioned and weakened the birth of the liberal Weberian state to the extent that some researchers consider that 'state institutions remain embedded in

¹⁹ See the excellent book by Caroline Elkins, *Britain's gulag. The brutal end of Empire in Kenya*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2005.

²⁰ See Guy Arnold, *Africa; a modern history*, London: Atlantic books, 2005, on the post-colonial period.

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities*, London: Verso books, 1991.

society. State does not lead society in Africa; and state does not control society. Societal values permeate state institutions in ways that are counterproductive to national development'.²²

In addition to the territorial boundaries inherited from colonial maps, these new states acquired armed forces, a constitution, and a nationalist secular ideology which overrode traditional religious identities. However, by stretching the concept of Nation in order to construct a state, the elites ended up, in many cases, repressing groups who resisted or who did not see the benefits of these wide-ranging changes.

Nationalism was the ideological concept underpinning national unity. However, the promoters of nationalism considered *ethnicity* (the idea of community based on common notions regarding origins, traditions, ancestors and culture) and *African religions* (beliefs based on animism and ancestors, often combined with Christian or Muslim elements) as ideologies opposed to their efforts to achieve unity.²³

The post-colonial state model implied a formal separation of power. However, in reality there was a predominance of Executive Power (and personalism) over Judicial and Legislative powers. Centralisation of power was inherited from the anti-colonial elite and the leaders of national freedom who had gained legitimacy. The process of centralisation was justified by the need to achieve national unity and the relativist justification that the African state model did not need to follow the European model. Centralisation led to a unipersonal and clientelist power, arbitrary and above the Law. At the same time, the previous existence of family and tribal networks facilitated clientelism and a type of state and power that had 'a multiplicity of networks' and in which 'faction-fighting' was part of the very structure situated 'at the heart of the state'.²⁴

²² Goran Hayden, *African politics in comparative perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 228.

²³ Alex Thompson, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

²⁴ Jean François Bayart, *El estado en Africa*, Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 1999, p. 331. Bayart is currently one of the most outstanding writers that critically analyses the links between African social and

The fact that relations between the three powers of the state, and links between state and civil society, were poorly developed prevented the creation of conflict resolution mechanisms. Another factor was the subordination of local powers. Coup d'état and political conspiracy became the most common forms of political replacement, with the armed forces playing a prominent role.

Africa ended up with a mixed model combining the rational-legal institution (according to Max Weber) and the personalist-clientelist one. Some authors, such as Chabal and Daloz, consider that the African state is *vacuous* because it was not consolidated after independence but fractured by internal disputes. It is inefficient because the elites had no interest in an institutionalised state. Instead of the lineal development of the state that happened in Europe, the African model may have developed structural inefficiencies.²⁵

Campos Serrano points out, paradoxically, that the state is 'oversized and removed from local dynamics' while at the same time it is 'weak and inoperative'. The result is that 'the modernising state of nationalist Africans has not been able to transform economic and social structures inherited from colonisation'.²⁶

Faced with this failure, and the diversity of theories that range from classifying African states as criminal or simply inexistent,²⁷ the response of academic studies and the recipes of international organisations have focused on rebuilding the state in Africa according to the Weberian model, while adding a large proportion of civil society participation. However, a new current of thought suggests that the answer lies in taking

cultural networks and the structure of the modern state. He examines the way in which both sides contributed to the enrichment of the elites and the precarious survival of the intermediate and poor sectors.

²⁵ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa camina. El desorden como instrumento político*, Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2001.

²⁶ Alicia Campos Serrano, 'Política poscolonial al sur del Sahara', in Jokin Alberdi et. al., *Africa en el horizonte*, Madrid: Los libros de la catarata and Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo y Cooperación, 2006.

²⁷ See, for example, Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis and Béatrice Hibou, *The criminalization of the State in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 1999.

advantage of the mixture of social forms on which the African state was built to propose a different model.

Forrest and Francis, for example, consider that rebuilding the state 'is not merely replicating modern Western state structures', but 'may represent a hybrid authority system combining aspects of pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary leadership structures in ways that more accurately reflect the existing social and political bases of rural societies'.²⁸ These reconfigured states would be characterised by inclusion and political participation and a profound decentralisation that, in part, would coincide with pre-colonial geographical and community bonds. At the same time, Francis considers that mechanisms of security and regional cooperation could help to strengthen these weaker state units.²⁹

Neoliberal Policies

In the eighties the clientelist model was in crisis, especially owing to the fact that state resources had become scarcer – there was less to share around. African countries exported cheaply and bought at expensive rates. Furthermore, they reinvested in ineffective import substitutions, in an oversized public sector and in sumptuary expenses while neglecting agricultural production.

By not diversifying agricultural production, the opportunities for widening domestic markets and local consumption were limited. At the same time, the state sector overexploited farmers to produce more: they were paid low rates while the produce was sold at higher prices on the market and profits were pocketed by officials. Corruption was a widespread practice at all levels of society and government.

²⁸ Joshua Forrest, in L. Villalon and P. Huxtable (Eds), *The African State at a critical juncture: between disintegration and reconfiguration*, London: Lynne Rienner, 1998; and David J. Francis, *Uniting Africa*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p. 56. The book by Francis provides an excellent overview of the debate on the state in Africa in Chapter 2.

²⁹ David J. Francis, op. cit., p. 58.

In the case of countries with coveted resources fetching high prices on international markets, the crisis of the rural sector was compounded by the corruption and wealth of the elite controlling these resources. The case of Angola is, in this sense, paradigmatic, given that the oil elite has also managed to control diamond production which was in the hands of the guerrilla *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA). Angola is currently a fragile state as far as its institutional structures are concerned and very strong regarding political control of power and its international role as a major exporter of oil.³⁰

The economic model of development based on single crop farming was confronted with an inequitable international market, failure of import replacement and increases in oil prices and interest rates in the eighties. These factors, combined with sumptuary expenses and the purchase of weapons, produced the indebtedness of countries in the South which came to a head in the nineties.

When debt began to cripple African countries, they accepted the rules of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and they applied *structural adjustment programmes*. In return for refinancing debt, adjustment measures had to be imposed that included cutbacks in state spending, reductions in subventions for social spending, devaluation of national currencies in order to attract foreign investment and market liberalisation. At the same time, international credit organisations insisted that African states should devote more resources and attention to the agricultural sector, which had been neglected in favour of urban growth.³¹

When several countries increased their agricultural production they came up against two problems. First, the protectionist barriers, and second, as supply

³⁰ See David Sogge, 'Angola, global "good governance" also needed', Working Paper N° 23, FRIDE, June 2006; and Tony Hodges, *Angola: anatomy of an oil state*, Oxford: James Currey, 2004.

³¹ See Jean-Pierre Foirry, *L'Afrique: continent d'avenir?*, Paris: Ellipses, coll. 2006; Christopher Clapham, 'Governmentality and economic policy in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 17, N°4, pp. 809-824. For a case study of Sierra Leone see David Keen, *Conflict & collusion in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Currey-IPA, 2005.

increased, the prices of raw materials fell. The result was that African countries could not accumulate the wealth that neoliberal formulas had promised. International financial organisations then recommended that African countries should produce semi-processed and manufactured materials for domestic and international markets. However, no national or foreign investment was made available for this.³²

The social impact of structural adjustment was very high. The state reduced the number of its workers and many public services were cut back in addition to social spending and programmes such as subsidies for food. Education and health services were privatised, and this had a negative impact on the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

Adjustment policies put an end to the dynamics of the patrimonialist state. Those who had lived by clientelism became poor or went on to organise or form part of rebellions. Political instability increased. When the state could no longer maintain the balance between communities with different ethnical identities, rebellion began in defence of these identities. In some countries, armed groups arose that questioned the state. Some states collapsed (Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone), or almost collapsed (former Zaire), while in others, secessionist confrontations began (Sudan). In some cases, democratisation processes emerged (Zambia and Malawi) and there was an increase in civil society.

Structural adjustment, however, was also profitable for some elites. Bayart argues that austerity programmes 'made inevitable the deterioration of large-scale equilibriums and the pressure applied by funds suppliers was also turned to advantage [...] The dismantling of the public sector, a demand made by international financial institutions, was not necessarily

detrimental for African regimes. It dried up autonomous channels of accumulation, without actually forming a real marketplace, and in this way it reinforced the position of the president who regained the role as the main provider of sinecures'.³³

'The failure of structural adjustment programmes is currently recognised by most people', declares the expert Anne-Cécile Robert. Owing to these plans, African society became polarised between the very poor and the very rich; the importance of the middle classes decreased and the state was demolished'. Public sector weakness contributed 'to the dislocation of societies. On the one hand, the state found that it did not have resources to redistribute income' in areas such as education and health.

On the other hand, 'impoverishment fomented discontent in poorly maintained armies, creating contexts favourable to coups d'états [...] government officials were paid months and even years late'. Furthermore, 'a truly legitimate authority, capable of giving direction to society did not exist. Public power was not now in a position to define the direction the state took, and this gave rise to alternative discourses, in particular of an ethnic nature'.³⁴

Failure was also due to the way the reform was run from outside. Clapham has pointed out that international credit organisations believed they could make trustworthy agreements with local governments. They did not disburse promised aid and investment funds, and their intention was that adjustment should make the African state into a likeness of Western states.³⁵

As a result, over the last 20 years, a crisis of authority has taken place, arising from the crises of accumulation and governability. The crises in the

³² The economist Paul Collier has recently suggested again that the failure of African economies is due, in part, to the fact that countries in the region did not start production of goods that needed intensive labour, as some Asian countries did. At the same time, he points out that if international markets are not opened, this project would fail. P. Collier, 'Africa's three main problems and how to fix them', *Financial Times*, 21 December 2006.

³³ Jean-François Bayart, op. cit., pp. 335-336.

³⁴ Anne-Cécile Robert, 'El sueño de una "segunda independencia" en el continente africano', *Le monde diplomatique en español*, December 2006, pp. 18-19.

³⁵ Christopher Clapham, 'Discerning the New Africa', *International Affairs*, N°74, April 1998, pp. 266-267.

eighties and the nineties wore out the patrimonialist system and its legitimacy, along with its networks. Although constitutional mechanisms for ousting those who govern, or for making them accountable, were inexistent or weak, social protest against the so-called kleptocratic or predatory states increased.

The crisis of the state also led to the creation or rebirth of political parties and exerted pressure in favour of a multiparty system. Churches and trade unions also fought for change. Means of economic social resistance were generated including communal organisations, micro-credit systems, and self-defence groups. Circuits were created outside state-controlled markets and schools were funded by communities. Family, religious and identity networks, which have enabled people to survive and resist,³⁶ were set up.

Parallel markets and economies not controlled by the state have become a significant force, for example, up to two thirds of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Uganda. Smuggling is another activity that has spread, as well as organised and petty crime. Farmers sell their produce in other countries where they can get a better price.

The crises of accumulation and governability also gave rise to new armed insurgence, such as the National Resistance Army (NRA) of Yoweri Museveni in Uganda; the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF); the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF); the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF); the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL); and armed groups in Sierra Leone and Liberia in addition to other groups that fought for decade such as UNITA in Angola and Sudan. The breakdown of the state created the appearance of *warlords* and militia that survived by exploiting natural resources such as diamonds and coltan. At the same time, weak states have resorted to mercenary armies for survival.

In Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda and former Zaire the central authority of the state collapsed. Alliances and repression that kept governments in power ran out of funds and could not resist pressure from other actors. Somalia is the clearest case where since 1991 there has not been a central government (except a government in exile which in December 2006 was able to come back thanks to an armed intervention by Eritrea). One part of the country, Somaliland, has broken away from the rest.

William Reno considers that some states have survived as fictitious entities for the direct benefit of elites who have formed alliances with external actors, sustained by mercenaries while they exploit the country's resources. This is the case in former Zaire, Liberia and Sierra Leone where an almost total division and fracture has taken place between state power and civil society.³⁷

³⁶ See the following essay in this publication by David Sogge on the development and concept of civil society in Africa.

³⁷ William Reno, 'Clandestine economy, violence and states in Africa', in Mariano Aguirre and Mabel González (Coords.), *World politics, dangerous trends*, CIP Yearbook 2001, Barcelona: Icaria Editorial, 2001, pp.19-52.

Development and State

State consolidation in Africa is fundamentally a task for local actors. However, international development cooperation can help states in setting up institutions and instruments and by providing officials for effective administration.³⁸ Traditional development cooperation (European and American), both official and unofficial, is now facing a challenge as China has gained a foothold in Africa through investment, the purchase of energy resources and aid funds. A number of African countries are diversifying their links with rising regional powers, such as Brazil.³⁹ At the same time, the African Union is assuming a more relevant role in regional conflict resolution and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is becoming more prominent.

Drawing from different proposals, economist Luis de Sebastian sums up a series of development objectives that would have a direct impact on state stability. The most noteworthy are:

- 1) Fulfil the Millennium Development Goals for 2015;
- 2) Cancel bilateral debt and provide long-term investment funds;
- 3) Open up European markets to African products;
- 4) Health cooperation through funding, volunteers, medicines, medical material and collaboration so that Africa can develop its own research and development in the field of pharmaceutical products;
- 5) Control the sale of short weapons;
- 6) Cooperate in initiatives to help protect and reinsert child soldiers;

- 7) Establish norms of behaviour for private and public companies that invest in Africa, especially extraction companies;
- 8) Cooperation to raise the educational level, training and rights of African women; and
- 9) Encourage and assist protection of the environment and climatic change.⁴⁰

A number of international institutions and rich countries have set up initiatives in the last few years to tackle poverty, corruption and to promote infrastructure. Among these are the World Bank, the International Monetary fund, the European Union through its Economic Association Agreements, the G-8 and its initiative for heavily indebted poor countries and even NEPAD.⁴¹

Anne-Cécile Robert points out that, 'These initiatives, while they are presented as learning from the lessons of past policies, continue to be prisoners of *a priori* neoliberal ideologies, and they are careful to avoid the forbidden debate on alternative macroeconomic policies'. Furthermore, 'debt reduction is always conditioned to the "medicines that kill": liberalisation, privatisation, straight-jacketing of the public sector and free trade, and opening of markets to world competition'.⁴²

Tensions between society, political and economic power, and between external and internal factors will give rise to future forms of the state in Africa, in ways that are difficult to envisage. The greatest mystery is whether they will serve to administer justice, democracy and equality, or whether they will serve to perpetuate complex forms of exploitation.

³⁸ On the links between development policies and politics see Goran Hayden, *op. cit.*

³⁹ See Mbuyi Kabunda Badi, 'International African relations and inter-African relations in the globalization era', *Africa en el horizonte*, 2006, pp. 74-105.

⁴⁰ Luis de Sebastian, *Africa, pecado de Europa*, Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2006, pp. 251-279.

⁴¹ See for example the proposals by the Commission for Africa, *Our common interest*, London: Penguin, 2005

⁴² Anne-Cécile Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

African Civil Domains: Realities and Mirages*

David Sogge

Introduction

Centuries before the idea of citizenship first appeared, tens of millions of Africans had been forcibly globalised – as commodities, not citizens. Globalisation has since penetrated the entire continent in successive thrusts – armed conquest, alien settlement, colonial rule, post-colonial regimes and proxy wars. Only exceptionally has Africa's subordination opened up political spaces in which some rights and liberties could be secured. Africans have shown remarkable stamina and grit, but most remain effectively subjects of the world system rather than its citizens.

This document considers one of the contemporary remedies for Africa's predicament – the promotion of 'civil society'. How closely does the idea of civil society correspond to the ways Africans themselves develop their associational life and politics? Has it functioned in the past? Can it foster robust citizenship in the future?

At some times and places, answers to these questions have been affirmative. Where Africans could organise to transform the political order – the ending of minority rule in Southern Africa being a major case in point – rights and collective self-esteem have advanced. Yet where the interplay of global interests and national vulnerabilities has had the upper hand the advance of citizenship has been halted or reversed.

* A slightly different version of this article appeared in the book C. Surankya et. al (Eds.), *Global Civil Society, World Citizenship and Education*, Amsterdam: SWP Publishers, 2005. It is based on a longer discussion paper, *Civil Domains in African Settings: Some Issues*, commissioned in 2004 by the Dutch donor organisation Hivos.

Under coercion or collusion with forces abroad, African leaders have squandered public goods and public trust. Sovereign powers and surpluses have been transferred abroad, open political competition outlawed and space for active citizenship marginalised or pushed underground. The hollowness of public affairs seems to validate the witticism, once made about democratic deficits in North Atlantic countries, that politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs that properly concern them.

In many settings, public institutions have decayed. In a number of cases – Somalia, Congo, and Sierra Leone – they have collapsed outright. Explaining why states fail is a complex and disputed matter. Many home-grown villains from Mobutu to Mengistu are blameworthy. But as powers over fundamental political and economic choices have shifted even further upward and outward, to Western-based entities that make the rules – donor agencies, bankers, investors and policy think-tanks – external factors loom very large indeed.

Foreign institutions and their local technocratic allies paid attention almost exclusively to economic matters. Government was important only as facilitator for business and guarantor of debt repayment. In exchange for their aid and loans, donors required African economies to pursue what successful economies elsewhere *never* did: 'market fundamentalism', a strong admixture of privatisation, deregulation and public austerity. Donors imposed this policy package as a technical imperative, claiming that there is no alternative. They also insisted on restructuring government: central banks and the finance ministries gained powers (supervised from abroad), while

parliaments were reduced to debating such issues as commemorative holidays and the national anthem.

Donors sought substitutes and sub-contractors for the state in the private sector. In the 1980s they discovered the virtues of the non-profit branch of this sector, where older entities such as mission hospitals and more recently created non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been tasked with providing a range of services, from schooling and healthcare to small enterprise promotion, that were once considered public sector responsibilities.

Under a paradigm of 'civil society', donors have recently elevated the non-profit sector's political status. Here a main task is advocacy toward public authorities. This paradigm holds that leaders must account not only to the lenders and policy mandarins in Washington, D.C., and Paris, but also to voluntary groups in the townships and the villages.

Yet this model of 'civil society' has evoked controversy. Questions have arisen about the effects of NGOs not only as substitute providers of basic services, but also as means to promote the public interest broadly in political forums. Some argue that the whole concept of 'civil society' as promoted by outsiders does not match African sociological or political realities, and can ultimately weaken, rather than strengthen the power of common citizens. There are calls, in short, for a re-think.

Background

Like Europeans or other peoples under absolutist regimes, Africans have long aspired to real citizenship, the exercise of authentic rights and responsibilities in political life. At crucial moments they have shown enormous vigour and creativity in pursuit of those aspirations.

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, struggles for African self-determination reached crescendos of activism. Nationalist movements emerged in virtually all colonies, as they did in South Africa. Where colonial powers and settlers refused the very notion of majority rule, a few parties developed guerrilla factions. Then, as today, authorities were quick to label such movements and their leaders, including Nelson Mandela, 'terrorists'. Yet more important than armed factions were those whose activism was non-violently political and cultural. Many kinds of voluntary organisations captured and channelled African anger and hope. Among these were:

- Independent churches, such as the Watchtower Movement in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland and the prophetic Zionist churches in South Africa and Mozambique;
- Tax revolts, such as by market women in Eastern Nigeria in the 1920s and later by residents of the Rhodesian copper-belt (in today's Zambia);
- Organised labour, developing from the 1920s across West Africa, peaking in the 1950s in Southern Africa - factory, dock, mine and railway workers often organised in collaboration with nationalist political movements, sometimes transcending ethnic boundaries in 'horizontal' patterns; and
- Intellectuals and publicists, inspired by the Bible, Marcus Garvey or Lenin, began forming politico-cultural groups and publishing pamphlets and newsletters.

African assertiveness provoked fear and counter-measures. Colonial and settler authorities and some of their indigenous allies were actively hostile to these organisations, especially the left-wing ones. After 1950 the colonial authorities took a fight-fire-with-fire approach. In the British-held territories this was called 'Community Development'. Introduced with a lot of fanfare about 'participation', it prefigured many initiatives driven by the foreign aid system today. The main point was not, however, emancipation and self-rule, but political domestication. For colonizers in the Cold War years, Africans had to be inoculated against the viruses of nationalism and socialism. French, British, Portuguese and American help in repressing or manipulating political, media, trade union and other forms of civil activism was usually quiet and discreet, but unrelenting nonetheless.

In helping end minority rule in the former Portuguese colonies, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, civil activists were crucial. Through boycotts, strikes, non-cooperation, sabotage, legal services, and distribution of outlawed news-sheets, amongst other actions, they helped mobilise millions and draw sympathetic world attention to their struggles.

Today, many decades after the end of colonial rule, such triumphs for citizenship have yet to be repeated. While it is true that citizen activists helped provoke shifts at the top of political pyramids in Zambia up to 1991 and in Kenya in the late 1990s, broad social movements intent on transformation are nowhere to be seen. Instead, associative life has grown along strongly divergent branches. Some of these, as in South Africa, continue in pursuit of emancipatory goals – for example, residents' associations in townships and the huge trade union federation COSATU, with a membership of more than 40 percent of the waged workforce. These and some other bodies of activists concerned about the environment, women and violence, and land rights have contributed to politics in ways that resemble civil action found in the West or in Latin America.

Yet other branches of associative life, though far less visible to outsiders, are much larger. These networks

and informal associations are much less concerned with citizenship and rights. Associative life is driven by a variety of purposes. A small but visible bloc indeed pursues emancipatory ends. A less visible but dangerous minority is driven by supremacist ambitions, especially towards foreigners or ethnic minorities. Most groupings, however, hold few if any political ambitions; their stance is self-regarding, even inward-looking. In this category are found:

- 1) Christian sects and Islamic denominations, which with foreign help and local proselytising have grown explosively in recent decades among the poor, excluded and war-affected;
- 2) Business and professional groupings ranging from associations linking city migrants with their home towns to secret societies like the Masonic brotherhood (whose membership includes key politicians in Francophone Africa) that promote international networking among elites;
- 3) Economic networks, often based on mixtures of faith and ethnicity, such as the Mouride Islamic business networks in Wolof-speaking communities of Senegal, Kimbanguist and Baptist church enterprises in KiKongo-speaking parts of Angola, and Lutheran networks in KiChagga-speaking zones of Tanzania; others pivot on long-distance migrant labour – an economic and social pillar in much of Southern Africa and countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Somalia and Sudan; and
- 4) Non-political NGOs competing as social enterprises in a market for donor aid grants and increasingly for government contracts for service provision, analogous to contracting out to the business sector.

In short, associational life in Africa shows diversity in scope and moral compass. 'Civil society' is not, as some have tried to portray it, a coherent unified thing with a plan to improve the world. It is better seen as a realm or domain of different and even opposing groupings. It is a social and political space for both consensus and conflict.

Civil domains⁴³ exist in Africa and have provided political space for movements with real emancipatory political impact. Yet associative life in most civil domains, particularly outside South Africa, does not pivot around organised citizens' engagement in public issues. Some of that deficit can be traced to repression and fear. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others provide copious evidence of intimidation and brutality directed especially toward independent media and trade unions.

However, there may be deeper reasons for these deficits. Indeed some observers question the overall relevance of standard 'civil society' paradigms in a continent where politics tends to take place according to rules and norms that allow no real role for citizens' organisations in the conventional sense.

Most ideas about 'civil society' developed on the basis of social formations and systems of governance of the West, including to some extent Latin America. As the Cold War ended and left-wing parties were no longer seen as a serious threat, Western policy makers warmed to the idea. They took for granted its applicability in Africa, going by the taken-for-granted hypothesis that all societies are going to converge around the Western model. For Karl Marx, who showed enormous respect for capitalist modernisation, 'the most developed country shows to the less developed the image of its future'. If this 'convergence hypothesis' is valid, then notions of civil society can be applied just about anywhere with few problems.

Yet in many parts of the world, including Africa, solid evidence for convergence is scarce. It is getting harder, not easier, to portray African dynamics as mere replays of the Western past. Africans are indeed making their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. Some circumstances relevant to the public sphere are:

- 1) Enormous variations in African ecologies, terrains, local modes of production, cultures and ways of exercising authority; these are far more diverse than those of Europe west of the Ural mountains;
- 2) Uneven development; as the Western world system drew Africa into its economic and political orbit, it created enclaves, social schisms and polarisation. Zones favoured by Western interests grew richer, draining other zones of labour and other resources and thus 'under-developing' them;
- 3) Racism and 'essentialism'; colonialists often assigned 'essential traits' of character according to race or ethnic origins, thereby shaping collective identities and reinforcing regional divisions and social stratification;
- 4) Imposed systems of governance; state institutions have rarely grown organically from within. Rather they were transplanted from Europe following armed conquest, within arbitrarily defined territories; and
- 5) Little reciprocity between rulers and the ruled; most African states depend on mineral or agribusiness revenues and foreign aid. Leaders can claim these resources without facing strong incentives to meet needs and wishes of citizens as taxpayers, producers, consumers or voters.

Those are some general circumstances. What about circumstances specific to associational life? Observers have noted the following kinds of reasons to show caution about, if not reject entirely, the idea of civil domain in many African settings. Similar cautions are also heard about Central Asia, the Middle East and parts of Southeast Asia:

- 1) In principle, associative life in civil domains takes place on the basis of *voluntary* participation or active consent. Yet in many African settings much associative life is based on *ascribed or involuntary affiliation*, notably in kinship and other customary systems into which one is born or otherwise obliged to be part of.

⁴³ Defined here as: *A social realm or space apart from the state, familial bonds and for-profit firms, in which people associate together voluntarily to reproduce, promote or contest the character of social, cultural, economic or political rules that concern them.*

- 2) Access to the civil domain is supposed to be open to all. Yet in many African settings, older men hold great status and social power; voluntary associative life is therefore smaller and less diverse than would be the case if familial authority did not loom large.
- 3) As a rule, civil domains should enable cross-cutting, horizontal ties to develop to defend or promote group interests in the public sphere. Yet in many African settings, associative life is organised *vertically*, according to logics of lineage, customary or patriarchal authority and ethnic allegiance.
- 4) In most thinking about civil domains, conflict follows logics of bargaining, ideological struggle and other non-violent ways of getting ahead politically. But in many African settings, conflict often follows zero-sum, winner-takes-all logics around neutralising or crushing opponents rather than bargaining with them.
- 5) Classically, civil domains develop on the basis of wage- and salary-earning strata and the petty bourgeoisie. Yet in much of Africa these strata and classes have yet to form sufficient 'critical masses' in pursuit of common interests. Complicating matters has been the over-representation of non-Africans or non-nationals in some of these social strata.
- 6) Active civil domains demand participants' time. Yet material poverty sets limits to the time available. This is especially the case for women, as struggles for survival (often requiring traversal of huge distances) and caring for others leave too little time for meaningful participation.
- 7) Civil domains classically emerge where the state presides over *one* public sphere according to rules that apply to everyone. Yet in many African settings, politics take place in ambiguous and non-transparent ways in what the Nigerian political scientist Peter Ekeh terms 'two publics': a 'primordial public' responding to moral imperatives of private realms of kith and kin, and a 'civic public' responding, with few moral prohibitions, to opportunities arising in formal politics and state resources. Ekeh wrote in 1975: 'The dialectical relationship between the two publics foments the unique political issues that have come to characterize African politics'.
- 8) Vibrant civil domains become possible where there is basic public order and a state capable of making rules and operating according to them. Yet in the post-colonial period in many African settings, the state is weakly institutionalised; it has too little autonomy from society to form an object of formal, open political contestation. 'Real' politics - processes determining who gets what, when and how - take place through informal, non-public and conveniently 'disordered' systems that pit 'Big Men' and their followers against one another.
- 9) In a classical anti-government script, such as in the drama of Eastern Europe, emancipatory civil domain groups confront state power in order to replace it with something responsive, impartial and democratic. In some African settings, however, some civil actors aim not to transform the state but to gain access to it, even to be co-opted into it, without changing the rules of the game.
- 10) In some African settings, customary power - the rule of chiefs, headmen and 'native authorities' - has been perpetuated beyond its colonial origins to dominate most rural, and even some urban populations. The Ugandan political scientist Mahmood Mamdani terms this 'decentralised despotism'. In its colonial and newer hybrid forms (such as local party bosses) customary power seriously constrains space for public voice. Even democratically elected regimes show no interest in abolishing such systems.
- 11) Civil domains are supposed to allow for open, assertive, broadly-organised expressions of popular discontent. Yet in many African settings, resistance is often expressed individually and passively. People prefer not collective 'voice' but atomised 'exit':

evasion, non-compliance, flight. More active variants involve what the Leiden-based sociologist Asef Bayat terms 'quiet encroachment', such as squatting urban land and illicitly tapping water and electricity. Significantly, resistance can take assertive forms when such quietly acquired gains are under threat, as in the case of poor residents fighting forced removals in cities like Luanda.

- 12) Usual notions of the civil domain allow little room for violence. Yet ruling groups and civil actors wishing to challenge them today can easily acquire weapons. Both kinds of power-seekers thus become less inclined to pursue long-term, complex routes to power through non-violent political mobilisation and interchange with citizens. Evidence from countries like Nigeria suggests that where voluntary groups start using violence in the name of justice, overall prospects for citizen action in the civil domain get worse.

The foregoing suggests that emancipatory associational life in many African settings faces a host of obstacles. Yet there is evidence of capacities to overcome obstacles, particularly from times and places in which Africans mobilised to end foreign and racial domination. Citizen action has developed unevenly, depending to a great deal on circumstances. Among favourable factors have been:

- Strong states, including the colonial order;
- Critical masses of large wage- and salary-earning strata with secondary schooling;
- Urbanisation through economic growth (as against forced urbanisation born of war or radical rural impoverishment); and
- Globalised culture, especially literacy in major languages, and organised religion.

One further factor merits special attention here: promotion of citizen action from abroad, be it by missionaries, official aid programmes or solidarity movements. About this factor there are mixed reviews. Certainly European development NGOs and aid agencies wishing to help build 'civil society' in Africa face tensions and dilemmas in pursuit of their goals.

Western Influence and African Dynamics

This document has already offered some reasons to believe that Western models may not be the best guides to understanding the past, present and future of civil domains in much of Africa. Yet it is undeniable that Western influences, driven with particular force since the 1980s by foreign aid, account for much of the rapid growth of NGOs in Africa. The balance of this article examines both pitfalls and potentials emerging in the interplay of African and foreign-led dynamics.

Let us begin with the West African nation of Mali, where 'civil society building' efforts of several Dutch development agencies, co-financed with official aid funds, recently underwent a rigorous independent evaluation.⁴⁴ The study found that the agencies themselves had no clear strategy toward strengthening the civil domain. They preferred to work with NGOs - a relatively new and externally-dependent type of organisation - rather than Malian membership-based bodies. Among faith-based NGOs, only Christian NGOs received support - despite the fact that Christians account for less than a tenth of Mali's population, which is overwhelmingly Islamic.

The evaluation considered civil society building performance along four dimensions: first, the build-up of basic organisational capacities; second, the growth and cultivation of networks, that is, fostering social movements; third, influencing public policy, and in the fourth place, effectiveness in fostering citizenship, that is, consciousness and action for the public good. Most Malian grantee organisations showed evidence of the first, organisational strength. Some showed evidence of the second in that they had developed better ties with officials (but much less so with other civil domain bodies). Few showed any capacities to influence public

⁴⁴ Kees Biekart, *Medefinancieringsorganisaties en maatschappijopbouw: Synthesestudie*, Ede: Stuurgroep voor de evaluatie van het Nederlandse Medefinancieringsprogramma, 2002.

policy or promote citizenship - the third and fourth dimensions of assessment.

Mali stands out in West Africa for the vibrancy of its social movements and party activism, especially in the 1990s. Yet this study suggests that Dutch agency support was hardly relevant to that kind of mobilised citizen activism.

Research elsewhere indicates that results by other non-profit agencies may fall even further short of hopes. In some cases outcomes are counter-productive. For example, the large faith-based development agency World Vision had mounted major efforts to 'empower' communities in rural Tanzania. On close inspection by independent sociologists, World Vision had in fact helped split those communities, privileging minorities and excluding majorities. Sadly, such outcomes are far from infrequent.

For more than a decade, a coalition of interests in international aid bodies has rejected 'top-down' approaches in favour of 'participatory' methods. Yet in practice, those new methods have often camouflaged old-fashioned autocratic power. 'Participation' in some places is experienced as manipulation, deception and unpaid local labour. Some now speak of the 'tyranny of participation', and discuss it only with adjectives: 'veneered participation' (going-through-the motions); 'inequitable participation' (women and minorities marginalised), and 'bureaucratic participation' (planning-by-numbers, discussing-by-checklists).

Some wish to drop the term participation altogether. Cees Leeuwis of Wageningen University urges adoption of more political terms like *negotiation*. Real citizenship is not served by cheap substitutes; rather it requires 'teeth' - concrete obligations and rights capable of being upheld in a court of law. Democratizing development is a noble pursuit and desperately needed. Public planners and civic activists have a lot more to learn about accounting downward to members and citizens. Yet this can pose tensions, as 'downward' accountability might come at the cost of

less frequent and intense accountability upward, towards donors.

In their approaches to the state in Africa down through the decades, aid donors have shown mood swings. In the 1960s they favoured the state and 'nation-building'. In the 1980s, donors changed course, mounting an offensive to 'roll back' government through privatisation, decentralisation and delegitimation of the public sector. Given drains on public resources, including the repayment of loans, to support such luxuries as four-star hotels and automobile assembly plants, cutting back state engagement in the economy was not always a bad thing.

From the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, most donors showed almost unconditional faith in the powers of private for-profit and non-profit sectors. NGOs became aid vehicles of choice, and their supply boomed in response to donor demand. But the main thrust was macro-economic policies premised on the idea that 'Greed is Good', and that horse-and-sparrow economics were sufficient to tackle poverty - that is, 'feed the horse well and some benefits are sure to pass through for the sparrows to eat'.

But delegitimising government rapidly became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Public sector institutions - especially those serving the politically weak - have shown poor organisational health, loss of good staff, under-funding, unfair coverage and corruption. Having lost abilities to deliver basic services of acceptable quality on a fair basis, they have lost legitimacy for citizens.

Donors and lenders aggravated decay of the public sector, and the politics to make it responsive to the public, simply by choosing to by-pass them. Increasingly, they channelled aid via special project units, consulting firms - and non-profits. The resulting organisational islands could deliver their agricultural extension, health care and training project services for a while. But disconnected from public institutions and local taxes and fees, those services collapsed when the stream of aid dried up.

Institutional decay, combined with the kind of domestic politics referred to earlier in this article, have made states and societies terribly fragile. There has been no lack of disaffected politicians or disgruntled army officers ready to spark a coup or a war whose chief victims are civilians. The sequel is collapse, sometimes with unspeakable violence. In the case of Rwanda, the system of foreign aid – including that helping create ‘civil society’ - set the stage for genocide.⁴⁵

Today, particularly in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, strategists at the centre of world power now acknowledge that state failure and collapse on the periphery is a bad thing. It turns out that people in supposedly secure lands are also made vulnerable by the breakdown of public order and security in faraway places. Washington, D.C., today regards weak and failed states as among its top security priorities. Its main development agencies are supposed to pay attention to ‘nation-building’ – the theme of the 1960s. That means bringing the state back into the equation. It is not a bad idea.

Contrary to some conventional thinking about civil society, stronger states can advance anti-poverty and human rights agendas. Weak and poorly institutionalised states offer unpromising venues for emancipatory associational life. But where there are robust institutions to provide basic services and to conduct open politics, many things become possible. Citizen action in South Africa, for example, has scored victories for landless people and those living with HIV-AIDS because special courts and official commissions have grown (partially as a result of civil society pressures) to promote provisions of the Constitution’s bill of rights. In Mozambique, an important pre-condition for achievement of land rights was the rehabilitation of the public cadastre.

Charitable giving and government subsidies to NGOs are commonly justified by claims about their special

methods for combating poverty. In many African settings, a lot seems to be happening thanks to NGOs: sewing circles, street children centres, HIV-AIDS counselling, kitchen garden and small livestock efforts, micro-lending, literacy, and so forth. Many places seem abuzz with little projects supported from abroad. But does this add up to anything people can count on? For many citizens such beehives of activity can be a ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ - a situation in which benefits are indeed flowing to some, but not according to priorities or plans ratified by wide popular consent. No one can be held responsible, or accountable to the public as a whole.

Non-profits claiming to be more responsive than the state in service provision may seem to have a point when people flock to their clinics and schools. But in the absence of public steering and comprehensive coverage, overall outcomes can add up to fragmentation, instability, unequal access and no reliable ways for citizens to call service providers to account and get what they are entitled to.

NGOs are often celebrated as the leading edge of political change. And indeed there are numerous NGOs, supported from abroad, that have protected or advanced the rights of women, young people and those living with HIV-AIDS. Yet comparative research embracing the broad range of NGOs often fails to support that heroic story line. In many settings it appears that, taken as a whole, NGOs often reinforce the political status quo. Sometimes their effect is to de-politicise and demobilise. In some settings, people join local associations not to assert collective interests but on the contrary to buffer themselves against a constant stream of outside interventions, and thus to *reduce* risks of involvement in public affairs. In some places NGOs have eclipsed opposition parties, sidelining basic political processes. Researchers have therefore begun to conclude that there may be ‘too much civil society, too little politics’.

Many have therefore begun to look beyond NGOs toward *public* processes where choices are being debated and substantial, long-term resources allocated

⁴⁵ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence. The Development Enterprise in Rwanda*, West Hartford: Kumarian, 1998. This important and surprisingly neglected study by a Belgian political scientist includes a devastating analysis in the chapter ‘And Where Was Civil Society?’.

for *public* provision. Some straightforward and efficient means of reducing poverty are well-known. One proven way is simply to give money to poor people! Until recently the World Bank and the rest of the aid system rejected redistributive social protection as unaffordable and difficult to administer. Yet in both higher income South Africa and low-income Mozambique, programmes of cash transfers to poor households with many dependents are working well, keeping many millions out of destitution.

Those entitlements and related public employment programmes can also have additional effects. They boost local investment, and therefore employment, drawn in by increased local spending and infrastructure. Managed with overhead costs of only about five percent of total turnover, such programmes are far more cost-effective than the average non-profit or government stand-alone project claiming to attack income poverty. And of course they can be quite popular with citizens at large, especially the poorer ones. To the extent that they are 'locked in' to political systems, they constitute part of the political contract of reciprocity between political classes and citizens.

This poses important issues for NGOs and those who fund them. Their standard operating procedure, the micro-project, can sometimes help pilot new methods or draw people together in collective action. But it is hardly a 'solution' to poverty, contrary to what most charity advertising would have us believe.

Conclusions

First, Africans, like everyone else, continue to make their own history, but under circumstances not of their own choosing. An emancipatory political impulse has driven African history at crucial historical moments, advancing citizenship and collective self-respect. The challenge is to keep reviving and drawing on that impulse, and holding in check forces that have commonly bent or blocked that impulse.

Second, Africans have a huge repertoire of vernacular strategies. The challenge is to respect and understand those strategies, including vernacular associational life, and thereby see 'civil society' beyond NGOs and other things brought into existence by the aid system. For some (but by no means all), vernacular systems can have emancipatory potentials on terms meaningful and sustainable for Africans themselves.

Third, many 'solutions' proposed for Africa's problems, have now become problems in themselves. This suggests insufficient respect for the depth and complexity of problems Africans in fact face. A new wave of 'nation-building' measures, driven by Western security concerns, is now underway. Lessons from outcomes of these externally-driven measures, including imported versions of 'civil society', have yet to lead to serious reforms. One challenge is to show self-restraint and to promote measures that open, nurture and protect political spaces in which emancipatory actors can define problems as they see them and press for solutions as they devise them.

Fourth, respect for citizenship, rights, and emancipatory action in civil domains will tend to be more effective where states are stronger. Delegitimising the public sector and shifting essential services to the private sector, be it for-profit or non-profit, is an inadequate way to respect, protect, promote and fulfil rights for all. The challenge is to recognise potentials of (and yet remain vigilant about) public politics and the public sector, and to promote

the basis of a political contract through citizen-state reciprocity.

In the fifth place, today's economic globalisation - unconstrained by ethics or democratic oversight - has polarising political and social effects. These pivot on material inequalities as well as on rising feelings of injustice and humiliation. The challenge is to transform a kind of globalisation that excludes and humiliates

into one that includes people on a broad and fair basis. Africans successfully rolled back apartheid and related forms of domination on their continent; active citizens in the North contributed, eventually forcing their governments to stop their indulgence of bad governance in South Africa. Lessons from that struggle merit attention as publics and governments face the epochal challenge of rolling back *global* apartheid.

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African Civil Domains: Realities and Mirages by David Sogge

The promotion of 'civil society' is considered one of the contemporary remedies for Africa's predicament. How closely does the idea of civil society correspond to the ways Africans themselves develop their associational life and politics? Has it functioned in the past? Can it foster robust citizenship in the future? Where Africans could organise to transform the political order – the ending of minority rule in Southern Africa being a major case in point - rights and collective self-esteem have advanced. Yet where the interplay of global interests and national vulnerabilities has had the upper hand the advance of citizenship has been halted or reversed.

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