

# The Post-Colonial State in Africa and Prospect for Development and Democracy

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## **Introduction**

One major problem African states are facing today is that of national integration and development. One would have thought that the enthusiasm that greeted the acquisition of political independence in Africa would have equally spurred rapid economic and political development. But what one witnessed was a trend that degenerated gradually to social conflicts, political instability, economic crises and general stagnation in the development process. Several formulas and solutions have been tried and adopted in an attempt to solve these problems, but one solution after the other results equally to one problem or the other. Thirty-eight years after independence, the situation remains unpredictable even after the old brigade of rulers have left the stage.

To worsen the situation was the activities of the erstwhile colonial masters and their allies who turned a blind eye to the ineptitude and the uncontrolled corruption of African leaders who were and are still encouraged by these external collaborators. These international actors encouraged African leaders to initiate hurried and strictly aid-tied democratisation processes in the late 1980s and early 1990s that never reflected the African setting but still contained the basic features of the imported or inherited systems at independence. Some of these processes have come and gone with African countries still grappling with the same problems which in the first place led to their initiation. What then are the solutions to these intractable problems of political and economic underdevelopment. Should Africa continue to depend on the developed or advanced nations for ideas and practices, a

dependence that has continued to deplete the African continent of her rich natural resources? Should she continue to fashion her political and social-economic development processes along the lines of the advanced nations. If not, what hopes and prospects do the African nations have for a sustained democratic development.

The thrust of this paper is therefore, that democratic development can only be achieved in the post-colonial states in Africa through the re-creation and utilization of indigenous socio-economic and political ideas and practices by way of a structural rearrangement of national political and economic institutions which have hitherto been manipulated by political leaders and their international agents of exploitation. The paper shall thus, specifically focus on:

1. Theoretical perspectives -State, democracy and development;
2. The colonial state, when the foundations of the economy and politics of contemporary
3. Africa were laid;
4. The post-colonial state, its characteristics and the consequences and implications for democratic development, and finally;
5. The prospects for democracy and development in Africa: Theoretical perspectives-the state, democracy and development.

### ***State***

The concepts of state, democracy and development, like many others in, the. Social sciences have continued to face the problem of definition. Hence, there is no general consensus as to what their real meanings are. For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to examine some of the contexts in which they have been used.

The concept of the state is enviably elusive as it cannot easily be translated to provide a meaning. Hence, a plethora of definitions have been offered. Recently, neoclassical views seem to agree on the definition of the state as "the organized aggregate of relatively permanent institutions of government" (Duvall and Freeman

(1987:106). In this regard, the state is seen as a set of associations and agencies claiming control over defined territories and their populations. (Skocpol 1985:7).

The main components of the state are consequently, decision-making structures, decision-making institutions, and decision-mediating bodies. Thus, the character of the state in any particular country is determined by the pattern of organisation of these institutions and structures at specific points in time.

Some other views have seen the state in terms of its relation with the civil society. These views hold that in any state the role of the civil society is very significant in mobilizing the people for purposeful participation in the activities of the state. If the state is detached from the civil society, it means then that it no longer exist for the interest of the population, implying that the state is there as an instrument of domination of the majority by those who control its instruments of power (Diamond et al 1989). This view seemingly has become the vogue in some contemporary literature of African politics. It takes its stand from the development of the political and business elite from colonialism and who subsequently took over the reigns of power after independence.

To complement the above view, several approaches to understanding the state in Africa have evolved. These are categorised into three which include the organic, configurative and interactive (Chazan et al: 1989) The organic approach sees the state as the critical actor in the public arena directly influencing social and economic processes and affecting outcomes.

Here the state is seen as a structure of domination, also as a unitary actor separated from the society and as a structure fulfilling certain functions. In this view of the state, the centrality of its position is assumed, with all occurrences directly attributed to state actions and its officials.

The configurative approach suggests that the state apparatus provides the main framework around which social groups form and in which certain types of political actions are made

possible and others are circumscribed. The organization of state constitutions thus affects the types of political issues raised and the way they are played out (Skocpol 1980). Here the impact of the state is no longer direct, political activities resonate from opinions presented by institutional configuration of a given state.

The third approach, the interactive, suggests that, specific groups i.e. social structures especially in complex settings like those found in accordance to this view have evolved their own rules and survival strategies which may compete or even conflict with those of the state. In order to understand the character and nature of the state, it is necessary to look back at how transactions are carried out and how these, in turn, alter the nature of public institutions as well as the social formations (Azarza and Chazan, 1987).

These approaches reflect different premises, orientations, concerns and explanatory dispositions of scholars studying the state in Africa. Their various concerns are premised on how the state came into being particularly from the colonial period and how the state has developed in the years that followed. To understand the nature of the state, its features, and pre-occupations, it is therefore necessary to cast our minds back to the colonial period when the beginnings of contemporary states in Africa were laid. This is not to say however, that states did not exist in pre-colonial Africa. They did, but the current states in Africa were a conscious and deliberate design through the imposition of colonial rule.

When colonialism created the state in Africa, one of its eventual aim was the creation of a conducive atmosphere for the existence of democratic practice and development. The ultimate hope was that African states would be developed in line with their colonial masters to achieve democratic development. What then is this democracy and development that African states should achieve?

### ***Democracy***

Democracy, like the concept of the state has different meanings, definitions and views. Generally however, it is viewed as "a system

of elected representative government operated under the rule of law, where the most significant groups in the population participate in the political process and have access to effective representation in the practice of making governmental decisions, i.e. of allocation of scarce resources" (Dahl 1982:11) In short, it is any system of government that is rooted in the notion that ultimate authority in the governance of the people rightly belongs to the people, that everyone is entitled to an equitable participation and share in the equal rights and equitable social and economic justice are the birthright of everyone in the society. The basic characteristics of democracy include, the existence of the mechanisms for political and economic choice, balanced political structure and stable political system.

There are various forms of democracy and these ranged from the socialist to the liberal democratic variants practised mostly in the communist and western capitalist states respectively. There are other democratic forms in the world which are not strictly in line with those practised by western countries but nevertheless, have contributed to the socio-economic and political development of these areas. Such ones include the peculiar cases of democracies in Japan, India, some south East Asian and Middle East and African countries.

In Africa, the idea of democracy as it is today was introduced during the colonial period when constitutional processes were put in place to lead Africans toward the achievement of independence. Various features of democracy such as elections into legislative houses, political parties and other forms of political participation were introduced. When independence was achieved, these democratic practices were to be carried out in a more pronounced manner. But alas, the intricacies of the systems were too much for the African leaders. Hence the eventual collapse of most post-independent democracies. Today elements of democratic practice are still existing in some states, but the extent to which these have been sustained leaves much for thought.

## ***Development***

The controversy as to what development means is as much as that of the state and democracy. Whatever this controversy, it is necessary to see it as a process that involves the progress of people in the society. Since people live within some form of social framework consisting of social, economic and political structures, development involves changes or transformations of these structures. In essence, development involves human, socio-economic and political development. It is therefore a multi-dimensional and comprehensive transformation of the society (Burkey, 1996:38).

Various theories of development have been propounded with regard to development in Africa. These include the modernization theory as derived from the Western view of development which entails among others, an overall process of economic, social, intellectual, political and cultural change. The third world countries, Africa inclusive, to which the theory was to apply, could be said to develop if and only if, they tow the lines of the western form of development. But events in the 1950s and 1960s showed that this theory could not adequately be applied to these countries. So also was the underdevelopment theory which was a reaction to the modernisation theory, even though it influenced the thinking of political leaders in terms of looking more inwards in their development orientations.

In all, it is imperative to note that the post-colonial state in Africa was constructed implicitly in the lines of Western development. The success and failure of the postcolonial state was expected to depend on it. As we shall see, however, this thinking was not to be since its foundations were laid without regard to the socio-economic and political formations that hitherto existed before colonialism. What then are the foundations of the post-colonial state in Africa?

## **The Colonial State: The foundations of neo-colonialism**

The basis of the post-colonial state in Africa is the colonial state. Thus, the foundations of the economy and politics were laid down by colonial imperialism which operated through trade, commerce, unequal exchange and bureaucratic administration. Colonial interests started becoming more pronounced at the turn of this century with the 1884/85 Berlin Conference that partitioned Africa. This colonial presence was characterised by the exploitation of the people through forced labour, expropriation of lands, forced cultivation of cash crops and the general disruption of indigenous economic activities. The obvious motive was to create an economic regime conducive to the mercantilists interest of the colonial masters.

At this time too, the dominant aspect of the economy was the development of largely peasant-based agriculture with stepped up production of cash-crops. This activity was complemented by those of the multinational companies. The end result was the subjugation of the economy under the dictates of the general world-wide capitalist system, with Africa losing its own autonomous capacity to generate its own internal structural dynamics. The indigenous population therefore, got oriented into the colonial economy thus, abandoning its traditional economic activity to enter into the world capitalist system. The second fiddle role and the parasitic nature of the African economy today is the result of the above tendency.

On the political, the story was anything better. Colonialism created structures that sustained its continued stay. Colonial rule superimposed a new administrative, order on the indigenous social and political structures. Thus, the colonial apparatus of power operated within new delineated boundaries. The functional patterns of colonial administration was backed by a well-defined coercive instrument of power; police forces, courts, prisons and the colonial army were established to suppress the people. In fact, as Kasfir (1983:34) observed, the political culture bequeathed by colonialism contained the notions that authoritarianism was an

appropriate mode of nib and political activity was a disguised form of self-interest, subversive of the public interest. In effect, the colonial state was essentially a military-administrative unit. The spill-over of this to the post-colonial state was nothing but great.

In addition, the introduction of colonial constitution and ordinances, creation of provinces and regions, political parties, election into legislative assemblies or councils were no more than processes at enhancing political inequality between the people and their colonial rulers on the one hand and among the various groups of people in Africa on the other. Indeed, the colonial administrators undertook activities that it deemed appropriate without widespread consultation and without questioning its superior knowledge.

Transitions to independence were hasty and incomplete. There was no serious attempt to give Africa a sense of ideological orientation on which to base her future development, so that by the end of colonialism, both inherited economic and political activities were left intact. For example, the British and the French left their Westminster Model and the Fifth Republic presidential cum-parliamentary democracy respectively, and did nothing to modify or even change their structures to reflect the African indigenous system. To compound the issue, nationalist leaders who were to take over the reigns of power were not united. They established varying political parties based on ethnic, regional and sectional foundations.

As would have been expected the imported political structures could not sustain their foundations after independence. For instance, as Nwabueze (1973:113) observed the Federal structure in Nigeria was doomed to fall because it did not have any "objective of building governmental units upon fairly homogenous social groups in order that they should manage their internal affairs within the unity of the whole". Obviously, this created a lot of friction between the major dominant groups and the minority ones. The problem of ethnic and regional balancing has resulted into crises in many parts of Africa particularly in places like former



Zaire, Sudan, Rwanda, Nigeria and the Horn of Africa, among others. These crises which are yet to be sufficiently resolved are remotely a creation of colonial policies. With this type of situation democracy and hence meaningful development can hardly be achieved.

In essence, the colonial state was designed in such a way that the structure of the politics and economy was tied to those of the colonizing power. For example since colonialism was essentially capitalist its penetration of African economics created what Ake called some fundamental affinities between Africa and the colonialisng powers. Thus, the controlled development of African economy in the interest of metropole meant structural link and interdependence. Chazan (1989) called this device the principles of complementarities and integration. Complementarily is a principle whereby African colonial territories would play a subordinate role. The objective of the imperial powers was to construct an integrated economy in which the principal role of the colonies was to service metropolitan needs and not that of neighbouring African countries; mat is why, as a consequence, infrastructure - ports, railways and roads - were directed toward the facilitation of overseas tamer than internal or regional trade and communication.

In sum, the colonial state was such that both her economy and politics were designed to satisfy the interest of the colonial power. Both the economic and political structures transferred to African hands were thus action in derivation, functionally conceived, bureaucratically designed, authoritarian in nature, and practically and intentionally dependent. It is thus, with this frame that the post-colonial state was moulded. Having imbibed the haphazard development initiatives of colonialism which spanned a long period of colonial tutelage, the post-colonial state had no option but to 'initiate' the economic and political orientations of its mentors. What then are the consequences of these for socio-economic and political development of the post-colonial state in Africa?

## **The Post-colonial State**

As can be seen from the foregoing, the colonial state laid down solid alien economic and political foundations which were to serve the interests of colonial imperialism. In the words of Davidson (1973:94) the African nationalists inherited a "dish" (referring to the colonial state) that was old and cracked.... Worse than that, it was an empty dish that carried the junk and rubble of a century of colonial muddle and 'make do'. What shone upon its supposedly golden surface was not the reflection of new ideas and ways of liberation, but the shadows of old ideas and ways of servitude.

Thus, African countries reached independence poorly equipped to tackle the enormous tasks that they faced. The continent as a whole was less advantageous than most other developing continents in almost all dimensions of development. The late commitment of the colonial powers to providing 'development' coupled with the more rapidly than anticipated movement toward independence provided African states with very fragile foundations on which to build in the post-independence period.

Nevertheless, from the onset of independence which the majority of them acquired in the early 1960s, the political leaders made some vigorous efforts to overcome the constraints of the colonial legacy they inherited. Developmentalism, though not a new concept to them, because it was an ideology of late colonialism, was at the core of their thinking. Thus, it became their reason d'etre and Achilles heel. Having achieved political independence, it was now to focus on social and economic development. Thus, after independence many, if not all the African states, initiated development plans which focused on providing education, health services, employment, industry, agriculture, transportation and communication, among others.

Perhaps it may be right to point out that the task was not an easy one for the African leaders but in those days of African optimism, great efforts were made to greatly expand the puny economic and social infrastructures left by colonialism. As noted

above, there was remarkable growth in education, health facilities, and urbanization grew, and so the working and middle classes. On the political front, efforts were made to resolve the ethnic, regional and sectional crises that had surfaced in the colonial period. In fact, national unity and integration

All these efforts notwithstanding, the legacy of colonialism frustrated any progressive and systematic development. Hence, the multiple contradictions and frustrations of the neo-colonial order, with its trapping of independence built on limited sovereignty, political posturing without economic order, and Africanization without indigenisation began taking their toll. State intervention in the organisation of the social, economic, cultural and political processes intensified as the contradictions deepened and became more open.

The postcolonial state thus became characterised by ethnicism and existence of many groups whose main aims were to mobilize to secure public resources from those in authority. These groups based on ethnicity, region and class grew in number. Their identification became more pronounced. For example, in Nigeria, Kenya and former Zaire regional and ethnic conflicts became the order of the day. In some cases the majority political leaderships changed the independence constitutions which encouraged multipartism to one party system which implicitly recruited membership from the dominant ethnic groups to the exclusions of the others.

Furthermore, the post-colonial state became characterised by the existence of an emergent class. Arguments have once raged that classes never existed in Africa. Instead, that there existed only mass-elite divisions or cultural pluralism. But dependency theorists have argued that both colonialism and the incorporation of Africa into a world capitalist system (and the class divisions this entails) have contributed to the formation of modern classes based on their relationship to the means of production. Be

that as it may, it is the view that classes have since begun to emerge in Africa since independence.

Colonial development was largely responsible for the emergence of class formations in Africa. Development efforts were concentrated in relatively high income urban areas to the disadvantage of the rural areas. Thus, this differentiated rate of economic change reinforced by subsequent policy decisions in most post-colonial states became the basis for contemporary uneven development - both between the various identity groups and the sub-regions of a state. Such a process obviously has implications for class relations.

To compound the situation, political participation was mostly restricted to those who acquired education from those educational institutions established mostly in urban centres. Hence it was the children of the privileged few that had access to education. This eventually gave them advantage over their rural non-education. This eventually gave them advantage over their rural non-educated folks in terms of political participation and office-holding. This group of educated class in conjunction with the emergent local bourgeoisie class which has grown from the womb of colonial imposition thus, see themselves as a special class destined to control the affairs of the state. It is with this frame of mind that the elite perceived power as absolute. It thus, uses political power to enhance economic power. This group having acquired politic-economic power uses it to appropriate the instruments and instrumentalities of the state to better the lot of their immediate constituencies. This often translates into oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of other groups.

It is this jaundiced perception of power that makes the elite to use every means to get to power including the use of primordial sentiments like religion, ethnicity, etc. As we have noted, the problem of ethnicity is related to this development. This moral bankruptcy of the ruling class is what made them not to deal a crushing blow on colonialism during the struggle for

independence. They were duly interested in stepping into the empty shoes left behind by the colonial masters and not the radical socio-economic transformation of Africa. Thus, by being morally bankrupt the ruling class has not been seen responsible and therefore decadent. This decadence is reflected in their refusal to accept defeat in elections.

The post-colonial state in Africa has also witnessed the institution of several forms of regime types characterized by personal rule, political domination and corruption. The basic features these regime types which Chazam et al (1989:137) classified as administrative hegemonic, pluralist, party-mobilizing, party-centralis personal coercive and populist have seriously, effected the operation of democratic rule in Africa generally. Most of the regimes are largely authoritarian, autocratic and partly, semi-democratic in nature. Their operations have led to serious breakdown which had its origin from the onset of independence. By the late

1970s and early 1980s in many African States public institutions had collapsed or ceased to function. For instance, from the Congo crises in the early 1960s, Nigerian civil war, Chad, Sudan, Uganda and lately Angola, Rwanda, Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone, African states have continued to witness breakdown in their regime casting continuous doubts as to the ability of African leaders to pursue the process of democratic development. To worsen the situation is the role of the military. Originally seen as a redeeming national organization, the military has incessantly intervened in politics compounding the socio-economic problems that engulfed Africa since independence. For their lack of knowledge in governance, they have even become worse than the erstwhile colonial masters.

Consequently, the economic crises that gripped most African states from the mid to late 1960s knocked the pedestals of rationality and legitimacy from under the feet of the post-colonial state. The economic, social, and political dimensions of the crises

are too depressingly familiar to be treated here. The DSPs implemented in the 1980s and as even the World Bank and IMF now grudgingly concede, only made matters worse. They led to losses of the post-independence gains in welfare, the erosion of populist programs, and "compromised state as the bastion of national sovereignty and raised the question as to whom the state is accountable" - the local society or external forces, such as the World Bank and the IMF (Mkandaeire 1982:7).

As a result of, and in response to, these crises, the post-colonial state assumed a more progressively repressive character. By the 1980s most African leaders had squandered all legitimacy bestowed on them. They could deliver neither economic development nor political stability, let alone social justice and freedom, the hallmark of democracy. Thus, anti-authoritarian and anti-statist movements and discourses grew. These movements which include trade unions, student organisations, professional associations, women groups and peasant movements sprang in both the urban and rural areas. The transmission of messages of popular discontent was facilitated by the spread of mass communication, including the growth of alternative media, both open and clandestine, local and foreign.

All these reform, movements were organized around class, ethnicity, religion and gender, the classes seeking redress were the over-exploited peasantry, unpaid workers, the restive middle class and out-of-power politicians itching to get back into office. Also in line for democratic incorporation were the marginalized or oppressed ethnic, national or communal groups. Women too have been seeking empowerment, arguing in the words of Ama Ata Aidoo that men's political monopoly has lasted long enough. "If they alone could save us", she writes, "they would have done so by now. But instead every decade brings us grimmer realities. It is high time African women moved into centre stage" (1992:25).

From the foregoing, the post-colonial state in Africa has witnessed numerous problems which have taken the shape of social,

economic and political instability. The influence of external actors continue to dominate her already disarticulated economy and politics so much so that while the opportunity exists for African leaders to develop independently, they have been unable to detach themselves from the clutches of international machinations. Here lies the problem of the post-colonial state in pursuing a meaningful independent and self-sustained policy that will enhance democratic development.

### **Prospects for Democracy and Development in Africa**

The post-colonial state in Africa, as we have seen from the foregoing is basically a creation of colonialism which established the economic and political structures which it inherited. Because they have been so entrenched, the post-colonial state has not been able to eliminate, redirect, recreate and re-define their existence. The state has been characterised by economic, socio-political instability which have manifested themselves in ethnic, regional, religious rivalries and class differentiation and external forces. Hence the route to democratic development has continued to be a mirage.

Development, as we have previously seen, is a process through which purposeful change and transformation of the society takes place in economic, political, cultural and social spheres. Even though the process has its own negative impact, the overall progress of the society with minimum conflicts is the main objective. The conditions for development have to exist in an atmosphere of peace, stability, where equal rights justice, political participation by the majority, rule of law and freedom of choice among others, prevail. Development is therefore linked closely to non-economic factors such as the political, social, cultural, psychological and institutional. And this is democracy. As Sandbrock (1987) notes, it is the socio-political factors in particular, which place severe limitations on economic development. Hence, any development strategy, whatever its economic advantage must

be politically and socially viable. The experience of Africa since independence demonstrates that these factors are crucial.

While one may doubt the prospects for democracy and hence development in Africa because of the piteous state in which Africa is today, at the same time one may see a glimmer of hope. Recent developments toward democratization, if sustained, may boost this glimmer. But the irony of it all is the transmitting of erstwhile military leadership into civilian rulers particularly in the West African sub-region. These military-turned civilian rulers basically have authoritarian instinct and while in power, the very military character which they had becomes a major feature of their new governance. Hence are sort to what we may call civilian dictatorship. Examples of this tendency abound in states like Guinea, Ghana, The Gambia, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger and emerging Nigeria, among others. The implication of this situation is that democratic values and practice would be gradually eroded. This would in effect lead back to dictatorship with mounting opposition from the extended population, which is and hence detrimental to the course of democracy and indeed, development.

To worsen the situation is the current spread of the globalization agenda which has liberal democracy as one of its variants. African states are told by the United States and its allies to democratize in line with western democratic, values. But the propagation of their democratic agenda is tied to conditionality's for foreign loans and aids from the capitalist advanced countries through their agents, the World Bank, IMF, and the London and Paris Clubs. But these conditionalities are but anything helpful to the development of Africa. Instead they seem to create another avenue for Africa's continued subsumption under the advanced nations.

From all indication, liberal democracy is not quite appropriate to the African society, but that is not to say that democracy does not apply to her. However, the values and principles of democracy



have to be customized creatively in consonance with the social realities of Africa. That is to say that Africa should be allowed to evolve her own political culture and the type of democracy that will be both suitable and lasting. Otherwise, the democratization process will degenerate into another assault on indigenous cultures and clash of interests and power struggle between various ethnic groups.

Africa needs to evolve definite democratic development strategies for itself. If democracy is a process whereby people strive to attain some measure of progress in an atmosphere conducive for free economic and political choice, justice and equality, it is obvious that such a situation will enhance socio-economic and political development. As noted above, this atmosphere must reflect the socio-cultural, political and economic factors characteristic of a particular state. African states therefore have to look more inward and ignore the intrusion of western democratic values since these are in contradiction to the indigenous ones in African.

## **Conclusion**

The thrust of this paper is that for democracy and hence, development to survive and thrive in Africa, she needs to re-evaluate the structure and operation of the post-colonial state which is a creation of colonial imperialism. Despite the overwhelming impact of the colonial state on the post-colonial state there seems to be hope for democratic development. The current trend toward democratization is a realization that democracy rather than authoritarianism and one-party rule is the route to development. Hence, African leadership should introduce radical changes toward democracy. These changes should also involve the mobilization of the civil society without which the task of political participation would be impossible. Creating a democratic development out of a shattered and an undirectional system requires skillful political crafting and courageous and wise choices by leaders. Hopefully, a crop of new African

leadership seems to be emerging. It is hoped that these leaders would be more committed to the course of democratic development which has eluded Africa these thirty-eight years of post-colonial independence.

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