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State Failure, Crisis of Governance and Disengagement from the State in Africa

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Abstract

The post-colonial state in Africa has continued to dominate the public space on the continent in spite of its well advertised failings. It is widely acknowledged in the literature that the African state has utterly failed in achieving material advancement for its people, leading disenchanted and frustrated citizens to take a ‘flight’ from the state and develop parallel structures to tend to their socio-economic and cultural needs. This situation, symptomatic of a crisis of governance, provides immediate explanation for the contested character of Africa’s public sphere.

This paper examines the nature of contestation in Africa’s public sphere between the two dominant actors in the sphere – the state and civil society, the ideological underpinnings of this contestation and the impact of domestic and external contexts on the contestation. The paper observes that the declining capacity of the state for social provisioning provides the context for citizens’ withdrawal from the public space occupied by the state. The paper argues that disengagement from the state, apart from not serving the interest of both the state and civil society, has serious implications for governing Africa’s public sphere.

Résumé

L’Etat post-colonial en Afrique a continué à occuper largement l’espace public sur le continent malgré ses échecs bien connus. La littérature a généralement reconnu l’échec de l’Etat en Afrique qui n’a toujours pas répondu aux attentes quant à la réalisation de progrès matériel pour son peuple. Ceci a poussé les citoyens désenchantés et frustrés à « fuir » l’Etat et à créer des structures parallèles, afin de prendre en charge leurs propres besoins socioéconomiques et culturels. Ce phénomène qui est symptomatique de la crise de gouvernance est la toute première explication de la nature contestataire de la sphère publique en Afrique.

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Cette étude se penche sur la nature de la contestation qui oppose deux principaux acteurs dans la sphère publique – l'Etat et la société civile –, les soubassements idéologiques de cette contestation et l'impact des contextes interne et externe sur cette contestation. D'après cette étude, l'incapacité croissante de l'Etat à assurer le social créé le contexte pour le retrait des citoyens de l'espace public occupé par l'Etat. Le désengagement par rapport à l'Etat, outre le fait qu'il ne sert pas les intérêts de celui-ci ni ceux de la société civile, a de graves implications pour la gouvernance de la sphère publique en Afrique.

Introduction

The post-colonial state in Africa has continued to occupy the centre stage in African political space. Its continuing dominance is however by no means a consequence of its relevance to the non-bourgeois sector of African citizenry by way of social provisioning. Indeed, as a social institution, African state is a weak organisation in terms of efficient social delivery while in its relationship with civil society, it is a strong force which heavily depends on 'its coercive and violent apparati to sustain itself' (Osaghae, Isumonah and Albert 1998). It is a consensus among students of African state that the post-colonial state has woefully failed in achieving material advancement of the ordinary people of the continent while those who manage the state and their cronies continue to enjoy unfettered access to state resources through a well-oiled patron-client system. This has earned the state in Africa such adjectives as 'the rentier state', 'the prebendal state', 'the predatory state' and 'the kleptocratic state', all stressing the irrelevance of the state to the ordinary people. This represents the heart of the crisis of governance rocking the state in Africa. The on-going governance crisis in Africa and the attendant failure of the hegemonic project of the African state gives strength to the contention of Jackson and Rosberg (1982) that the state in Africa lacks the attributes to meet the definition of the state conceived in terms of capability to control the people in its internationally recognised territory.

The expectations of African people, following the political liberalisation of the early 1990s have been replaced with rising frustrations. After two decades of uninterrupted liberal democratic rule in most of Africa, African leaders have failed to steer the continent in a way that positively impacts on the material conditions of the people while civil liberties of the citizens are still assaulted, sometimes with impunity, by the state and its agencies. The immediate consequence of this governance deficit is the disengagement of African citizens from the state-controlled portion of public space. Disengagement simply refers to a retreat from the state by disaffected segments of the citizenry with its attendant creation of parallel social, cultural,

economic and even political systems competing with state institutions (Mutfwang 2005). These parallel structures tend to gain influence and authority in the face of the declining relevance of the state, particularly at the local level of state governance (Adejumobi and Seteolu 2002). Disengagement, to be sure, is a consequence of the failure of African state to deliver development to the African people and to engender a governance apparatus that is responsive and accountable. The phenomenon of disengagement is induced by the perception of the state as oppressive rather than rewarding (Azarya 1994) and thus could not relieve people of their burdens but would rather worsen same.

Today, African regimes and their legal-politico institutions are not only intolerant of opposition but are distrustful of, and attempt to muzzle alternative sites of value or ideology production. This governance attitude is a carry-over from the immediate post-independence period when development and national integration efforts of the newly independent African regimes were defined in terms of centralist logic which frowned at independent political action and contestation of state policies (Olukoshi 2003). The authoritarian character of the African state however became more decisive with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on the continent in the early 1980s in large part because the implementation of SAP, given its unpleasant social consequences, required a 'strong state'. The neo-liberal character of SAP essentially meant retrenchment of the state from entrepreneurial activities. Ultimately, it favoured a minimalist state restricted to providing an enabling environment for private sector-driven production. Structural Adjustment precipitated a general erosion of the relevance and effectiveness of the state economically and politically while adjusting regimes were overwhelmed by pressures internally and externally. Regimes' capacity for action was undermined by the scaling back of public expenditure. Public sector workers, in the face of poor conditions of service in the sector, were not only morally compromised but were also demotivated (the South Commission 1990).

Conceptual Definitions: Public Sphere and State Failure

Public Sphere

Since Jurgen Habermas's 1962 influential work on the conceptualisation of public sphere, copious scholarly efforts have been invested in understanding the concept and its various dimensions. Much of these works, while criticising Habermas's effort, have succeeded in enriching the conceptualisation of the concept of public sphere by providing useful insights to its essence and nature. Public sphere, for this study, is operationalised as a social space in

which the state and other non-(or anti) state actors operate. Private sphere, on the other hand, refers to the household or family life. In their extreme conceptions, private sphere (conceived as family life) and public sphere (equated with the state) tend to suggest that there is no middle public space occupied by civil society (Habermas 1978). This is erroneous as civil society occupies that portion of the public realm between the state and the family, thus distinguishing it from political society or formal state.

The public sphere has remained a contested terrain in Africa, not only because of the irreconcilable interests of the two major actors in Africa's public realm (the state and civil society), but also because of the proclivity of the state, driven by its proprietary view of the public domain, to appropriate and monopolise the public sphere. The state in Africa, in spite of the monopolising posture and domineering tendencies of its managers, does not exclusively own Africa's public sphere. Rather, it is merely a co-actor in the public domain functioning through consciously designed structures. On the other hand, the non-state domain or associational life activities which aim at either limiting the power of the state or ensuring autonomous reproduction of socio-economic and political life constitute civil society. The proprietary attitude of the state towards the public sphere is one driven by political, economic and military resources at the disposal of the state which, it confidently believes, puts it at an advantage over other actors in the public realm. This awesome resource base of the state intoxicates it into believing that not only does it have the power to determine those other actors it will allow to co-habit with it in the public sphere, but it can also drive them out of its 'property'. This attitude, observes Ekeh (1992), is radically different from what obtains in the West where the ruling elite do not claim to own the public space but regard themselves as 'the tenants of history' that created the public space. Civil society, according to Keane (1998), refers to an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged in a complex of non-state activities, economic and cultural production, household life and voluntary associations and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions.

Africa's public realm is replete with a rich array of civil society groups covering ethnic, religious, communal, professional and trade organisations that operate at the margin of the state. Civil society organisations are autonomous groups which share the public realm with the state and which the state cannot wipe out of existence (Ekeh 1992). The operation of civil society groups in Africa's public sphere has been buoyed by the new thinking on the political redemption of the post-colonial state which recognises civil society as a viable instrument of reforming the state from below. This contrasts sharply with the modernisation thesis of the 1960s which urged that only

strong states represented the path to African political redemption in the post-colonial period. Needless to point out that the expected modernisation did not occur while many of the immediate post independence regimes degenerated into dictatorships either of one-party states or of military genre. It should however be stressed that civil groups in Africa operate with varying levels of contact with the state and equally varying degrees of capacity to serve as agents of democratisation. While there are civil society groups such as pro-democracy/human rights groups, trade unions and students' movements who confront the state in a struggle for the expansion of the democratic space and respect for human rights, there are others mainly cultural/ethnic associations who, formed on the basis of kinship, are only concerned with the welfare of their members and hardly penetrate into the civic public realm. Therefore, civil society is not a homogenous or an undistinguished entity. It is a pluralist formation whose components/constituents are as varied as their cultural and socio-economic interests as well as the primary factor that led to their emergence. This point needs to be stressed against the backdrop of the tendency in the literature to treat civil society as a homogenous non-state entity vis-a-vis the state.

The portion of the public sphere which the state controls can be equated with what Ekeh (1975) calls 'the civic public' which in his words operates on 'amoral codes of behaviour'. Basically, a colonial creation with a primary motive of servicing the interests of its metropolitan creators, the colonial state in Africa was perceived by Africans as alienatory, repressive and oppressive. The nationalists who took over power from the colonialists after formal independence, and later the soldiers, have failed to transform this character of the state. Rather, the post independence governing elite have succeeded in deepening these attributes of the colonial state in the post-colonial era. Thus, ordinary people in Africa could not relate to the state as 'our own'. It is thus conceptually wrong to, as Fatton Jr. (1992) suggests, refer to the public sphere as being synonymous with the state. One tragic factor that undermines governance renewal efforts in Africa today is, issuing from the failure of the state to tend to the material needs of the citizenry, the rapid disengagement from the public sphere by the people who now set up non-state structures to cater for their social, cultural and material needs. These structures represent what Osaghae, Isumonah and Albert (1998) call 'an alternative state'.

State Failure

The concept of state failure like a related one, state collapse, has remained a contested concept in social science discourse as the concept is perceived in different ways by scholars with diverse intellectual orientations. Ted Gurr

captures the conceptual chaos in the literature on the meaning of 'state failure' when he contends that 'state failure has currency... but it is not entirely clear what it refers to other than the instances used to illustrate it' (Gurr 1995). The prevailing tendency is to treat the two concepts interchangeably. It is however true that the two are distinct, with each manifesting itself in different forms. According to Kieh (2000), state failure is a performance-based term referring to 'the inability of a state and its custodians to adequately address the cultural, economic, political and social needs of its citizens.' On the other hand, state collapse is a sustenance-based concept referring to the incapacity of the state to reproduce itself. It occurs when a state experiences a total breakdown of the entire political order, including the structures and authority of the state. While a collapsed state needs a complete reconstitution for its re-generation, a failed state can be reformed through improved governance system infused with such attributes as popular participation, responsiveness, accountability, transparency and efficient social delivery. However, in the absence of a genuinely designed and inclusive reconstitution process which addresses the salient issues that precipitated its earlier collapse, a state emerging out of a collapse may suffer a re-collapse. Historically, there have been manifestations of the two phenomena in the evolution of nation-states in the world. On the one hand, the events that led to the collapse of the monarchical state in France; the emergence of the former Soviet state from the old feudal state in Russia; the later collapse of the Soviet state itself; as well as the emergence of new states from the debris of war-torn old states of the Congo, Liberia and Rwanda in Africa typify the phenomenon of state collapse. On the other hand, to the extent that popular yearnings and aspirations of the African people are yet to be met by African regimes, virtually all African countries are failed states.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The literature is replete with divergent perspectives on the nature and essence of associational life. However, in spite of the different paradigms adopted by diverse intellectual orientations to theorise civil society, they find a common ground on their emphasis on the externality of civil society to the state; its independent material base; and its capacity for self-organisation. This study adopts deprivation theory as theoretical framework of analysis. The central thesis of the theory is that material deprivation is at the root of citizens' retreat from the public sphere controlled by the state in Africa. According to the proponents of this theory including David Reisman, Hannah Arendt and Will Kornhauser, the failure of the state to make the needed intervention in the face of the worsening material status of the people challenges the citizens

to collectively organise, through a platform outside of the control of the state, to arrest their miserable conditions capable of making their future precarious. According to Kothari (2002), 'such a pervading sense of uncertainty has given rise to pyramids of insecurity, helplessness, bewilderment, withdrawal, cynicism and apathy'.

This theory forcefully explains the evolution and subsequent implosion of civil society groups in Africa, particularly between late 1970s (the outset of economic recession) and early 1980s (when SAP was foisted on the continent as a policy response to Africa's economic crisis). The failure of the state to ensure material advancement of the people turned African people against the state, prompting them to seek alternative sites of cultural and material production. Two major weaknesses of the theory lie in its 'economic determinism' and the inherent assumption that civil groups cease to exist once economic hardship eases and people experience improved material conditions. The exclusively materialistic approach of the deprivation thesis tends to downplay the importance of such political factors as dictatorial and unpopular regimes with the attendant rights abuse in the emergence of associational life. Dictatorial regimes often turn the state against citizens who then form associations that serve to checkmate the proclivity of the state to tyranny. The point that needs to be stressed here is that Africa is replete with an array of civil society organisations with diverse concerns and *modus operandi*. This explains why civil society in Africa assumes particularistic character (Bratton 1994). The assumption of the theory that existence of civil society associations is tied to material deprivation does not fully capture the essence of civil society. For all we know, associational life exists beyond the period of economic hardship as it does exist even after the collapse of authoritarian regimes. To restate in another way, civil society does not only exist when locked in confrontation with the state but continues to exist even after the subject matter of state-civil society contestation has been resolved. Kasfir (1998) recognises this point when he observes that civil society remains in existence even when its constituents are not locked in confrontation with the state.

Colonial Roots of Contested Public Sphere in Africa

The African state did not emerge through 'a gradual process of aggregation or expansion of indigenous societies' (Joseph 1991). It is essentially a product of foreign conquest and domination. The coercive, arbitrary and absolutist character of the colonial state manifested in its total domination of the colonial political economy. The colonialists controlled education, trade, labour, land allocation and social services. To perpetuate this domination, the colonial

state was not only intolerant of any potential challenge to its absolute powers, but rejected restrictions to the manner it dispensed state power.

The colonial state was a statist and powerful institution. Some of the salient characteristics of the state included discrimination, economic exploitation, social (racist) segregation, forced labour and remiss of social services. Flowing from the peculiar circumstances of its birth and *raison d'être*, it needed to be an omnipotent force to accomplish its mission and to reproduce itself in the face of a hostile colonised population (Ake 2001). Colonialism was driven by an ideology which portrayed African people as ahistorical, primitive and uncivilised and therefore needed colonial tutelage to launch them into 'the mainstream of modern civilisation' (Nnoli 2003). This colonial ideology essentially meant social closure against African people.

The conditions of alienation, discrimination and humiliation engendered by colonialism provoked reactions from the colonised people which pitched them in deadly confrontation with the colonial authorities as evident, for examples, in the Mau Mau insurrection in Kenya and the Aba Women riots in Nigeria. The anti-colonial struggle was led by the nationalists with the heavy support of intellectuals, urban workers, the press and the peasantry to constitute what is referred to in Africa's decolonisation history as the 'anti-colonial coalition'. Thus, the nature of contestation in the public sphere under foreign rule took the form of struggle for national liberation between African people and colonial oppressors, a struggle that spanned almost a century in Nigeria (1861 to 1960). For African people, they believed that independence which was the end goal of liberation struggle would bring an end to the backwardness, abject poverty and deprivation they were being subjected to by colonial rule. However, apart from the nationalist movement, there were sundry other groups that posed challenges to the colonial state. Smith (1960) has documented the challenge to the British rule in 1906 by a Hausa Madhist group which operated in the outskirts of Sokoto in Nigeria.

Nature of Contestation in the Public Sphere in the immediate Post-colonial Period

Apter (1965) has rightly observed that the function of encouraging loyalty and support by government is performed badly by regimes in the developing world. For Apter, since it is upon the performance of this function that state legitimacy is anchored, the poor (or in the extreme, non) performance of this function puts political groups in a position of high leverage with the state. While Apter's observation generally represents a fair assessment of the state in peripheral economies, the situation in Africa is more tragic. The post-colonial state in Africa in several respects is a continuation of its

precursor, the colonial state. It inherited virtually all the salient features of its colonial forebear, including its lack of legitimacy and capacity to deploy violence against civil society. Ake perceptively captures the character of the post-colonial state at independence in the following words: 'It continued to be totalistic in scope... It presented itself as an apparatus of violence, had narrow social base and relied for compliance on coercion rather than authority' (Ake 2001). Post-colonial African leaders have grossly failed in changing the character of the colonial state as 'a coercive force unable to transform power into authority and domination into hegemony' (Ake 1994) into that of an organisation capable of meeting the genuine aspirations of African citizenry. The state in Africa, five decades after flag independence, is still regarded as a threat to civil society, leading on the one hand to the withdrawal of most African citizens from the improvident and predatory state; and on the other hand the creation of alternative sites of social provisioning. The emergence of these parallel sites has not only almost displaced the state but has also reduced it to 'a power resource and a fearsome nuisance' (Ake 1994).

Citing several reasons, Africa's new state managers at independence adopted statist model of development which gave the centralised state a leading role in social and economic development. The centralising logic inherent in statist model of accumulation produced an over-bloated and over-bureaucratised state which itself became a major user of scarce public resources, not only in terms of running the overstuffed state bureaucracy, but also in terms of privatisation of public resources by the ruling elite that lacked the discipline of economic production. Centralising logic was also the defining element of the twin projects of democracy and development initiated by Africa's new leaders at independence. These ideologically designed projects were initiated as a legitimacy-building tool to contain the frustrations arising from the realities and challenges of independence. For Africa's new men of power, the cause of democracy and development was better served in a political context devoid of oppositional attitudes. This essentially translated into the absence or criminalisation of political dissent and rationalisation of single-party regime. It was not too long before it became apparent that the centralising logic could not take the continent to the 'Promised Land' as state institutions could no longer meet public expectations, which led to the alienation of leaders from followers. The expectation-delivery gap precipitated frustrations among the citizenry, which led to loss of legitimacy by the state. The immediate reaction of the people to this symptom of state failure was open resistance and withdrawal from formal economic activities, prompting the emergence and spread of informal economy, flourishing outside of state control.

Economic Crisis, Adjustment and Exiting from the State: Africa's Public Sphere in the 1980s

The genesis of the economic crisis troubling the African continent could be traced to the late 1970s and its severity is underscored by its persistence till the present time. The immediate factors that accounted for Africa's economic problems in the 1970s included oil crisis, neglect of agricultural sector, unfavourable terms of trade and mounting indebtedness. However, more importantly, the strategy of development adopted by African leaders in the early years of independence, as well as official corruption inherent in statist model of accumulation, played decisive roles in precipitating economic crisis on the continent during this period. Adopting import-substitution industrialisation as a strategy of development, African countries embarked on massive importation of inputs needed for achieving expansion of the manufacturing sector with earnings from the agricultural sector, precisely cash crop production, as the source of financing. Following the rise of the oil economy in the 1970s in Nigeria for example, the financing of the import needs of the Nigerian state was replaced with the petrodollars earned from oil exports even as agricultural productivity drastically declined (Olukoshi 1993). The export earnings from oil accruing to the Nigerian state considerably expanded its revenue base in the 1970s, which accentuated the immensity of state power and made same rabidly attractive to the fractions of the ruling elite (Animashaun 2007).

By the early 1980s, there was a fall in the international market of oil, resulting in a dramatic shortfall in the revenue accruing to the state from this natural resource. As documented by Olukoshi (1991), Nigeria's earnings from oil fell from about N10.1 billion in 1979 to about N5.161 billion in 1982 which negatively impacted on the capacity of the state to service the domestic economy. The scenario in Nigeria represented the general pattern and dimensions of the economic crisis across African countries. The deepening economic crisis afflicting Africa had become more severe by the early 1980s and this provided the context for the introduction of the World Bank/IMF-inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on the continent.

SAP made its entry into Africa as a result of the escalation of the economic crisis plaguing African countries. The pace of adoption and implementation of the SAP prescription on the continent was so rapid that by the late 1980s, almost all countries of Africa had latched on to the programme. Fadahunsi (2005) identifies the defining elements of SAP as including deregulation and privatisation; removal of subsidies; strengthening of the existing demand agreement policies; faster movement towards a more realistic exchange rate; rationalisation of import items and excise duties; replacement of administrative

controls with reliance on market forces; adoption of appropriate pricing policies, especially for wasting assets like petroleum products; and rationalisation of parastatals. The bitter and people-unfriendly SAP pill required a repressive and authoritarian regime to push through the programme on the continent. This led to a situation where African state deepened its authoritarianism, brazenly violated citizens' rights and increasingly became high-handed in its dealing with civil society. For example in Nigeria, the Babangida dictatorship, confronted with a dogged determination of civil groups opposed to SAP, adopted a host of authoritarian measures, such as proscription of popular movements like Nigerian Labour Congress, Academic Staff Union of Universities and National Association of Nigerian Students; closure of radical media houses and detention of civil society activists.

In contrast to the promises of SAP as the new economic orthodoxy for developing economies, as touted by the authors and implementors of the programme, SAP turned out to be a huge social failure across adjusting countries. Most people in Africa and Latin America witnessed a substantial drop in living standards as per capita incomes markedly declined. Industries were operating at half capacity utilisation. There was a huge job loss in the public sector while victims of rationalisation/retrenchment resorted to 'much more precarious and ill-paid work in the informal sector' (UNRISD 1995). Indeed, in one and a half decades of the implementation of SAP, poverty deepened in sub-Saharan Africa (Rodgers and van der Hoeven 1995). The implementation of the policy components of SAP worsened in a profound manner the endemic legitimacy crisis troubling the post-colonial state since its emergence after the end of colonial rule. According to Beckman (1990), the 'restructuring of incentives brought about by SAP makes it difficult to sustain the political coalitions underpinning the state; SAP drives wedges into pre-existing alliances; it undercuts the interest mediation previously managed by the state; it obstructs ideological legitimation...' Social costs of SAP were so pervasive that the various cushioning programmes infused with social dimension, reluctantly designed by the Bretton Woods twins to mitigate the hardships, failed to make significant impact on social decline and growing poverty on the continent which emptied citizenship of its social content (Olukoshi 2003). At any rate, SAP could not have mitigated African economic crisis in any significant way since it was consciously designed to manage African crisis more in a way that served the economic interests of the West than in exiting the continent from the crisis (Kankwenda 2002).

The political repression and exclusion generated by SAP widened the social gulf between the state and civil society forces, and also brought out in bold relief the alienatory and arbitrary character of the state (Momoh and Seteolu 2006). At another level, the disengagement of African state from

critical social provisioning produced a sort of 'state closure' in which only state managers and their cronies had access to state resources through patronage (Jega 2000). The reaction of African people to the excruciating pains of SAP took two major forms: street protests and disengagement from the state. Unable to cope further with the consequences of the strict implementation of the elements of SAP, African citizens trooped to the streets across major African cities to protest against the dehumanising conditions engendered by the SAP regime. The response of African regimes to popular protests against harsh adjustment reforms and increasing authoritarianism had dual character of concession and repression. On the one hand, where the demonstrations centred on resistance against declining material conditions, the regimes responded through reduction of user charges for public utilities and an upward review of public sector salary and other emoluments. On the other hand, where the protests assumed political overtones that tended to threaten regime survival, African leaders responded in a brusque repressive manner deploying state instruments of coercion to unleash violence on the people. Structural Adjustment Programme also induced disengagement from the state by African citizens, following the inability of the state (its capacity for social provisioning having been emaciated) to ensure social citizenship. Ake (2001) summarizes the nature of 'exiting' from the state under the SAP regime thus:

Structural adjustment programmes...forced the masses in Africa to turn away from states that seem helpless in the face of a persistent and deepening crisis, states whose ability to maintain social services and infrastructure are visibly declining or non-existent. For the most part, people are turning to community organisations, special interest groups and self- help projects to survive and to arrest the erosion of social services as well as the collapse of the social infrastructure.

Africa's Public Sphere in the Post-SAP Era

There has not been any significant change both in the character of the state and the material status of African citizenry in the post-SAP period. While it is easily conceded that SAP no longer exists in its pristine form in Africa today, the economic policy thrusts of African regimes still continue to be laden with heavy dose of neo-liberal character. Absolute poverty threatens majority of African population, per capita income is ever decreasing, rationalisation continues in the public sector, state continues to abdicate its responsibilities to the citizens by disengaging from social service delivery while violation of citizens' rights remains a salient feature of state governance. All these have combined to make the post-colonial state irrelevant to the ordinary people of

the continent. The state is perceived as an alien and oppressive institution which should be avoided. The consequence of this is the withdrawal of the people from the state and its share of the public sphere. This retreat is evident, for examples, in the growing establishment of and enrolment in privately-owned schools; engagement of private security providers; and initiation of self-help projects such as road construction and provision of water.

It requires no special knowledge to discern the implications disengagement from the state has for public sphere governance in Africa. First and foremost, the rapidly declining legitimacy of the state will be completely eroded. The state will continue to be perceived as a criminal, oppressive and alien institution which will not encourage people to be mobilised for achieving national goals. Also, exiting from the state makes the emergence of national political society very difficult. Furthermore, civic public will continue to be governed by lack of morality while primordial loyalty gains precedence over national loyalty. These implications portend grave consequences for the African state and its managers in particular and the public sphere in general. There is therefore an urgent need to embark on efforts aimed at transforming both the state and the public sphere in Africa. In the next section of the paper, I propose some measures that are capable of reforming the state and transforming Africa's public sphere.

Transforming Public Sphere in Africa

There is no contesting the fact that what Africa needs as part of its governance renewal efforts is re-construction of the public sphere in a manner that encourages popular participation which lubricates participatory democracy. Since the state is not permitted to 'kill' civil society and capturing state power is not one of the aims of associational life, the challenge before African continent is how to re-construct its public space in a manner that guarantees cordial co-habitation of the two sectors in the public space. The re-construction should be designed in a way that moderates the claims of the state for exclusive ownership of the public realm while simultaneously encouraging the ordinary people to have a more proprietary sense of the civic public sphere (Ekeh 1992). The re-construction process should encourage mutual engagement between the state and civil society 'without the state overguiding the process' (Azarya 1994) of engagement as to put civil society under state control or surveillance. This kind of framework will encourage civil society to develop an attitude of 'voice' rather than 'exit' in state-society interface. It is only through such process that Africa's public sphere can be re-constructed or re-defined. The greatest governance challenge confronting African regimes is earning legitimacy from African people. This

challenge is best overcome through creation of responsive and accountable governance system. To attain this requires radical transformation of the state from 'a private network of relations built around the ruler and his entourage' to 'a set of impersonal institutions serving the general interest' (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1998). This transformation will ultimately ensure citizens' participation and their preferences will find expression in public governance. Reflecting on the imperative of reconstructing the African state, Onimode (2000) perceptively observes that any meaningful transformation of the post-colonial African state 'requires mass mobilisation, especially of the poor and rural population, popular participation and empowerment of the people at all levels of society, a systematic and all-inclusive political education as well as the promotion of popular choices of policies and programmes...' The failure of the orthodox neo-liberal adjustment programme with its attendant market logic after more than two decades of intellectual hegemony has compelled a re-thinking of the strategy of African recovery. The new perspective favours a return to developmental state with its major attributes of social responsibility, social citizenship and social provisioning (Olukoshi and Laakso 1996). The new developmental state must however be rooted in democratic norms in order to minimise the prospects for the re-emergence of the democratic deficits that characterised earlier attempt at developmentalism in the 1970s. This new perspective essentially negates the aggressive promotion of neo-liberalism on the continent by the countries of the North and their pro-market theorists, a promotion which, Nzongola-Ntalaja (2000) insists, is rooted in 'abstraction of the historical development of Europe, North America, Japan and East Asia' all of which share a markedly different historical experience with Africa. This historical fact supports adoption of different strategy of development which must recognise the peculiarities of a society in terms of its historical and socio-economic mutation.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine the phenomenon of disengagement from the state in Africa in the post-colonial era. It observes that while the phenomenon predates the post-colonial state, the dismal developmental performance record of the post-colonial African regimes provides the context for the continuing withdrawal of the citizens from the state till the present time. The declining capacity of the state for social provisioning which adversely impacts on the material status of African citizens on the one hand, and the increasing authoritarianism and repressive tendencies of the state on the other hand, have encouraged the flourishing of 'politics at the margin of the state'. The paper concludes that permanent exit from the state serves neither the interest of the state nor that of civil society. For the state, it

worsens the crisis of legitimacy which it inherited from its colonial predecessor. For civil society, it is only within the state system that the reciprocal rights associated with state-citizen relations can be claimed. More importantly, civil society groups need a sound legal regime provided by the state for their autonomy and reproduction. This throws up a huge challenge of developing a pro-active framework that facilitates mutual engagement of the state and civil society in the public arena, with a view to lessening the totalising claims of the state to the political space of the public realm while simultaneously creating an enabling environment for associational life to thrive.

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