

State Integrity and Democratization: Issues, Values, and Paradoxes in African Development

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Introduction

Africa has long been the recipient of globalizing processes (e.g., the expansion and internationalization of financial markets), interactive networks (e.g., global corporate management, worldwide epistemic and interpretive communities), structures (e.g., newly emerging power relationships deriving from changing global investment patterns), and discourses (e.g., new social constructions of cognition, identity, and meaning built upon postmodern global conditions).¹ The interactive effects of these global systemic changes within African states have had serious ethical implications for political and economic development. The consequence is conflict between the Westphalian legal-political order, on the one hand, and the imperatives of demands and expectations of civil society, on the other. Increasingly, the cultural lag between dominant global systemic values and politico-economic change in Africa is manifested in the normative and moral limitations of the African state.

The objective of this analysis is to examine the ethical and value implications, paradoxes, and dilemmas inherent in the political development (democratization) process in Africa. Accordingly, the focus is to (1) analyze the tensions between state building and democratization, (2) examine the paradoxes of political and economic liberalization, and (3) underscore the ethical dilemmas and implications of liberalization as aspects of the development process in Africa. These issues are directly related to questions such as: What are the structural constraints on genuine pluralism? Are issues of ethnonationalism, state building, and democratization irreconcilable? Do neoliberal economic solutions enhance political development?

Structural Constraints on Democratization

The current state of African political economy is essentially the result of the combined effect of the legacy of precolonial structures, the impact of colonial rule, and the pressures of contemporary global political and economic expectations and the responses at each historical juncture of internal African social forces. These experiences have bequeathed to Africa different and varied realities that are unique when examined in the light of globalizing processes such as democratization. The past and current legacies of African states accordingly present challenges to traditional conceptions of

democracy or the traditional ordering and conceptualization of international relations.

African states in general constitute a glaring exception to traditional conceptions of the state and the international system in international relations theory. For example, neorealist and neoliberal dichotomies of order/disorder, domestic/international, centralized/decentralized, or anarchy/hierarchy are largely inappropriate when applied to Africa's experiences and realities.² The state-building and democratization paradox has, in many cases, been heavily influenced by external variables. Domestic developments in Africa are often the consequence of external imperatives. International relations theorists often ignore the historical evolution of the state system, particularly the construction and assimilation of developing states. African states played no key role in the construction of the international state system. Rather, they were incorporated into the global capitalist system as specialized producers within a global division of labor constructed according to the needs of European powers.³ Their peripheral incorporation into the global capitalist system is currently being sustained by the hegemony and interventionist proclivity of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In reality the current state system has always been and remains hierarchically ordered.

The Westphalian legal political order and its institutional expressions have a significant impact on the political transitions (democratization) and are manifested in structural-institutional constraints that severely restrict political elites' room for autonomous decision making. State structures and institutional constraints coupled with continuous external impositions undermine freedom of, as well as elites' perceptions of, possibilities. Reduced state capacity and inept rule are often the result of the inherent incompatibilities between informal (precolonial) and formal institutional (colonial and postcolonial globalization) values that manifest themselves in patronage, corruption, tribute taking, coercive extraction, and external impositions.

These past and current structural constraints make state building and democratization irreconcilable goals. Instead of helping to control the worst impulses of ethnonationalism, the freedom of action and expression inherent in democratization often exacerbates intercommunal tensions. In states like Burundi, Rwanda, or Somalia, among others, the success of democratization in enhancing ethnic accommodation is less than assured. Besides, the reallocable resources and institutional means necessary to achieve greater intercommunal inclusion and cohesion are woefully lacking. In such countries, democratization is likely to be reversed, to stall, or to erupt into communal rebellion or escalate into a civil war.

The anomalies and contradictions of the African state vis-à-vis international society are especially quite evident in the experiences of Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), and Angola, among others. In these cases, internal disorder is in stark contrast to the order and structure of the international community. The transition to genuine pluralism has been undermined by deep-seated and long-standing institutional and structural problems.

If democratization is to be sustained in Africa, there is need for a spatial unit to be under the control of an effective government characterized by juridical autonomy in space. African states are often confronted with issues that they are incapable of dealing with on an exclusive basis because of the imperatives of external demands and the centrifugal effects of ethnic subnationalisms. African states in the context of democratization are an apt example of Barry Buzan's categorization of "weak states" as characterized by (1) high levels of political violence, (2) a lack of coherent national identity, (3) a lack of clear hierarchy of political authority, and (4) a high degree of state control over the media, among other factors.⁴ Thus, for many scholars whose works focus on developing societies, the practical value of democratization in resolving ethnopolitical conflicts amounts to a very dubious expectation. Democratization is instead likely to unleash election frauds, a dominant single party in relation to weak opposition parties, and a reinventing of "old-guard" politicians with no new or effective contribution to make toward political and economic development.

Economic Liberalization in the Context of Democratization

Economic liberalization, which translates into privatization, structural adjustments, and the general implementation of a free-market economy, often has a wide-ranging impact on state and society. This aspect of economic globalization underscores the opening up of developing economies and is thus manifested in removal of obstacles to free trade (tariffs and other barriers), reforming the financial system, providing incentives for foreign investment, and privatizing public enterprises, among other deregulations. Economic liberalization is believed to enhance political liberalization especially when it is effectively implemented and divorced from the shackles of authoritarian regimes.

Democratization and its accompanying economic liberalization seem, however, to undermine the twentieth-century ethos of the state as responsible for a substantial portion of the economic well-being of its citizens. The state, in other words, bears responsibility for functions ranging from the maintenance of domestic tranquility and protection of the territory against external attacks to contributions to the material security of the members of society. In other words, many African states aim at a greater availability of collective and distributional goods and institute policies directed at greater social and economic equality.

Democratization involves the gradual establishment of values such as respect for civil rights and political liberties as well as greater citizen participation in the politics of society. In general, however, such political liberalization devoid of societal cohesion and a high level of economic development is often plagued by electoral conflict and intense political rivalry. Besides, the indexing of economic liberalization to political liberalization may be acting as a stumbling block to the realization of political stability in many African countries.⁵ The immediate reactions to economic austerity measures inherent in economic liberalization policies have been varied but destabilizing. Many take the form of spontaneous uprising

against the government in response to the sudden experience or fear of loss of economic privileges. In countries where this has occurred it is often the military that is used to coerce the people back into peaceful behavior. The use of the military to put down riots is counterproductive for young experiments in political liberalization.

The developmental success of advanced industrial countries is generally a strong argument that economic liberalization and political liberalization are interconnected and mutually supportive processes.⁶ Evidence from developing countries, however, suggests that there is no consensus as to the real dynamics between them. To a large extent, the general relationship between the two so far is one of a dialectical tension with economic liberalization acting as a constraint on political liberalization because of the limits it can put on the extent of political reforms. The consequence of the dialectical tension between the two is an oscillation between progress and regress within a context of lingering authoritarianism, caution, and control.

The interaction of economic liberalization and political liberalization presents serious dilemmas for African states because of its contradictory consequences. The government is often confronted with the choice of when and how much to liberalize the economy or how to prioritize the various adjustment programs that constitute economic liberalization and reform. Often the state, concerned about the negative consequences of economic liberalization, can deliberately stall in its implementation of the required measures. The state is thus forced to waver between strict state control and restricted elections. In the final analysis, political liberalization can act as a brake on economic liberalization, and the latter can in turn severely undermine democratization. The fear of political instabilities caused by severe distributional inequities often keeps the state heavily involved in the economy. After all, the so-called East Asian economic miracles of the 1980s and early 1990s were the result of effective state intervention in stimulating the export-led sectors of those countries.

African governments operating in a context of fragile legitimacy and a legacy of military intervention in politics are often faced with the dilemma of whether to shield the military or other groups from the austerity measures inherent in structural adjustments. If certain groups are privileged by economic liberalization, the government is invariably confronted with resistance from the economically deprived and politically excluded groups in society whose interests are not protected by the new political economy. Generally political liberalization without visible economic improvements is likely to cause enough deprivation to delegitimize the incumbent regime, awaken nostalgia for a more authoritarian regime, intensify ethnic divisions, or instigate a military intervention in politics.⁷ This lack of sustained political confidence in incumbent regimes is to some extent responsible for the shifting economic development strategies in many developing countries. For example, many African governments have shifted from import substitution industrialization to what is now referred to as a free-market development strategy.

In order to make the appropriate transition from authoritarian systems to neoliberal politico-economic systems, the institutional frameworks need

first of all to be developed. Where well-established and supportive economic institutions are absent, far-reaching political reforms are likely to generate a barrage of demands and problems that would escalate into collective political violence.

Ethical Dilemmas of Economic and Political Liberalization

The policy shift by international financial institutions and major Western donors from poverty reduction to debt servicing in the early 1980s was motivated by the inability of several developing countries to service their debt and the fear that commercial banks would go bankrupt. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) became the policy instrument of the donors, with an emphasis on currency devaluation and export promotion.⁸ The reduced state capacity to deliver goods and services has also been a direct consequence of the implementation of SAPs, which also have the effect of generally eroding living standards as well as widening the gap between rich and poor. In particular, the experiences of many African countries, including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Zaire, are cases in point.

Even where positive results in the form of new economic opportunities have resulted, the rich have disproportionately reaped the gains. Adjustment programs have routinely directed a relatively enormous amount of resources to commercial farmers at the expense of subsistence farmers.⁹ Funds are generally directed away from the more public sectors of health, education, and agricultural support. These cuts in public expenditure have severely undermined the manpower development necessary for long-term national growth. Because of the enormous suffering and eroded living standards caused by SAPs, in 1987 the IMF and the World Bank introduced poverty-sensitive reforms. However, such reforms, implemented as "social dimensions of adjustment" projects (SDAs), failed to involve the very poor adequately in the liberalization process. Thus, democratization and its accompanying economic liberalization policies raise serious questions related to social justice in African societies. The institutional structures that underlie the markets and economic behavior in many African states are not adequately developed to integrate the bulk of the population into meaningful and viable political and economic existence.

Redistributive policies do not always promote efficiency and sustained economic growth. In some countries, the politically dominant segments of society (industrialists, top civil servants, the military, and the middle class) have been the beneficiaries of economic growth and liberalization. Thus, instead of liberalization and the probable economic growth diminishing the overt inequalities and divisive elitism in such countries, it has instead entrenched the power and position and preserved the elitist traditions of these dominant groups. Such a situation results in the further alienation and marginalization of the lower classes and the utter failure of economic and political liberalization programs.

Although effective economic liberalization may be a necessary aspect of viable democratic reform, it is nonetheless a sacrificial and prolonged

process. The widespread deprivation caused by adjustment programs, the vulnerable state of markets, and the ill-developed institutional infrastructure in many African countries, for example, suggest that there is a need for a “strong” state to ensure basic human needs and to put in place the necessary structures for a functioning market economy.¹⁰ In the final analysis, formidable ethical questions still remain unanswered where economic and political liberalization are concerned. Does the goal of establishing a market economy based on long-term viability and sustained economic growth justify the initial negative social consequences of liberalization programs? How do we in fact know that such liberalization programs will ever work in Africa, where the institutional structures and societal values may be quite at odds with the Westphalian, European legal-political order? What is the most effective way to ensure that economic liberalization policies will have an “acceptable” and less strenuous political, social, and economic impact on all segments of society?

Group Rights versus State Rights

With the end of the Cold War, the relationship between people’s rights (human rights) and state rights (sovereign rights) became one of the key issues within states and in world politics. For example, the argument over whether state sovereignty is absolute or dependent on popular consent was reflected in the debate over the occupation of Haiti by the United States in 1994 in order to reinstall the elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, which had been overthrown by a military coup. In terms of great-power relations with weak states, it has now become generally acceptable in international politics for donors to impose foreign aid conditions on recipient states. Such impositions are considered legitimate and outside the bounds of blatant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. Even economic and political agreements between the World Bank and the IMF are considered legitimate because they are based on the state’s consent and on negotiations. In the context of the state’s sovereignty versus popular sovereignty, however, does the state have the right to negotiate and agree on adjustment policies that impose intense deprivations on societal groups without their consent? Should such intervention by powerful state and nonstate donors not be approved by popular consent? Should the state be made to succumb to external impositions that undermine its contractual obligation to its citizens to ensure a modicum of welfare?

With the end of the Cold War and the eruption of hyperethnicity, the increase in ethnic bloodletting, genocidal massacres, and outright state collapse, the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and major powers have at times been forced to intervene in order to alleviate the suffering of peoples. The globalization of human rights impelled the United States to intervene in Haiti (1994), Somalia (1992), the former Yugoslavia (1995), and more recently NATO in Kosovo (1999), among many other examples. Similarly, incidents of dislocated economies and state failure force the international financial institutions and major donors to impose

democratization and economic liberalization as conditions for a state's receiving development loans.

As the culture of democracy and human rights becomes more pervasive, the dominant state attributes of sovereignty, independence, autonomy, and inpenetrability are likely to weaken. Interventions in their various forms, such as SAPs, democratization, and humanitarian military interventions, are seen as ways of promoting and establishing constitutional democracy and free-market systems. As groups become more prone to challenge state sovereignty, so should citizen participation in governance become more essential. The sovereign rights of states cannot always be superior to individual and group rights. At the same time, both intervention and nonintervention should ensure a proper balance between state sovereign rights and group rights or popular sovereignty.

The State, Civil Society, and the Military

Civil society—trade unions, student organizations, women's movements, nongovernmental organizations, and churches, among others—have played a significant role in the transformation of some African polities from military or single-party regimes to pluralistic ones. In combination, they act as a force of moral legitimacy as well as a buffer between state and citizens. Increasingly, regimes are realizing that a strong civil society can help promote political liberalization as well as foster economic progress.

The relationship between the state and civil society, however, at times depends very much on the pace of change within the state. A rapid liberalization process may destabilize rather than effect a peaceful transition.¹¹ Accordingly, ruling elites in most African states tend to pursue incremental reforms. They view any fast-paced implementation of economic liberalization policies as an invitation to political instability and the loss of their authority. Thus, they are often faced with a dilemma: if they liberalize too fast they face the consequences of losing further legitimacy and having to resort to coercion; on the other hand, if they do not, they face isolation and the consequences of not integrating their national economies into the global economy. In this age of increased globalization, international economic participation tends to expand international political recognition.

In particular, the military's continued inclination for intervention in politics is related to the human security implications of old expectations and new developments related to the twin processes of political and economic liberalization. The effects of liberalization often mean that incumbent regimes fail to provide progress and wealth for all except the power elite, while other social institutions offer neither hope nor an escape route from state decay. The resulting attitudinal dislocation and societal insecurity enhance the military's justification to intervene in politics.

Finally, the lack of resources to sustain the young democracies, coupled with austerity measures of economic liberalization, will hardly keep the military out of politics. Moreover, the military may intervene and disrupt the democratization process simply to preserve its autonomy and prerogatives. The drive toward economic efficiency that is accompanying

democratization could result in corporate or collective military grievances focusing on pay, promotions, assignments, retirements, general budget allocations, type and quality of equipment, and general military policy. The insecurity related to liberalization has led junior officers and ordinary enlisted soldiers (the *militariat*) to stage coups with class overtones in Sierra Leone, Gambia, and Liberia in particular. To rationalize their takeover of power, members of this subordinate class often engage in populist rhetoric about the need to democratize society, wipe out corruption, and ensure a decent life for every citizen.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the processes, interactions, structures, and discourse that characterize globalization have unleashed paradoxical situations, dilemmas, and countervailing forces in many developing countries. In particular, political globalization in Africa in the form of democratization seems to have created tensions between state integrity and sovereignty based on legal-political criteria and popular sovereignty premised on group rights and ensuring a modicum of social welfare. Thus, democratization as a process can transform social structures without necessarily bringing about basic changes in politico-economic values. The result has been persistence of a legacy of military intervention in politics. Basic changes in political and economic practice as manifested in liberalization policies can occur together in either a mutually supportive or destructive fashion. Examples abound, however, of such changes occurring largely through widespread misery and intense sociopolitical conflicts in which ethnic, regional, religious, class, group, and other struggles play a key role.

In the face of such countervailing forces and dilemmas, an effective combination of economic liberalization and gradual and sustained political liberalization is critical to the democratization process in Africa. Responsible and progressive leadership, constructive criticism, and an active and equally responsible civil society is essential to overcoming the myriad obstacles to the democratization process. Internal policymakers should at all times confront the paradoxes facing African states with sensitivity based on the highest ethical behavior.

Notes

¹ For an elaboration on globalization's varied dimensions, see, among others, E. Helleiner, *States and the Re-emergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Cynthia Weber, *Stimulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).

² For details on these distinctions, see Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979); and Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

³ See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

- ⁴ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 100.
- ⁵ For details, see Peter Gibbon, Yusuf Bangura, and Arve Ofstad, *Authoritarianism, Democracy, and Adjustment: The Politics of Economic Reform in Africa* (Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1992).
- ⁶ See, for example, World Bank, *World Development Report, 1991: The Challenge of Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- ⁷ See Lual Deng, Markus Kostner, and Crawford Young (eds.), *Democratization and Structural Adjustment in Africa in the 1990s* (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1991).
- ⁸ For details, see John Weeks, “Credit Where Discredit Is Due,” in Robert J. Griffiths (ed.), *Developing World 1995–1996* (Guilford, Conn.: Dushkin Publishing Group, 1995), pp. 46–49.
- ⁹ See Kidane Mengisteab and B. Ikubolajeh Logan (eds.), *Beyond Economic Liberalization in Africa: Structural Adjustment and the Alternatives* (London: Zeb Books, 1995).
- ¹⁰ See Michael J. Francis, “A Response to Rethinking Development,” in Griffiths, *Developing World 1995–1996*, pp. 38–40.
- ¹¹ For details on civil society in Africa, see Michael Bratton, “Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa,” *World Politics* 41 (April 1989), pp. 404–430.