Globalisation and the African State

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Andy Storey suggests that the widespread absence of state legitimacy works against the emergence of developmental states in Africa, states which would be capable of dealing with the challenges of globalisation in a progressive way, i.e., helping to improve the welfare of the majority of the population. The absence of state legitimacy also hinders the development of civil society and democracy. This legitimacy deficit is rooted in history, but it is also compounded by present-day factors, and it has not been fundamentally tackled by present programmes of economic and political reform. Whether it can be tackled, and if so how, is the subject of the concluding section of the article.

Introduction - globalisation and the state

Globalisation, in an economic sense, may be defined as the growth of economic activity that spans politically defined boundaries. Indicators of globalisation over the past decade include the fact that trade between countries in goods and services has grown twice as fast as total economic output, while foreign direct investment (FDI) and international trade in company shares have registered yet faster growth rates (The
The remainder of this article explores what type of state response globalisation may be engendering in Africa. A central argument is that the way in which some African state agents are adapting to globalisation may not prove "developmental"—in the sense of a state with sufficient capacity to devise and implement developmental programmes which, at least potentially, might confer significant benefits on the population as a whole. The "developmental state" is a contested concept, and it is important to approach it with caution.

Much commentary on globalisation and its relationship with the state has tended to oscillate unhelpfully between hyperbole and dismissal (Strange, 1998). For some, globalisation comes close to rendering national state authorities redundant (Horsman and Marshall, 1994) while, for others, globalisation changes little in terms of the potential power of national states (Hirst and Thompson, 1996). Weiss' balanced judgement appears appropriate: "national and regional differences remain substantial and national institutions remain significant" (1997: 13). Globalisation does not render the policies of national states irrelevant: rather, different types of state actions and capacities are required in the current climate (Weiss, 1998: 212; Rodrik, 1997: 14).

While the state is neither dead nor in universal retreat, it is in a process of adaptation to changing circumstances (Higgott and Phillips, 1999: 22). Analysing this process of adaptation highlights the "differences in national (and regional) responses to globalisation, and the state capacities which drive these responses" (Higgott and Phillips, 1999: 22). Higgott and Philips (1999), for example, examine the similarities and differences in state responses to globalisation between Asia and Latin America (see also Phillips, 1998).

State legitimacy

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to note that such states need not necessarily be democratic – in fact, many of the paradigmatic examples (such as South Korea) have been authoritarian (Leftwich, 1996). However, the particular reason for the absence of developmental states in Africa may also be a reason for a tendency towards poorly developed democratic structures, including civil society (which is further discussed below).

The reason in question is state legitimacy (or the lack of it). Legitimacy is here defined as the extent to which the state possesses, or does not possess, “the acknowledged right to command” (Kenny, 1998: 169) State legitimacy, for present purposes, can also usefully be separated into two components – territorial and governmental (Clapham, 1996: 10). The first refers to whether the state is acknowledged to correspond to a meaningful geographical or political space, and is often bound up with the issue of whether people recognise the legitimacy of the nation of which they are treated as citizens. The second component refers to whether the people who rule the state are seen as having the right to do so – this can extend beyond the attitude towards any particular government in power at any particular time, and can refer to the sense of obligation people feel towards the state authorities in general. If a person feels her/himself to be a member of an ethnic group but not of the nation-state of which she/he is supposed to be a citizen, then this is a breakdown of territorial legitimacy. If the person does feel (at least some) loyalty to the nation-state, but rejects that state’s claim to regulate cross-border sales of her/his agricultural produce, then this is a partial breakdown of governmental legitimacy. As will become clear, both components of legitimacy are often in short supply in much of sub-Saharan Africa.

The history of state legitimacy in Africa

While many analyses of the alleged illegitimacy of the African state (and problematic state-society linkage) trace the roots of the problem to the colonial and post-colonial eras, Peter Ekeh (1990) locates the issue in a longer-term historical context. He argues that the separation between state and society originates in African people’s trust in, and reliance on, the kinship group.
rather than any form of national state. In turn, he claims that the social origins of kinship behaviour lie in the inability or unwillingness of earlier African state formations to protect people against the slave trade. His argument is that the slave trade made African states less dependent on internal sources of power, prompting them to rely instead on alliances with international capital; and as the state’s interest in, and ability to protect, its citizens declined, so people turned to kinship groups for what (admittedly often limited) support they might offer.

It was this pattern of relationships between individuals, kinship groups, and states which colonial forms of government encountered, manipulated and, partially, transformed. In a broad sense the colonial impact was principally reinforcing of the already established political trend. Some indigenous state structures, such as that of the Asante, that possessed, or might have developed, popular legitimacy were actively dismantled (Warner, 1998: 509) by European powers. Increasingly, the source of African leaders’ power was again, in large measure, located in external alliances, leaving ordinary people to turn yet further inwards and away from state structures over which they had limited influence. This trend was heightened by the violence and racism which characterised colonial rule (Lindqvist, 1998; Mamdani, 1996).

But colonialism had more specific impacts on the kinship structures it encountered – such as the partial reinforcement of the role of certain kinship groups or tribes (for purposes of indirect rule), and, sometimes, the effective invention of such tribal structures (Ranger, 1983). An impact which is especially relevant to the present discussion is the establishment of nation-state structures – still, for the most part, dictating the borders of modern Africa, and having major implications for territorial legitimacy – incorporating diverse tribal units (whether of relatively old or new creation) and/or separating the members of some such units from each other. The nature of this particular inheritance is critically detailed by Davidson (1992), who describes the nation-state as Africa’s curse and the “black man’s burden”.

To summarise the pre-colonial and colonial impacts, the argument of Ekeh, Davidson and others is that the pre-colonial and colonial legacies left post-colonial African states in a profound crisis. At its most basic, this crisis can be described as one of legitimacy – both territorial (the new structures often did not correspond to spaces and communities to which people gave primary loyalty), and governmental (in the sense that a well justified distrust of most forms of authority was also fostered).
The post-colonial African state: from nationalism to shadow politics

Post-colonial strategies for state legitimisation

Faced with this historical legacy, a principal imperative of newly independent African states was state legitimisation (closely linked to the task of nation-building). The nationalist project played a role here, insofar as nationalism – central to the anti-colonial struggle – provided a means of welding together often diverse people into a reasonably cohesive imagined community corresponding to the colonially bequeathed national territory (Anderson, 1991). But, after independence, nationalist enthusiasm alone proved a limited mobilisation device. Ultimately, more concrete mechanisms (or, perhaps, substitutes) for state legitimisation were required. The resources of the state, such as they were, often became a means to the desired end – hence the widespread emergence of regimes subsequently labelled as patrimonial, clientelist, etc (Engelbert, 1998: 768). Legitimacy which could not be expected as of right would have to be purchased, especially from key constituencies which presented potential threats to the régime – including ethnic chiefs and professional urban groups. Meanwhile, the ties of kinship themselves penetrated the structure of the state, creating networks of patronage relationships (Sandbrook, 1996: 9).

And when state legitimacy could not be purchased, quiescence at least had to be ensured – by the state security apparatus. This could often be facilitated by continuation of the long historical practice of reliance on external, rather than internal, sources of support – the international aid industry and superpower competition provided African autocrats with leverage over aid and other resources (including military ones). Between 1962 and 1988, six countries – Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan and Zaire – topped the list of US aid recipients: in each case, US aid primarily went to support authoritarian leaders who possessed minimal internal legitimacy (Diamond, 1995: 251).

Disengagement and the rise of the shadow state

Thus, for the most part, the historical legacy of weak state-society relationships was not overcome by the post-colonial states. Many
people responded by increasingly disengaging from the state, what one commentator terms a flight from the state (Mbembe, 1999). Faltering governmental legitimacy ultimately caused, in many cases, a deeper questioning of territorial legitimacy.

Left with the shells of a fragile and fallible civil society, the majority have sought ways of defending themselves. The principal way they have found of doing this is through “tribalism”, perhaps more accurately, clientelism: a kind of Tammany Hall-style patronage, dependent on personal, family, and similar networks of local interest. [This] has become the way politics in Africa largely operates. (Davidson, 1992: 12)

One of the many ironies of this situation is that the agents of the state are often themselves heavily implicated in the informal economy of tax evasion, smuggling, etc. – enriching themselves at the same time as they undermine the authority of the state as the state (as opposed to the interests of actors within the state apparatus). This situation corresponds to Bayart’s conceptualisation of the rhizome state, an underground network of alliances and deals that moulds much of the pattern of African politics and economics (Bayart, 1993). More specifically, Reno (1995) documents the extensive involvement of state agents – what he describes as the shadow state – in Sierra Leone in a variety of illegal activities, and the way in which this has undermined the formal institutions of the state, with particular relevance for governmental legitimacy. The tendency of some state agents, such as Moi in Kenya, to foment ethnic conflict can be interpreted within the same framework – the maintenance of power through the further degradation of the legitimacy of the state itself (Africa Confidential, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 1995) – though in this case the implications touch on territorial legitimacy also because people are explicitly encouraged to define themselves in ethnic rather than national terms.

This pattern of state-society interaction poses severe problems for the development of so-called civil society, the networks of voluntary organisations which classical political theory views as essential to democratic development. Rothchild and Lawson (1994) note that civil society requires for its development the existence of a social contract whereby the population recognises the legitimacy of the idea of the state, and the legitimacy of the parameters of the political space in which they live – and thus “contribute to the legitimisation of overall state authority” (Gordon, 1996: 1534) – even when they reject the policies of a
particular government. Such recognition – in either its territorial or governmental dimension – is not present in many African cases for the reasons discussed above. Illegitimate (though by no means necessarily weak) states are, in turn, unlikely to foster or even tolerate genuine civil society organisations. The implications of this for the possible development of civil society in the future are discussed further below, but first we examine how the recent forces of globalisation have impacted on African economies and politics.

Globalisation and Africa: marginalisation and adaptation

Marginalisation?

Part of the legacy of an inherited and sustained legitimacy deficit is that many African states became “precariously balanced between repression and disintegration” (Ottaway, 1997: 12). By the 1980s, a number of factors converged to threaten this precarious balance. The most notable of these was the changing geopolitical context associated with the end of the Cold War, and the diminished importance attached to matters African by the sole remaining superpower, the United States. Despite the high cultural profile of Africa and African issues in the US, evidence for diminished official interest ranges from “declining levels of aid, through empty Africa desks in the State department, to the closure of USAID, and, presumably, CIA bureaux across the continent” (Martin, 1998: 9). The same is largely true of European aid also (Randel and German, 1996: 24; Storey, 1996: 10).

The marginalisation is not only political (in terms of the end of the Cold War) but also, to a certain extent, economic – part of the reason for the redirection of aid is the perception that the world’s best economic opportunities are mostly to be found outside Africa. Africa’s share of world trade – the overall expansion of which has been such a feature of globalisation – has been in steady decline for at least two decades (Martin, 1998: 13; Davenport et al 1995: 5).

The picture in relation to FDI is more mixed. Africa’s share of global FDI inflows has been falling steadily in recent years – for example, from 2.3 per cent in 1994 to 1.2 per cent in 1997
In a similar vein, Fahey (1999) documents how internationally connected Somali businessmen have developed lucrative global

Within the grey zone of international commercial activity, which has become increasingly important as global markets have expanded into unstable areas, companies are able to secure a degree of privilege and protection through negotiating private deals with warlord-type rulers. Not constituting a state, meanwhile, warlords such as Taylor are free from creditor demands. (Duffield, 1999: 5)

In similar vein, Fahey (1999) documents how internationally connected Somali businessmen have developed lucrative global
Box A: The business of war

For international mercenary companies, conflict and instability offer many opportunities for profit. For example, both Sandline International and Executive Outcomes have helped indigenous forces in Sierra Leone secure access to mineral-producing areas in return for direct payment and commercial concessions. In the case of Sandline International, in 1997 and 1998, their activities were supported by the British government (Francis, 1999). For Western governments, such companies are attractive proxies for the conduct of foreign policy because they not only fulfil economic-strategic interests (such as the protection of mining company concerns), but they also do so at minimal cost (they finance themselves) and with no risk of Western troops being killed (what might be termed the “Somalia syndrome” as far as the US is concerned). While this type of intervention may provide “some semblance of coercive stability” (Francis, 1999: 323), it is unlikely to prove supportive of long-term stability or development, not least because it thrives on instability, but also because the privileges granted to the companies concerned may be extremely depletive of a country’s resources (Francis, 1999).

trading links without the inconvenience of state regulation (such as taxation) but also without state support in the form of, for example, a national telephone or banking network. However, this point should not be taken too far – some at least of the levers of state power retain enormous material significance in most cases.

Adaptation

The increasing integration of some African actors in global criminal networks (Bayart et al, 1999) is evidence that while Africa is increasingly marginalised from the formal workings of the global economy, the rhizome/shadow state has extensive linkages with the wider world. For the élites concerned, this constitutes a rational adaptation to a changed world environment in which the advantages of formal control of the “official” state have declined, a function of globalisation and the end of the Cold War (Clapham, 1996: 23). For example, globalisation means that a state is less able than before to officially regulate multinational
companies and/or enforce capital controls, while the end of the Cold War makes an African state’s vote at the UN a less salable commodity. But unofficial taxes or payments for security can still be extracted from the companies concerned, and profitable alliances established between shadowy indigenous and international actors. This capacity for adaptation extends to programmes of economic reform: shadow state agents have been able to turn structural adjustment to their own advantage by, for example, selling state companies to their allies under the guise of privatisation programmes, thus reinforcing the centrality of the underground/rhizome pattern of economics and politics (Bayart, 1993: 226; Carmody, 1998: 37; Hibou, 1999: 74-5; and see also Box B).

The ongoing crisis of development and democracy

The fact that non-state (or shadow state) openings have been increasingly turned to does not lessen the scale of the crisis, especially for the great mass of ordinary people. The fact that a minority of the population has found ways to enrich itself through adapting to changing international economic conditions is scant consolation to the vast majority who are impoverished. But such capacity for elite adaptation does mean that the prospects of genuinely progressive, developmental states emerging are probably gloomier than ever – because important interests that might have worked towards such emergence are focused elsewhere.

Similar gloom is apparent regarding the prospects for democracy. Despite talk of a “wave of democratisation” sweeping Africa, the democratic gains achieved have tended to be rather more shallow and tenuous than anticipated (Abrahamsen 1997; Baker, 1998; Joseph, 1998). For the most part, “the same élites are still in power, and the same socio-economic arrangements persist” (Abrahamsen, 1997: 151). This highlights the fundamental disjunction (governmental and/or territorial) which frequently still pertains between state and society, precluding the type of civil society that typically underpins democratic government. Rothchild and Lawson (1994) point to examples of possible broadening or liberation of civil society in Africa –
Box B: Structural adjustment and the state

White (1996) points out that while stabilisation may have improved economic growth performance in some countries – and even this is challenged in cases such as Mozambique (Hanlon, 1996) – there is no evidence that the other components of adjustment have yielded positive results. The liberalisation of agricultural prices under adjustment may have boosted incentives to farmers but the supply response has been constrained by frequent unavailability of essential complementary inputs such as credit and extension services. And while adjustment may not necessarily impact negatively on the poorest sectors of African society, to ensure that it does not do so often requires a programme of social safety nets and investment in human capital. The provision of services such as agricultural inputs and social safety nets is, ultimately, the business of the state, a view which even the World Bank now seems inclined to at least partially accept (World Bank, 1997; Stiglitz, 1998).

However, whether the “framework” state now envisaged by the Bank is adequate to the task of economic and political reconstruction required in many African societies, especially those trying to emerge from periods of conflict and decline, is questionable (Munro et al., 1999: 82). A fear is that the relatively minimalist (certainly not developmental) state role still proposed as appropriate by the Bank – where state interventions may be justifiable, but are still to be strictly limited – is, in fact, inappropriate for many African countries, especially in view of the level of development of political and civil forces discussed elsewhere in this article (Fine, 1999; Henriot, 1997).

through, for example, the state-populist politics of Ghana and Uganda. But such progress is, at best, slow and fragile; at worst, it is proving cosmetic or showing signs of degeneration (Kasfir, 1998). Chabal and Deloz (1999) refer caustically, though perhaps exaggeratedly, to what they term the illusions of civil society in Africa. More specifically, Uvin (1998) notes that a seeming upsurge in civil society activity may be deceptive – for example, an increase in the quantity of civil society organisations
Conclusion: prospects for change?

The shadow state has proven an adaptive and resourceful actor and, in important ways, its flexible way of working meshes neatly with the forces of a liberalised global economy. The problem is that such a state, while frequently resilient within its own terms, has little developmental or democratising potential. How, if at all, can this impasse be resolved? For Davidson, the answer is as follows: "the modern state can become stable and progressive only in the measure that it wins back for itself the popular legitimacy it has lost or never sufficiently possessed, and it can do this only by processes of participatory democracy" (Davidson, 1992: 315).

Davidson (rather vaguely) goes on to argue that participatory democracy must be located within a framework of regional, rather
than solely national, government. Davidson can be interpreted as arguing that a more participatory form of politics would help remedy the governmental legitimacy deficit, while regional structures could go some way towards easing the territorial legitimacy deficit. But it is precisely in relation to such proposals that Leys (1994: 44) contends that the task is practically hopeless – politics cannot be meaningfully reformed so long as Africa remains economically backward, the victim of "such a huge productivity gap" with the rest of the world.

But scepticism (or pessimism) can be taken too far; gains, albeit limited and tentative, have occurred. There are also a limited number of cases in Africa where economic progress is relatively long-lasting and well-entrenched, of which Botswana is the most prominent example. Between 1965 and 1980, Botswana enjoyed average annual GNP growth per capita of 9.9 per cent (compared to 1.2 for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole); more strikingly, between 1980 and 1993, Botswana's annual growth rate per capita averaged out at 6.2 per cent while, for sub-Saharan Africa in aggregate, the economy contracted by an annual average of 1.4 per cent per capita (UNDP, 1997: 202-3). Botswana is, in many respects, a special case, benefiting as it does from a small and ethnically homogenous population (thus limiting the need for a concentration on nation-building and state legitimisation in the territorial sense) and from substantial diamond reserves; and its success story must be qualified by the persistence of substantial rural poverty (Buchanan-Smith and Tiogelang, 1994) as well as by the extent to which a hierarchical, technocratic style of government limits popular participation (Neme, 1997). Civil society has tended to be weakly developed in Botswana (Holm, 1996), highlighting a point made in the introduction to this article, namely that a developmental state is not necessarily a promoter of thoroughgoing democracy.

That Botswana has proven developmentally successful, if democratically imperfect, is, however, clear. And not all Botswana's advantages are unique: Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Angola and Sierra Leone, for example, also possess substantial diamond reserves, but the populations thereof did not benefit from them to anything like the extent of the people of Botswana (Marysse, 1998: 16-18; Reno, 1995); as for ethnic homogeneity, Somalia shares this characteristic with Botswana (Fahy, 1999). Part of the explanation for the differences between these countries lies in patterns of government and politics (McCarthy, 1994: 238). Such patterns cannot be willed into existence – they depend on specific
historical and structural circumstances – but what the Botswana case suggests is that politics can make a decisive difference to economic performance. In other words, a reformed state structure (and state-society relationship) can precede and stimulate economic development – it does not necessarily have to await the radical alteration of “the global economic and political forces bearing on Africa” (Leys, 1994: 44). Thus states can deal with global forces, not merely wait to be dealt with by global forces.

A question which requires further investigation is whether the type of state epitomised by Botswana – one with relatively strong territorial and governmental legitimacy – is being rendered obsolete by the particular nature of the globalisation project vis-à-vis Africa, in which more fragmented and privatised forces (warlords and private armies) may be the preferred partners of global capitalism (Duffield, 1999). If this is the case, then the future looks bleak indeed. What this possibility highlights is that the process of globalisation is intensely uneven. While some regions of the world may see a reinvigoration of strong, progressive states acting alone and/or in co-operation to resocialise the power of capital (Higgott and Phillips, 1999; Martin and Schumann, 1997: 241-3), other regions, including Africa, may witness tendencies towards fragmentation and weakening of the capacity of the official state to regulate the economy in the interests of the majority.

If we assume (and it may be a brave assumption) that developmental states are being challenged but that they are not necessarily obsolete, then there is some scope for the reform of the African state so that it can play a more developmental role in the context of a globalising world economy. This, of course, does not mean that the state apparatus is likely to reform itself – the pressure for reform will have to be based on the organisation of oppositional forces. How best to support those oppositional forces – in the fields of aid and advocacy – is the major challenge confronting those non-Africans who see themselves as supporters of African people.

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Footnotes

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2 Most of the discussion in the article focuses on sub-Saharan Africa.
3 A large and powerful West African kingdom that came under British rule in 1896.
4 A particularly direct expression of this project was the comment of the late President of Mozambique, Samora Machel, that “For the nation to live, the tribe must die” (in Africa Confidential, 1999: 4).
5 Some of the régimes and leaders in question, for example Kenyatta’s Kenya, possessed greater degrees of legitimacy than others.
6 See also Dramé (1996) and Jones (1998).
7 For example, in Rwanda, control of some state organs allowed members of the ruling élite to organise a lucrative smuggling trade spanning eastern Zaire, Rwanda and Kenya (Storey, 1999).
8 Another is Mauritius, “the measure of whose success is that it is often treated for analytical purposes as if it were no longer an African country” (Mosley, 1995: 703).
9 A telling example is the fact that Air France has signed a contract with a private company to provide security for its African stopovers (Leymarie, 1999).