

# **Towards Understanding New Forms of State Rule in [Southern] Africa in the Era of Globalization**

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## **Abstract**

*In the recent process of transition in Africa since the 1980s, the form of state rule has been changing in many important ways as have the relations between the state and (civil) society. One of the changes in this process concerns the demise of development as a national state project through which state rule was reproduced and legitimized (culturally and politically) up to the 1980s. While the collapse of this form of rule of the developmental state is now apparent, a clear alternative has yet to become evident in Africa. Often formal multi-partyism and elections have been introduced, while at the same time a single-party predominant system has been prevalent to the extent that the earlier ruling parties often continue to control state institutions. In this context, relations between state and civil society may not always exhibit the same kind of obviously repressive characteristics as before, and various alternative forms of legitimation are being experimented with (e.g., rights discourse, national “visions”, reconciliation, neo-liberal multi-partyism, new forms of corporatism, etc.). This paper addresses several theoretical problems surrounding the analysis of new forms of state rule in Southern Africa in particular. These seem congruent with the current phase of globalization. It seeks to elucidate the workings of developing alternative modes of rule, one based on the plunder of national mineral assets by members of the ruling elite, another legitimized through a state constructed consensus. It debates the various components of the consensual state in South Africa in particular and assesses the extent to which these have been achieved.*

## **Introduction**

We know that the struggle for power is the struggle for a lie. What is needed in these times of globalization is to build a new relationship between government and citizens. (Sub-Comandante Marcos, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2001.)

From the perspective of democratization and the establishment of popular sovereignty and genuine emancipation in Africa, one of the main issues of concern is to develop a theoretical perspective capable of enabling an understanding of politics in its own terms. This is the only alternative to conceiving politics in a way which reduces it to the economy, history, ethnicity, culture or even to the state. It is these various forms of reductionism which inexorably lead to essentialist conceptions in theory and to undemocratic politics in practice. Understanding forms or modes of politics in Africa means rethinking relations between state and society on the continent.

Central to liberal discourse, has been a conception revolving around the idea that politics is reducible to the state or that the state is the sole legitimate domain of politics. For liberalism, "political society" simply *is* the state. This idea has permeated so much into African opposition thinking, for example, that it has become difficult to conceive of an oppositional practice that is not reduced to capturing state posts or the state itself. One of my main intentions here, is to establish the highly limited and limiting nature of this perspective, especially in so far as the process of democratization is concerned. It is indeed important to stress that if the concern is to conceptualize a genuinely popular form of democracy in which popular institutions are sovereign, in which politics is truly emancipatory (Balibar, 1997), then politics need to be conceived in a different manner. In particular, this means visualizing a popular domain of politics beyond the immediate purview of the state, over which the state needs to exercise some form of hegemony, but which conversely may also be in a position to influence state politics and hold the latter to account. My other main concern to briefly outline some of the features of state rule (of state-society relations) as they have developed in Africa in the context of the globalization of neo-liberal ideology and practice.

### **State and Society in Mutual Relation**

Even sophisticated and subtle accounts of state and society often fall short of accurately accounting for political change simply because of a failure to systematically encapsulate the relationship between state and society within their narratives, and because of their tendency one-sidedly to stress the ability of the state to "invent" and enforce social relations. Moreover, while the state cannot substitute itself for social activities, it should not be assumed either that any social institution can be substituted for the state itself. For example, although it seems to have been understood that state authoritarianism in Africa has been systematically suppressing and substituting itself for the popular self-activity of social groups and individuals, this cannot just be corrected through simply demonizing the state and proposing that its functions be replaced by equally unaccountable "non-governmental organizations" (NGOs) which are taken, by neo-liberal discourse, to be the main components of civil society in Africa today (Beckman, 1992).

It is in the context of the relations between state and society that the concept of "civil society" becomes useful. "Civil society" as understood here refers to society in so far as its political character is concerned. It is its organizational and

institutional forms which give that society a "civil" (political) character. The use of the term here does not imply any agreement with the way it is sometimes used in neo-liberal Africanist political science, as an "arena of choice, voluntary action and freedom", and as necessarily liberatory in relation to a supposedly monolithically authoritarian and corrupt state. Neither does its use imply that the relations between state and civil society are always confrontational. What it does suggest rather, is that there is a dimension of society which is "civil" and thus implicated with the state in the reproduction of political power. As such, any process of democratization, a process that would have to transform the nature of power in society as well as in the state, along with the relations between them, must start from a perspective which sees state and society as fundamentally interconnected. It is the concept of civil society as Gramsci in particular understood, which expresses this interconnectedness.

Marx had already argued that the existence of civil society is itself intrinsic to a process of capitalist development, one whereby the realms of politics and society/economy become separated and distinct so that rather than being combined as under feudalism, politics now becomes relegated to the state while society and the economy (i.e., civil society) are largely de-politicized (Meiksins-Wood, 1995: ch. 1; Gibbon, 1986). In such cases the state itself tends to be, according to Marx, bureaucratic and authoritarian. The apparent "externality" of the state from society thus masks its underlying links with society and the potentially political nature of the latter. As a result the state may also appear as a "neutral" body "above" society while at the same time, the unequal and oppressive character of society is reproduced by the state. Therefore, authoritarianism and the absence of politics in civil society can coexist more or less happily with a "developed" civil society and a seemingly universalistic or "neutral" state existing above the conflicts between the particularisms of society. Democratization cannot therefore be equated with or reduced to any "deepening" or "vibrancy" process in civil society as contemporary liberal Africanist social science maintains.

Moreover, politics can only become democratized if as a necessary prerequisite, civil society becomes politicized. The basis for a democratic politics must be the recovery of politics within civil society, in other words, to begin with the centrality of a realm of politics outside or beyond the state domain. Democratic politics beyond the state also implies the creation of a fully politicized citizenry, a process which presupposes pluralism but is not reducible to it. But such politicization cannot be a sufficient condition for a democratic politics. After all, the state can itself politicize civil society "from above". The politicization of civil society should be supplemented by the democratization of the state in order for a democratic transformation of politics to be successful. Therefore, in order to be able to conceive of a democratic society, a fully active citizenship needs to be combined with a democratization of the state: the two are inseparable conceptually and politically, one does not make any sense without the other.

In liberal conceptions, the state domain is the sole source of politics, or in other words, "political society" is itself the state, there is no politics beyond the state

regulated and controlled political arena. Liberalism is therefore unable to recognize the existence of politics outside this state-controlled domain. Africanist neo-liberalism therefore has a problem as it tries to find alternatives to what it has seen as a corrupt, incompetent and irredeemable state. Its anti-statism is only skin deep as the "civil society" it prefers is one which operates clearly within the state domain of politics. Thus, in so far as the neo-liberal notion of civil society in particular is concerned, it is worth noting that this amounts to a formal conception from the point of view of the state. What I mean is that here, civil society is only said to exist when it is granted formal recognition by the state. For liberalism, a civil society of secret societies and illegal organizations cannot be conceived while it is stressed that civil societies are incompatible with authoritarian states. Here, civil society is formally circumscribed by the state which also legitimizes its existence, hence the fact that the former is often equated with "interest groups" (today referred to more innocuously as "stakeholders").

Thus, civil society can be said to be part of the state domain of politics because its existence is premised on its legitimacy in the eyes of the state. Conversely, the same position also implies recognition by civil society organizations of the legitimacy of the state. This view cannot include explicitly "revolutionary" organizations within civil society. It is to emphasize this point, and also to stress civil society's class-ideological character, that Gramsci referred to it as *bourgeois* civil society—in other words, a civil society well ensconced within a (bourgeois) state domain of politics and political consciousness. The neo-liberal conception of civil society is one defined by the state itself.<sup>1</sup>

However, the state should not be allowed to dictate whether popular organizations are legitimate or not, and neither can intellectual inquiry allow itself to narrow the concept to adhere to state prescriptions; only society itself can bestow such legitimacy. In this sense South Africa, for example, can be said to have had an extremely powerful and "vibrant", as well as politicized, civil society in the 1980s despite the quasi-legal nature of most organizations which comprised it. In fact, it was the political distance of these organizations from the state, the fact that they had exited the state domain of politics, which accounts for the "vibrancy" of civil society in South African townships during the 1980s (Neocosmos, 1998). Also in neo-liberalism, "rights" are seen as formal and universal, and thus not subject to debate or contestation because of the fact that they are deemed to be scientifically, technically or naturally derived, and it goes without saying, they are supposed to be state sanctioned if they are to achieve the status of universal truth.

Under such conditions, it is clear that civil society is already part of a state domain of politics, and usually appears to be "apolitical" if the state is evidently "universalistic" in form. Interest groups lobby for favours and for "their share of the cake", which they claim is not large enough; they do not demand rights and social entitlements. In other words, the authoritarian nature of the state is not questioned by them, they simply wish to access its resources and favours. Here, frankly political questions regarding the entitlements of various social groups are hidden

under issues of state-legitimized technical expertise, claims for greater access to state resources, and the deployment of state *largesse*. In most cases in Africa, the problem of authoritarianism, irrespective of the number of political parties or interest groups in existence, revolves around the absence of such entitlements and rights and is linked to the absence of an active citizenship which corresponds to this state of affairs. The liberal view must, therefore, be jettisoned in favour of a more inclusive conception, which goes beyond the notion of a civil society exclusively composed of politically neutral "interest groups" within a unique state-monopolized political domain.

Today in Africa, it is the development of political identities not necessarily reducible to economic concerns, which have become more apparent in the opposition and resistance to state authoritarianism. It is such identities which define political arenas. They are formed in relation to the state but from within civil society. If we see political arenas or domains as structured largely by political identities, we can also start to see that politics can also exist outside a state-controlled domain and may exist within society itself.

Moreover, the state itself possesses features (authoritarian, bureaucratic, managerial, etc.) which are not reducible to socio-economic class characteristics. In fact, it is arguably the authoritarian nature of such state practices which has exercised a determining effect on the political character of the ruling class or elite, rather than the other way around as has usually been assumed. This is because such a class or elite constitutes itself as a political unity through its melding with the state power. On the other hand, the economic and social attributes of such a politically dominant class can be determined from within civil society, although in Africa, as is well known, the tendency has been for the state to have a dominant role to play in elite accumulation. However, it must be emphasized that it is state authoritarianism and unaccountability which has historically enabled predatory accumulation and socio-economic class formation among members of the state personnel; in other words it is state practices, rather than class ones in the strict sense, which have been determinant in the process of ruling class formation. When it comes to the political as well as socio-economic characteristics of the popular or subaltern classes and groups, these have invariably been constituted from within civil society and, as such, their political practices have tended to be much more contradictory.

Rather than simply reducing political forms, consciousness, identity and practice to the economic characteristics of various classes and groups in civil society, it may therefore be more useful to distinguish between different forms and domains of politics characteristic of the state and of the elite/ruling group who are associated with it on the one hand (elite politics, state politics, dominant/hegemonic politics, etc.), and those domains and forms of politics practised by those excluded from and oppressed/coerced by it on the other (popular politics, subaltern politics, etc.). This distinction must be undertaken on the basis of the social relations, cultural practices and discourses within which each exists (Chatterjee, 1993). While the "domains" of politics refer to the different arenas in which politics takes place,

"forms" or "modes" of politics refer to different political practices. The central points are that the state is not the exclusive domain of politics, and that state forms of politics are not necessarily the only ones in existence.

In general, the fundamental reason for the difference between the politics of the hegemonic groups and those of the subaltern groups in society is related to the role which the state itself plays in each. In particular, the ruling classes and groups establish their hegemony through the state and hence through one form or other of authoritarian, bureaucratic or administrative political practice. These various forms of politics are by their very nature state-founded politics, if not wholly *étatiste* in nature. Such politics always restricts democracy in one way or another and to some degree or other. These kinds of politics may differ along a continuum between say liberal democracy and militarism, but they always exhibit elements of a bureaucratic or authoritarian practice, simply by virtue of the fact that they are founded on the modern regime of power. Militaristic politics (currently dominant in several African states such as Congo, Rwanda, Eritrea, Angola, etc.) constitute an extreme form of statism or elite politics in which minimal concessions are made to democratic practices, while liberal democracy is more clearly able to make such concessions. It can be argued that the latter usually results from pressures from subaltern groups and subaltern politics and is usually a means to coopt or deflect these simply in order to produce consent (Rueschemeyer, Stevens and Stevens, 1992). In Good's words "liberal or representative democracy is a phenomenon of this century which expresses not the fulfilment of democratic aspirations but their deflection, containment, and limitation" (Good, 1997: 253). It often suggests a ruling class or elite which is secure and confident in its ability and in its (purportedly natural) "right" to rule.

Therefore, the hegemonic project of the ruling classes or groups is founded on a politics which is structurally and fundamentally undemocratic (irrespective of the complex contradictions between various interests or positions within the state apparatuses), as it has to manage state rule bureaucratically. Its undemocratic nature may be more or less tempered and restricted by popular pressures and especially democratic prescriptions emanating from within civil society. These subaltern forms of politics emanating from within civil society are clearly contradictory, including as they do both authoritarian as well as democratic forms of politics and may be expressed in completely different representational forms from those associated with the modern state (e.g., religious, "traditional", literary, theatrical, etc.), but they may possibly form a distinct domain of a counter-hegemonic project (Chatterjee, 1993). If it is to be more than a state-centred project, this has to be founded on a popular-democratic politics and thus on a project for the democratization of the state itself.

Popular-democratic or *consistently democratic* politics are the only kind of politics which are truly emancipatory and of greatest interest to the majority of the people of Africa—the poor and the oppressed. Democratic politics therefore are to be found primarily within civil society as, despite the contradictions within it, the

domain of state politics is founded on administrative, managerial and bureaucratic concerns, the nature of which is anything but democratic. How state politics ended up being so dominant in Africa (*étatisme*) is fundamentally connected to the nature of the state and to the historically developed relations between state and civil society there.

## The State and Civil Society in Africa

Three historical periods of the relations between state and society in Africa are important: the colonial period, the post-colonial period (1960s–1980s) of the developmentalist state, and the post-developmental period of the 1980s to the present. Each period can be distinguished by different modes of state rule, in other words by different forms of state-society relations.

### The Colonial Period

The colonial period is of central importance in understanding the contemporary state and its relations with society because it was during this period that certain fundamental features of the post-colonial state were constructed. Colonialism was not (Said, 1994: 9) primarily about territorial acquisition nor was it fundamentally about the (arbitrary) drawing of boundaries. As Mamdani (1996, 1998a) shows extremely well, it was not a question of geography but primarily a question of politics. It was about the imposition of an alien form of state rule over a subject population. The state did not simply exercise social control in order to regulate individuals but it was primarily founded on the coercion of (majority) groups of people and nationalities in particular.

It is widely recognized that the colonial state was profoundly founded on coercion. As Crawford Young puts it: “nothing was more alien to the telos of the colonial state than a civil society. Sovereignty required forcible subjugation; there were few illusions that it could rest on any principles but overwhelming military power” (Young, 1994: 223). Coercion (of the extra-economic variety) affected peasants primarily and workers in so far as the latter existed and were not simply wage-labouring poor peasants. Forced labour, forced contributions, forced cultivation, forced removals and forced development all contributed *inter alia* to the reproduction of the modern regime of power as well as to the exploitation of the majority of the population. The power structures of existing societies were transformed and made to fulfil the roles of lower level state apparatuses so that tradition/culture and authoritarian state became closely intertwined in the process of indirect rule. The kind of capitalism which developed in Africa during the colonial period can therefore be described as state-coercive capitalism.

Central to the colonial form of state rule in Africa was not only the coercion of peasants and workers, but also the oppression of women and “youth” as the anthropological conception of African society, a knowledge upon which the state depended for its control, saw this society as structured around family and kinship relations usually of an authoritarian, patriarchal and gerontocratic kind. The

"tribalization" of African society for the purposes of indirect rule during the late colonial period, centred on the making of a particularly oppressive tradition which was based, not only on colonial interests, but which also sought support primarily among chiefs, elders, men, the wealthy and dominant ethnicities in colonized society (Vail, 1989). This colonial intervention had the important effect of restricting to a minimum differentiation between society, economy and culture (i.e., civil society) on the one hand, and state power on the other. As a result, authoritarianism was entrenched and democracy systematically restricted in rural areas in particular. Moreover, it was generally the case, initially at least, that resistance, particularly among the rural-based colonized population, tended to operate from within these specifically authoritarian constraints and to be profoundly marked by them (Mamdani, 1996; Neocosmos, 1995).

The British had already developed a clear philosophy of separateness on the issue of government and administration in their older colonies which Chatterjee (1993: 16) refers to as the "rule of colonial difference" whereby cultural difference between colonizers (civilized) and colonized (uncivilized) was seen as justifying the authoritarianism of the state. In addition, it also justified the teaching by colonizers of their "child-like" colonial charges to advance and progress towards a cultural state where they could then benefit from and responsibly utilize modern forms of government and administration. Until then, cultural backwardness was the main impediment to a universalistic state. From this essentialized hierarchical notion of difference it was easy to move to a position which stressed separateness in political systems through indirect rule as a way of resolving this contradiction, as the "native question"—the thorny problem of how to rule the subject population—was revisited in the late 1920s. Mamdani (1996) has shown how this system of indirect rule controlled rural Africa differently from the manner in which urban areas were ruled so that the state took a "bifurcated" form. Mamdani clearly shows how this policy of ethnic segregation, eventually developed in South Africa under the name of apartheid, became the general form of state rule during the late colonial period in Africa. Colonialism therefore naturally restricted politics to the state, but it tended to do so in a way which demarcated two forms of rule, one of which was not alien but based within a culture and practice (in, however, state-distorted forms) emanating from within society and popular practise itself.

As—in conformity with authoritarian exigencies—society and economy on the one hand, and the political realm on the other, were not clearly demarcated during the colonial period, the formation of resistance (civil society) organizations combined socio-economic demands with frankly political ones within an overall nationalist anti-colonial movement. Thus, as they took up such nationalist positions (of various kinds), these organizations were politicized, born as much of a socio-economic as of a political struggle, a distinction rarely made by them. The fact that this resistance initially occurred outside the state domain of politics, was one of the reasons why their political character independent of the state, could no longer be tolerated once independence had been achieved, as they contested the legitimacy of



a state-controlled domain of politics. Adversarial politics between the state and these civil society organizations had to be undercut for the imposition of state-hegemonic national unity in the post-colonial period. This was done through the state project of "national development" which was an attempt to give each sector in society something, and to ensure the dominance of a domain of state politics over a fast-receding popular domain of politics.

Related methods of incorporating such organizations into the state domain of politics also included "expert" advice from civil society organizations from the erstwhile colonial power (or other countries, or even United Nations organizations such as the ILO) such as the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) advisers to African trade unions, for example. Such organizations were of course already part and parcel of state politics in their own countries (or in the case of the ILO, part of a supra-national state structure). The central lesson they invariably taught was the necessity for trade unions (in this case) to abandon their more obvious political positions and concerns and to restrict themselves to representing the interests of their members by acting as efficiently organized interest groups. In other words, African trade unions were being taught about the advantages of being incorporated into the state domain of politics. This process was always presented as a simple technical one, of course, or as one of the "maturation" of trade unions in the third world, but never as the state-political process which it evidently was.

### ***The Developmental State***

The post-colonial period saw state rule being structured around a project of a national character whilst maintaining some of the fundamental features of its colonial predecessor. The most obvious politico-economic continuities, as noted on many occasions, were the forms of state appropriation based on extra-economic coercion of peasant producers in particular and continued forms of coercive state regulation. On the other hand, the racially ordered division of labour was transformed and restructured through a more clear class differentiation among the African population in both its upper and lower strata. Among the upper strata, a section of the middle-class professionals demarcated itself from the rest of the petty-bourgeoisie and accumulated through access to state resources and links to foreign capital. Among the lower strata, a minority of peasants and artisans became transformed into capitalist farmers and small capitalists through access to state amenities and the removal of racial barriers to capital accumulation. Employment opportunities were created in the civil service in particular as state posts were Africanized and thus de-racialized.

This changed political economy informed and constrained the possibility of new forms of rule. The post-colonial state could not rely solely or even primarily on force and coercion as the colonial state had done, as it had to secure its hegemonic rule through greater use of legitimizing processes. The combination of authoritarianism and paternalistic social democracy which developed and characterized this state was centred around the state project of development. It was development

which would unify the nation, and only the state which had the capacity to undertake such a wide-reaching project as a national bourgeoisie was weak. In its radical version made famous by Nkrumah and theorized in dependency theory, the idea was to achieve economic independence after political independence had been won. In whatever version and irrespective of the political colour of the regime, economics was to take precedence over politics, and democratic institutions were seen as superfluous, as obstacles to the process of nation-building as they encouraged ethnic threats to national unity. Politics and debate were seen as luxuries that poor countries could not afford as they were ethnically divisive. Rather what was required was economic development (Shivji, 1988; Chachage, 1999; Mamdani, 1990; Mkwandawire and Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1993).

Central to this state ideology of developmentalism was a close combination of political and economic processes. In fact, the process of development or accumulation itself was one which was not simply state-dominated and coercive, but at the very centre of the state's existence. The most obvious aspects of this process have been debated at length in the literature. For example, the role of parastatals as vehicles for the economic exploitation of the peasantry through iniquitous pricing policies as well as their role in bureaucratic accumulation is well known. Also much debated are the opportunities afforded for private appropriation of resources by state channelled aid along with the corresponding centrality of patron-client relations as a form of class rule. Moreover, the fact that these appropriated resources were rarely productively invested but rather put into speculative ventures, real estate, transport or commercial ventures, meant that very little accumulation in the strict sense took place. The fact that the post-colonial state had to secure support from aspiring accumulators among the middle class explains to some extent its use of "neo-patrimonial" practices. This feature of the state cannot, however, be used as a universal key to explain the state itself without collapsing into crude essentialisms which often dominate in current Africanist political science (Mamdani, 1990, Beckman, 1992).

At the same time it must be recalled that while the development undertaken during this period was state-directed and thus top-down and ultimately coercive, it was supported politically and financially by Western donors and international institutions (including the "Bretton Woods Twins"). Concurrently, the state genuinely secured support from large sections of the population through the mobilization of national sentiment and the provision of social infrastructure and subsidies. It also provided, in most cases, basic state functions and provisions through a sometimes increasing reliance on overseas development assistance. These included some basic infrastructure, social services, low-level co-operative financing, subsidization of inputs, extension services and so on. In combination these often provided a kind of "cushion" which, while it failed to promote accumulation on a broad scale among the people, was sometimes successful in contributing towards restricting the process of impoverishment, especially among rural producers.

This form of state must be qualified as a "developmental state" not with

reference to its possessing (or lacking) a technical capacity to ensure that development takes place as the term is sometimes understood today (Mkandawire, 1998), but rather because it secured its rule through its ubiquitous and fundamentally authoritarian (statist) conception of development in which the reproduction of its rule was contingent on the success of its economic ventures. The emphasis in characterizing the state should be placed on its *political* character and not on its supposedly politically neutral technical or administrative capacities. Clearly, the ideology it employed was highly political. It served as a justification for state authoritarianism, typified most obviously by one-party states. What was delegitimized was not politics as such, of course, but democratic politics. The masses of the people who had been mobilized in anti-colonial struggles were systematically demobilized. Popular organizations, trade unions, political parties—the bases of an organized civil society—were either banned or incorporated into state structures, while their leaders were either imprisoned, banned, killed or bribed. Liberal multi-partyism was rejected as a threat to state-controlled national unity (nation-building) and to the very existence of the state itself largely because it was seen as giving voice to a politicized ethnicity which was itself founded within social structure. The state attempted to establish its universalism through coercion and fundamentally continued as an “excrecence” (to use Marx’s term) on the body of society, detached from the day to day cultural activity of the people. State forms and state politics were evident within society as a struggle raged between elite forms and more popular forms of politics within villages, ethnic groups and whatever socially founded communities were in existence. Thus, even under conditions of state collapse, popular politics (authoritarian or democratic in form) were often able to continue existing at the level of civil society itself.

In sum, the colonial state as well as the post-colonial state in its authoritarian developmental form, both reproduced ethnic particularistic allegiances, while (and because) they were simultaneously suppressing them from above.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the development process based on a strategy of state-led import-substitution industrialization, founded on the twin rocks of statism and globalization and with it the legitimacy of the state itself was questioned. The crisis which befell this mode of state rule at the end of the 1970s and early 80s was predictably both economic and political. Economically, the failure of development to provide basic needs for African populations was exacerbated by the precariousness of African economies in the world economic system as a result of the collapse of raw material markets in the mid-70s. The crisis of legitimacy which ensued was exacerbated by Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) which advocated economic “liberalization” or state “withdrawal” from the market which undercut whole classes’ possibilities of reproduction and systematically altered (and informalized) people’s survival strategies. The nation-state entered a crisis as ethnic, religious and regional entities contested its existence. Pressures for political liberalization sometimes taking the form of political conditionalities by western donors restricted themselves to calls for multi-partyism, elections and respect for human rights, while popular demands

for democratization “from below” often went beyond this to demand popular forms of government and accountability of leaders to the led (Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996; Olukoshi, 1998b). The South African popular movement of the 1980s went the furthest in demanding the democratization of social relations and of the state (Neocosmos, 1998).

### *The Post-Developmental Period*

Clearly, development as a state-led consciously planned project can today no longer suffice as a legitimizing principle in Africa, while in certain instances (Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, for example) the existence of the state itself is being contested. Currently new processes of rule under different conditions are being worked out throughout the continent. These include at one extreme the Kenya (or Cameroon) “model” where Moi has been able to continue securing his personalized rule while introducing multi-party elections which his party controls. At the other extreme it includes the South African case which is said by most accounts to be a paragon of liberal democracy and to have been produced by a miracle of negotiations between departing racists and incoming black nationalists.

Furthermore, the issue of state corruption is now also becoming an unavoidably public issue. However, with the dominance of liberal conceptions of politics in the current general discourse on the state in Africa, there is a reticence to address the fundamental cause of corruption which is undeniably to be found in a popularly unaccountable power. The most that liberal conceptions can propose on this issue is to make one state department or commission the policeman or overseer of others. The state is therefore expected to police itself. Nevertheless, the struggle against corruption in Africa is unavoidably linked to the struggle for genuinely popular democracy. However much liberal discourse tries to skirt around this issue, it is difficult to avoid this fundamental implication. This is especially true given the weakness of professional associations in Africa, which is itself largely derived from the fact that they lack a monopolistic power over professionals and knowledge, and the consequent weakness of their policing functions (as compared to Europe where they developed from the powerful medieval guilds).<sup>3</sup>

Such kinds of functions can rarely be democratically fulfilled by what are currently referred to as NGOs, as these are overwhelmingly dependent on the state itself, on foreign donors or on powerful politicians (see, for example, Kiondo, 1994). In this context, the dominant perspective on state–society relations in Africa by liberal scholarship is one which has been dismissive of the African state as fundamentally corrupt and largely irredeemable in practice. The same perspective has searched for an alternative to this apparently demonic state, and appears to have found it in an idealized conception of civil society understood as a realm of “choice, voluntary action and freedom” and reduced to NGOs (Beckman, 1992). It should be pointed out that the net effect of this conception and practice, has been not just for donors to bypass governments, as they seek apparently more palatable clients, without in any way contributing to a democratization of the state itself. This process

has also had the fundamental effect of turning citizens and potential active participants with entitlements and “voice” into clients and passive consumers of donor *largesse*. It can therefore be fundamentally “disempowering” rather than “enabling” in its orientation, and has very little to offer regarding popular democratization in Africa, as a genuine emancipative democracy must rest on the mutual recognition of rights and not on the granting of freedom from above (Balibar, 1997: 22). This process has as its fundamental objective effect, the expansion of the state domain of politics to include NGOs and hence to legitimize state rule both at home and abroad. At the same time, it makes possible a new form of accumulation among the petty bourgeoisie through what has been aptly called “social entrepreneurship” (Fowler).

Two new forms of state rule seem to have come into prominence in the new epoch of globalization. One may be called the “warlord state” (e.g., DRC, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia); another form can be referred to as the “consensual state” (e.g., RSA, Botswana, Namibia). In either case they seem to correspond to new globalized neo-liberal conditions; in either case politics is restricted to a specific state or elite domain, but in radically different ways.

### **Collapsed States?**

The idea of “warlord state” is based on the notion that it is in the economic and political interest of ruling elites to systematically pursue warfare and insecurity to the detriment of their country’s social fabric and to the overwhelming majority of the population. It has been suggested that huge amounts of profit can be made by plundering the natural resources of countries under conditions of insecurity. This plunder is undertaken by local and regional elites, as well as transnational corporations as they all seek truly staggering profits. The case of the DRC is perhaps the best example in which political elites from neighbouring countries as well as local rulers and their transnational partners carve up the country’s resources. According to the South African periodical the *Financial Mail* (15/01/1999):

If the risks are high in Angola or the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where President Laurent Kabila’s troops are battling rebel forces, the business rewards can be dazzling. These and other warring African countries, like Sierra Leone and the Republic of the Congo (Congo Brazzaville) are rich in mineral deposits with scant, if any, regulatory restrictions—a glittering lure for foreign companies (cit. Taylor, 2001: 5).

Clearly then, the central state is here unable to provide the basic conditions of socio-economic life for its citizens including basic security, markets, communications, etc. Rather the state constitutes an extreme version of a vehicle designed for the self-enrichment of members of the elite and engages in constant warfare with other elites based in other parts of the national territory who are also engaged in plundering natural resources and the population. Militarism rules, as does extreme

factionalism, the constant search for the highest bidder, etc. Wamba-dia-Wamba). In Taylor's words:

a number of state elites in the Great Lakes and Southern African regions have ceased to use the mantle of sovereignty to promote the collective good, but instead have used it to help bolster their own patronage networks and weaken those of potential challengers (ibid.: 11).

Of course, under such circumstances such elites have very little incentive to resolve conflicts and find peaceful answers to their differences. Whether such elites ever used sovereignty to promote the collective good is a moot point, however, such warlordism has been made possible precisely by the neo-liberalism which insists on the withdrawal of the state from the market and the short-termist and unregulated conceptions of economic activity so prevalent in today's hegemonic economic discourse. It is perhaps also worthwhile commenting that to refer to these states as "collapsed states" as is sometimes done is singularly unhelpful for a number of reasons.

First, the idea of "collapsed state" tends to be used with reference to any crisis situation with the result that the genocidal state of Rwanda under Habyarimana was also said to have "collapsed" despite all the evidence to the contrary (see, e.g., Longman, 1998). Second, the absence of the state which this term seems to suggest, would logically also imply the absence of politics or at least of a political culture. While this may be true among the elites who have had no qualms in engaging in systematic slaughter rather than in political discussion when the former has been in their interest, it is certainly not the case among the people. "Collapse" would seem therefore to reduce the state to the existence of central state institutions which have in most instances ceased to function, at least for the majority of the citizenry.

However, the fact that such institutions had in the past the primary function of leaching the population of its resources and conditions of life, suggests that such collapse may not necessarily have been such a bad thing! Surely the point must be that large numbers of the people of Africa have lived under such oppressive conditions, that the issue is not one of collapse or not, but rather one of accountability or the lack thereof. It is after all quite clear that state functions can be carried out in conditions of central government "ungovernability" in urban or rural communities, as well as within whole ethnic groups. Moreover, this can be done probably with greater legitimacy than any central state has been able to achieve given its overwhelmingly authoritarian history.

How can states be collapsed or non-existent and countries still exist? Surely this suggests that countries are held together by other social forces and that, if this holding together requires politics as a public arena for debate in order to occur, then this politics must exist within society itself, relatively independent of central state authority. After all this is what writers like Foucault and movements such as feminism have been saying for years: *viz.*, that politics is prevalent within social relations and cultural relations everywhere. Politics cannot be reduced implicitly or

explicitly to the state, politics can always be found, to various degrees, outside the state. What matters is the character of this politics, not whether it exists or not.

## **The Consensual State**

Another new form of rule in the new post-developmental period is an attempt to establish state legitimacy by following the western model of liberal democracy through the establishing of a “consensual state”—a state founded on a elite-driven political consensus. This is the case in South Africa and in some other countries such as Botswana and Namibia. In Africa this form of state has been based on single-party predominance, as one based on the alternation of elite parties in power, which would have to attempt to emulate the universalistic attributes of the western state while combining these with a state form actually founded on colonially initiated particularisms, is largely impossible. However, characterizing the state in terms of the characteristics of parties (single-party, multi-party, no party, predominance) remains squarely within the narrow limits of liberal assumptions for which political participation is predicated on the existence of parties. It fails to address the more serious questions regarding the characteristics of the forms of rule by the state over society (Neocosmos, 2001a). After all, politics can exist outside political parties, the notion of “political movement” suggests as much.

In order to elucidate new forms of rule it has to be recognized that in a number of African countries, state discourse and practise are geared primarily towards achieving consensus with notable consequences for politics such as the delegitimizing of political activity in society, i.e., that beyond the predominant party/state consensus, as “extremist”, “foreign inspired”, or whatever. In the Western liberal model, consensus is established through multi-partyism and the alternation of different parties representing different sections of a ruling class or elite. The system works precisely because each party is given access to the benefits of state power in turn, and *predictably* so (e.g., alternation of two similar political parties in Britain and the United States, “cohabitation” in France) even though the increasingly low turnout at general elections creates a problem of legitimacy for the political system. The consensus is further underwritten by the power of the mass media (along with other ideological apparatuses) and by regular state-cultural discourses on the national interest and so on.

In Africa, given the notorious inability to unify the ruling elite into a coherent class, as access to state resources implies jobs, careers, contacts and resources for accumulation for certain sections of the ruling elite at the expense of others who are excluded from all the perks, other ways have to be found to achieve consensus if at all. It was this economically-founded sectarianism which had formed the basis for the one-party systems on the continent during the heyday of the developmentalist state. If anything, the economic position of the middle classes has become more precarious since the 1980s in several African countries as a result of SAP (e.g., Mustapha, 1992). This economic precariousness is thus arguably even more conducive to sectarianism than it was previously. With the insistence on multi-

partyism by western political conditionalities, crude one-partyism has been displaced, but its conditions of existence have remained leading to institutionalized "predominance".<sup>4</sup>

The case of South Africa is a useful illustration of this process of building consensus. Constituted in a conjuncture of the resuscitation of political and economic liberalism in the post-cold war period, and given the extreme power of an already established capital with a (political as well as economic) role (or pretensions to a role) on the world scene, it is clear that the South African post-apartheid state had to achieve legitimacy and hegemony through different means than simple one-party authoritarianism or developmentalism. The main characteristics of the way in which a consensual state was achieved in South Africa differed from the Western model because of its African historical context.

The consensual state in Africa has to be a *national* state, it has to establish a national consensus, around a national legitimizing process of some kind. It has to confront foreign domination and in the case of South Africa, white power and privilege. As the South African state sees itself as a "world player" in the neo-liberal global arena, the anti-imperialist aspects of this dimension are minimal. This is related to the dominant ideology of South African exceptionalism, according to which South Africa is visualized as having more in common with Southern Europe or even Latin America than with the rest of Africa, because of its relatively industrialized economy. Unlike in the case of the African developmentalist state of the 1970s, which attempted to build national unity around a national project—namely development—there is no national state project in South Africa. Of course, given the centrality of the state in the processes of development planning, investment and so on during the post-war social democratic or Keynesian consensus, after the collapse of this political paradigm in the 1980s, such unifying state projects became no longer quite so easy to construct.

Rather, the national unification process in South Africa while still referred to in official discourse as "nation-building", is not centrally founded on an ideology of development. In fact, this was attempted and jettisoned mid-way through the first ANC administration as the neo-liberal right acquired ascendancy over the statist left within the government. The South African state's national legitimacy is not based on any one single overriding project, but on a number of state initiatives which attempt to produce a national *consensus* (so far reasonably successfully). Thus we can speak of the development of the post-apartheid state as the development of a "consensual state". This legitimization process has a strong authoritarian dimension as we shall see. The main ways in which this consensual state is being constructed are as follows:

**1. Nationalism.** As in other African countries in the post-independence period, the post-apartheid state attempted to secure legitimacy primarily by incorporating the nationalist political organization (ANC) which emerged as the representative of the people-nation within it and to meld with it. The nationalist political organization had achieved victory precisely by embodying the nation to form a political



movement founded on a diverse social movement in civil society. As a "movement" it saw itself as representing different strands of civil society (workers, youth, women, businessmen, chiefs, etc.) and it still attempts to create national unity by convincing itself and constantly asserting that it does indeed still represent the nation, long after it has transformed itself into a political party with all the sectarian attributes this implies. Thus the ANC is in formal alliance with organizationally independent sectors such as unions and has largely incorporated previously independent women's and youth organizations within it. At the same time, state posts are being Africanized and jobs are provided for the new petty-bourgeois elite within the state apparatuses (so-called affirmative action). This feature of the ruling party of nationalism is similar to that of other such parties (and one-party systems) in post-colonial Africa. However, as noted above, there is no single national project around which the state-party can mobilize the nation (Neocosmos, 1998 and 3. below).

**2. Multipartyism/Constitutionalism.** As in the western liberal model, a multi-party system has been set up in a way that political parties dominate over elected representatives. Party bosses have immense power of patronage over party membership. Parties either become fused with the state or operate like mini-states. Political parties for the most still express racial divisions. However, it is political parties which are elected and not individual members of such parties. The party bosses have inordinate powers in deciding who is on a party list and impose their candidates on local branches and regions. Indeed the internal operations of the ANC are becoming more and more obviously authoritarian (see 3. below). A liberal constitution is in place and a court is charged with defending the constitution against the state itself and the state party the ANC. Members of this court are as yet not clearly making judgments against the state which has appointed them. African countries in general have been renowned for having extremely liberal constitutions which their states have proceeded to systematically ignore, bypass or transform (Shivji, 1991). The latter is not yet the case in South Africa where constitutionalism has so far prevailed.

**3. Predominance.** The potentially contradictory aspects of 1. and 2. are reconciled through a system of predominance whereby one party (the ANC) regularly acquires the overwhelming majority of votes. Multi-partyism exists for ensuring the legitimacy of the main party's dominance and hence of the state itself. Single-party predominance means that many (if not most) of the benefits of a one-party system (for the elite) can be retained, while at the same time securing legitimacy in the eyes of the west and in those of the economically dominant white capital. Predominance also means that one party becomes heir to "the nation", it becomes identified with the nation and criticisms of it amount to attacks on the nation and on its supposed national intentions such as social justice for the majority of the population of black South Africans. It must be stressed that one-party predominance cannot suffice to denote a type of state; to assume that it does is to place undue emphasis on the electoral system alone (multi-party, no-party, single-

party, one-party predominance). Zimbabwe which has a clear predominant party system, has evidently less in common with South Africa than with a one-party system (Laakso, 1999). This is simply because the state there has shown itself incapable of securing its legitimacy in civil society beyond the first few years of independence. It is universally considered as illegitimate throughout civil society, and multi-partyism has quite simply failed to secure its legitimacy because single-party dominance has been achieved through evident electoral fraud and systematic state coercion, *inter alia*, features which are common to one-party systems. Consensus or its absence as a way of securing the reproduction of the state power (consensus as a principle of legitimation) appears to be much more fundamental in characterizing the state than the kind of electoral or party system in operation.

**4. Statism and State Consciousness.** The equating of political consciousness and state consciousness dominates the popular perspective, in other words it is maintained that "politics is the state and the state is politics" (Wamba-dia-Wamba: 1994: 250). The state is seen as the provider. It will "deliver" development or will pass whatever legislation is necessary to ensure that development is "delivered" either by itself or by private capital. *Political* problems and issues such as ethnic, racial and gender oppression, inequality and poverty, are all addressed through legislation and policy, administratively and technically, rather than politically (though planning is no longer in vogue). This amounts to transformation or development "from above". It is no longer a question of the people or communities "making history", of being in control of the state as was attempted, at least at a local level, in the 1980s, but of political passivity and apathy (see 3. above). Erstwhile popular organizations are now transformed into "interest groups" or "watchdogs" and a civil society is formed which corresponds, in all major respects, to the liberal model. This civil society is unquestionably part and parcel of the state domain of politics. Its leaders all sit (or aspire to sit) on the appropriate state-funded commissions and state bodies for which they get handsomely paid. The established consensus is thus a state or elite consensus. The state is internalized in consciousness by those wishing to democratize it, so that the only way towards transformation is to achieve state positions. All politics is reduced to state politics and to "capturing" state posts; state politics thereby soon appears to be "natural" and therefore inevitable. Society is expected to be transformed "from above" and new bureaucracies are created for this purpose with the result that millions in aid money for the poor is said to be still unallocated as a result of "administrative bottlenecks" while, of course, the creation of jobs for the favoured is made possible in the bureaucracy.<sup>5</sup>

**5. Corporatism.** Corporatism is evidence of the incorporation of erstwhile popular organizations into the state domain of politics. It is one way in which a national consensus is achieved, but this way is reserved for those organizations of civil society which cannot be directly incorporated into the party of nationalism proper. In South Africa this has primarily meant trade unions and refers less to civics, as these have largely collapsed, and even less to official women's organizations which have lost their independence. Such corporatism operates through institutions

such as the National Economic and Development Labour Council (NEDLAC) whose decisions are in fact more and more ignored by the government. Another way in which incorporation into state structures is undertaken is through formal alliances with the state party in which civil society organizations are given a direct stake in the state and potentially damaging threats to the state-structured national consensus are avoided (e.g., the alliance of the ANC with the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party). At the same time regular attempts are made to bring in as many individuals with nationalist credentials as possible into state posts at high levels, thus tying as many members of the new elite as possible to the state through career paths and access to perks on government commissions and so on (Neocosmos and Selinyane, 1999).

In Botswana, the incorporation of NGOs (the main source of criticism of the state) within the state domain of politics has taken all kinds of inventive forms beyond (crucially important) state funding to include “breakfasts with the president”, permanent state councils, and the regular inclusion of (usually unelected) NGO officials through the provision of travel expenses and *per diems* to conferences in the west and elsewhere. This is of course referred to as “consultation with all stakeholders” thus providing it with a veneer of democratic legitimacy. The problem, however, is that in most cases these NGO officials represent no one but themselves. Ultimately, therefore, this simply creates a consensus exclusively among the middle classes as it is these who are provided with access to the trough of perks and jobs to the exclusion of the majority of the population of whom around 48 percent are said to live in poverty.

**6. Reconciliation.** In South Africa, a reconciliation programme ostensibly between races but (as I argue elsewhere, Neocosmos, 2001b) actually between the new and old state managers has been undertaken, while justice for the majority *vis-à-vis* past state depredations and systematic atrocities has been precluded (Mamdani, 1998b). The legal basis of the old state has not been contested or seen as illegitimate, neither has the basis of its colonial statism been critiqued. Rather, its legitimacy has been confirmed and thus the threats from the agents of the old state on the new have been undermined at the expense of the people. The process of reconciliation has also been one of the formation of a post-apartheid national ruling class cutting across the races.

**7. Ideological Vision.** An ideological “vision” propounded by the state has to be available. This also has to possess a “national” character in order for such a consensus to acquire hegemonic dominance. Although, as noted, “development” does not constitute such a vision, social justice, especially economic justice, is regularly mooted by the state as in desperate need of achievement. Yet the overcoming of poverty has not been even remotely initiated as unemployment has been increasing (so-called jobless growth). The idea of “development” or whatever impoverished component of it is left (such as infrastructural provision) is seen simply as particularistic and not as national and universalistic, because it only affects a sector of the population—the “most disadvantaged”. This general dis-

cursive orientation is a direct result of the neo-liberal economic perspectives and policies which hold a central place within the state ideological consensus. These are not designed to incorporate social welfare programmes and subsidies, land reform programmes, poverty alleviation and other social democratic statist prescriptions as *central* state tenets but only as peripheral ones. While the state asserts that it is indeed engaged in such social welfare policies to some extent, the contradictions of these assertions with the neo-liberal paradigm are becoming more apparent.<sup>6</sup> Another "vision" is the ideology of an "African renaissance" propagated by intellectuals in close proximity to the new President, Thabo Mbeki. According to this view, a "new dawn" is emerging for Africa under South African leadership. What this "new dawn" consists of is not altogether clear apart from the fact that it is said to be congruent with neo-classical economic ideology (see Lodge, 1999: 96–109).<sup>7</sup> It appears to be mainly a way for the black South African business elite and intelligentsia to assert a new found confidence, as accumulation takes place among a new group of rich state-connected South Africans sometimes referred to in official discourse as a "patriotic bourgeoisie".<sup>8</sup> This slogan is also mooted as a way of providing a government of national unity between the ANC and some obviously "African" political parties such as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), but *not* it should be noted with those nationalist parties created as a result of disaffection from the ANC such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the United Democratic Movement (UDM).

As a result of this state-defined consensual discourse, criticisms of the ANC can be labelled as "foreign" (outside the national consensus), as either the utterances of racists or ex-racists if such criticisms are made by whites, as disloyal remarks if made by blacks, or simply as foreign inspired. The labelling of someone as standing outside the (state defined) national consensus is very difficult to answer as one South African commentator has recently stressed:

Whenever freedom is to be curtailed, restrictive actions are justified by patriotism, *boerehaat*, anti-Soviet activities, communist activities or racism. The censure is powerful for it identifies the critic as someone standing for perversion of the consensus and, accordingly, defence is almost impossible (*Mail and Guardian*, Vol. 16, No. 9, 3–9 March 2000).

However, what is not emphasized so much in this remark, is the fact that this discourse of exclusion is a state discourse whoever may be uttering it. This state perspective is complemented by an outright chauvinism in relation to non-South African Africans most evidently apparent in the actions and statements of state bureaucrats, university employees and informal sector participants in particular, who see their jobs, careers and/or access to state perks as threatened by Africans from abroad. The changed attitudes towards migrants from the sub-region who still seek employment in South Africa is also an important indication of this crude state-directed or elite-inspired chauvinism (Neocosmos, 1999; McDonald, 2000). In this discourse, an arrogant South African exceptionalism in which South Africa is

distinguished from the rest of Africa in terms of its supposed superiority and similarity with the west (and/or Latin America) is combined with pretensions to be a leader in Africanness (in some ways similar to certain African-American conceptions), a position which leads to obvious contradictions as those noted above.

Broadly speaking, as a result of this discourse, democratic prescriptions on the state are delegitimized and said to be impossible, such as, for example, the equal treatment of all inhabitants of the country, including, in particular, migrants from other African countries. The basis for this discrimination is given legal support simply because the South African constitution distinguishes between rights of persons and rights of citizens, with the former being restricted in several important respects most notably with regard to their right to engage in business (*ibid.*). In sum, the false appearance of unanimity created by the consensual state suppresses political differences, and tends to remove democratic prescriptions from view. The net effect of the creation and imposition of an elite consensus by the state is to delegitimize any forms of politics outside its narrowly defined and imposed domain. No politics is allowed unless it accepts the parameters and practices of this state domain of politics. The restriction on democratic political practice should therefore be obvious as it excludes the possibility of dialogue and debate with (let alone influence by) a subaltern domain of politics independent of the state.

As the consensual state attempts to secure its legitimacy, the most important contradiction it faces is between the success of this endeavour on the one hand, and what are perceived to be the exigencies of accumulation as ascribed by neo-liberal economics on the other. Clearly, neo-liberal economic conceptions do not usually assert a serious social welfare dimension, and as the growth achieved so far in South Africa has not been associated with job creation but the opposite, job loss, criticisms of neo-liberal policies ring true. Even growth is slowing to zero as reliance on private investment means that the power of the trade union movement and the government's inability to control crime are disincentives for foreign investors compared with countries such as Malaysia and Turkey among others. If the economy and state continue to show themselves to be unable to "deliver" resources to the overwhelming majority of the population, or to confront the massive poverty at present existing in the country (as stressed by the most senior politicians), more and more strain will be put on the ability of a consensus to deliver popular legitimacy to the state.<sup>9</sup>

Consensus as a way to secure the state's legitimacy does not operate quite so evidently in the countryside which is still very much under the control of chiefs. However, the countryside can be and has been safely ignored by the state as it is not usually (unlike say in Kenya) the site for alternative power bases to the state consensus (with the possible exception of right-wing die-hard Afrikaner nationalists wanting to restore the old order). This ignoring of the countryside by the state is evident in the complete lack of progress in any serious implementation of a land reform programme which was one of the main planks of the ANC's nationalist

appeals during the liberation struggle. Apart from the case of Kwazulu Natal where rural power bases and votes are crucial in determining who holds power in the province, in other provinces, the countryside simply follows the town, so far anyway. The industrial and urban character of South Africa does indeed tilt the balance heavily in favour of the urban areas as the main centres of power, but this need not remain so forever.

Other sources of contradiction include: the selection of state personnel from certain particular social groups (e.g., "affirmative action") as opposed to others, emphasizing particularism *vis-à-vis* the state's universalistic principles,<sup>10</sup> the contradiction between an Africanist ideology and the oppression of foreign Africans and petty chauvinism, the contradiction between the urban and the rural areas where the majority of poor are located and where development has yet to be seen, the contradiction between the growing middle class of both blacks and whites and the majority of the poor, the contradiction between the state and elite claims regarding the democratic nature of the country and massive poverty, and the contradiction between a formal adherence to gender equality and the systematic oppression of women illustrated by an estimated one million rapes a year, a fact which is depoliticized in state discourse by its relegation to a realm of individual violence.<sup>11</sup> A further potential long-term threat to this liberal mode of state politics is the decline in the turnout at elections which is usually an indicator of popular disaffection with the system, but this has not yet manifested itself in legislative elections and may take some time to do so in South Africa (Friedman, 1999). On the other hand, the turnout at the recent local elections was by all accounts low, a fact which gave rise to comments on political apathy among the ANC's constituency (*Mail and Guardian*).

However, in the rest of Africa outside South Africa and a few other countries, multi-partyism has not been able to secure for the state the legitimacy it has been seeking, as the old pre-multi-party ruling elite has largely been able to secure its position and access to state resources through the adoption of multi-partyism (Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, Gabon, etc.). At the same time SAPs have not produced the levels of development predicted. As a result, calls for more popular forms of development and democracy—in other words the general detaching of democratization from multi-partyism as a prescription on the state—are becoming less isolated (Olukoshi, 1998a, 1998b). There is an intellectual trend developing in Africa which argues for forms of democracy which go beyond liberal democratic prescriptions on the state because, if grafted on a colonial foundation, these cannot give rise to genuine democracy (Mamdani, 1987; Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1993, 1994; Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996; Chole and Ibrahim, 1995; Olukoshi, 1998b, 1998c). It has also been argued that donors' current interest in notions of "good governance" is not unrelated to attempts to neutralize these more popular democratic prescriptions on the state (Olukoshi, 1998a).

It is becoming clear that in Africa at least, *the state cannot democratize itself*. Political parties, rather than being links between civil society and the state as maintained by liberal democratic theory, are state agencies for placing members of

dominant social groups into powerful state posts, with the consequent reproduction of an extremely powerful and corrupt elite which is seen quite apparently to be accumulating at the people's expense through access to state resources. Parties are instruments for reproducing sectarianism at the expense of the national interest. In actual fact, it should be recalled that the liberal conception of politics is premised on the view that the state ("political society") is the exclusively legitimate domain of politics. If civil society were itself to be politicized so that a popular domain of politics were in existence legitimately, political parties as presently constituted could become redundant, or at the very least contested as the exclusive form of political organization.

The crude economic reductionism of neo-liberalism, whereby a free market is said to be the best guarantee of democracy, has undermined our ability to think about democratic politics because debate and discussion are precluded by reference to external exigencies on politics. Thus, at present, we are told continuously that the "economic reality of the market" demands a particular type of politics, which must be of necessity neo-liberal. If we are indeed serious about developing genuinely democratic prescriptions on the state (Lazarus, 1996), we need to transcend such theoretically reductionist and politically authoritarian conceptions.

The resurgence of ethnic movements in Africa has seemed to question the very nature of the nation state. The predictions of the modernization paradigm according to which ethnic identities would soon be replaced by national ones as the process of state consolidation unfolded, has proven to be a chimera. While this process has not been restricted to Africa, it is on that continent that this process has been the most widespread. The context for this has been provided both by the process of globalization itself as well as by the bankruptcy of the developmentalist state model.

The collapse of Fordist regimes of accumulation worldwide and their reliance on cheap labour in the third world generally, has meant that both capital on one side and labour and the peasantry on the other have both been trying to make up their declining capacities (for sustained profit on the one and for reproduction on the other) at the expense of each other. The squeezing of the working people of Africa and the struggle for access to the state, the traditional source of accumulation for the elite, has had as one of its effects, the recrudescence of ethnic mobilization. The often genuine grievances regarding the post-colonial state's partiality in its largesse with regard to "development goodies" and its systematic mistreatment of minorities (or majorities), has been a major source of discontent as well as an easy method of raising followers, thus easily leading to sectarian politics.

However, ethnic mobilization has had a contradictory character in Africa. While some ethnic movements have been putting forward authoritarian demands which concern the retention of privilege and have led in extreme cases to "warlord states", others have been concerned with the extension of democratic rights, not just to individuals but to oppressed groups. In fact, the resistance to SAPs and their neo-liberal agendas has not only been undertaken by the poor, women (who are at the sharp end of household reproduction) and youth (who have slipped through all the

strained security systems), but also by ethnic communities who find their environmental and cultural legacy systematically destroyed (as in the Delta region of Nigeria, for example). The increased state authoritarianism as a result of the forcing of SAP down the people's throats has also had an ethnic bias as the scramble for protection against the state and the saving of "one's own" has often taken precedence over the struggle for democracy. The recent popular upsurge in Zimbabwe is only the most recent manifestation of resistance against the extremely predatory combination of the post-Fordist regime of accumulation and state authoritarianism in Africa. The demands of resistance organizations and by the struggle for democracy on the continent have, however, not cohered as yet into a broad movement with a transnational dimension.

### **Conclusion: Towards a New Mode of Politics**

Clearly both warlord states and consensual states attempt to restrict politics to a specific elite domain, well beyond the cultural practices of popular politics embedded in the day to day lives of the majority of the population of their countries. They do so, however, in fundamentally different ways. While the former has little need of a principle of legitimation and tends to rule primarily through violence and terror, the latter depends on such legitimation provided primarily, but not exclusively, by a process of universal suffrage. Nevertheless, state violence is never completely out of sight. The kind of political culture which each form of rule leads to also differs. The former tends to lead to a culture of militarism and opportunism among the elite, fear among the oppressed, but also to inventiveness resistance and popularly based alternatives as the people need to organize at community level simply for survival purposes. Clearly such popular forms of politics should not be idealized as they can include racist or ethnic militaristic politics as well as democratic ones, but they seem to enable the posing of alternative popular state structures, as central ones are so clearly oppressive and illegitimate. In other words, the possibility exists for the development of a subaltern domain of politics which would challenge the monopoly of politics in the state domain.

The latter form of state tends to lead to a culture of apathy and self-censorship among the people (*Wamba-dia-Wamba*) as popular movements are demobilized and as the state is seen as a god on earth which is expected to "deliver" benefits of various kinds from employment to development to housing. Rights discourse tends to be concentrated within the state domain of politics. Popular politics in so far as it exists seems to be less concerned with rights, individual rights in particular.<sup>12</sup> Popular politics within a subaltern domain has a tendency to shrink as popular involvement in politics is restricted to voting every five years or so, and as the latter shows itself as more and more irrelevant to people's lives as its benefits are restricted to a small minority of corrupt politicians. The resultant civic apathy and ignorance leaves people open to the scapegoatism, racism, ethnic chauvinism, violent sexual oppression and to the simplistic rhetoric of opportunistic politicians who target the weaker members of society to benefit their own careers. This is



particularly the case in those countries where there is little in terms of a popular history of resistance to oppression (such as in Botswana). In South Africa, given the history of popular struggle, although political apathy is widespread (witness the low turnout at the recent local elections), instances of democratic popular struggles among individual communities and organized groups still exist, although these are quite isolated and easily ignored by the state.

Clearly new forms of state rule in historically new contexts tend eventually to give rise to new modes of politics of resistance. The central conception of these new modes of politics must be a popularly based politics which eschews the attainment of state power as a prerequisite for democratization (at best) as the lesson of history must surely be that there can be no democratic transformation "from above". Rather, following Marcos's statement heading this paper, such new modes of politics should have as their goal the development of a new popularly based democratic relationship between state and society.

Different forms of state rule tend to give rise to different forms of resistance. It seems, for example, that the only effective antidote to the militarism of warlord states is a mass movement for peace, one where communities reassert their right to life and simple existence, peace and security, guaranteed by a popularly accountable state. Clearly, there are many possibilities for international cooperation on such issues but it should be noted that this means the assertion and recognition of a realm of politics outside the state domain, within communities themselves.

This is also the case in the consensual state form, but in this case a popular realm of politics must emerge in different sites with other demands to stress the unacceptable and authoritarian nature of the state consensus. In either case, recognition of a popular or "subaltern" domain of politics means of necessity a new conception of citizenship with an accent on the reaffirmation of recovery of politics as a popular right and the removal of the monopoly of politics by professional politicians. At the level of theory, this means beginning to develop a different understanding of politics, one which legitimizes the contradictory but potentially liberating character of popular practices and culture.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>This is theoretically and politically similar to reducing the economy to its "formal" (i.e., state recognized) constituents alone, while excluding the so-called "informal" sector from economic activity (the latter is said to exist "outside" the economy, etc.). Economics here simply follows state conceptions.

<sup>2</sup>At the same time there were other state forms which were not strictly developmentalist such as the Congo-Zaire state at one extreme generally characterized as a predatory state and the Botswana at the other, a liberal state. Incidentally, both were rentier states.

<sup>3</sup>Even *Transparency International*, the German-based NGO, stresses the role of civil society organizations (in conjunction with state ones it adds) in the control of

corruption in Africa. See the interview with its director on SABC News Hour, 10/10/1999.

<sup>4</sup>Arguably it is this precariousness and uncertainty and the intensified competition which they have engendered, which have provided the conditions for extreme cases such as "warlord states".

<sup>5</sup>Such as the so-called NDA (National Development Agency) whose task it is to allocate state funds to NGOs and which a year after its creation had only allocated a tenth of its R340 million (*Mail and Guardian*, 12–19 April 2001).

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, the *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 1998.

<sup>7</sup>The point here is to criticize the notion of "African renaissance" as employed by the South African state and not the idea itself. In fact, it is important to struggle to provide a popular democratic content to this idea which would give it an emancipatory character. See, for example, Wamba-dia-Wamba (1998).

<sup>8</sup>Lodge (op. cit.: 108) notes that it is striking how this discourse has become dominant alongside the accelerating black share of market capitalization on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange "from 11 black-owned companies worth R4.6 billion in September 1995 to 28 companies representing a capitalization of R66.7 billion—10 percent of the total share holdings listed—in February 1998 ... Between 1994 and 1997, the number of black South Africans earning more than R5000 a month jumped by 52 percent, from 310 000 to 472 000".

<sup>9</sup>Recent figures on income distribution suggest that the income of the (largely white) richest 20% of South African households is 45 times greater than the average income of the (largely black) poorest 20% of households (Maharaj, 1999: 2). At the same time, as I have already noted, the black middle class has been rapidly increasing as a result of government "affirmative action" policies, some would say at the expense of the majority of the poor; see, for example, *The Economist*, 2 Oct. 1999. *The Mail and Guardian* (Vol. 16, No. 4, 28 Jan.–3 Feb. 2000) cites recent research which notes that between 1991 and 1996 in South Africa: "the richest 10% of blacks received an average 17% increase in income, while the poorest 40% of households actually suffered a fall in household income of around 21%".

<sup>10</sup>The fact that "affirmative action" is seen as of greater benefit to "Africans" than to "coloureds", is a real political issue in the Western Cape province even if we leave aside the state-nationalist consensual consideration of "whites" as a unified homogeneous group of racists or potential racists and their exclusion from state posts if not ANC card-carrying members.

<sup>11</sup>Maharaj (op. cit.: 2) for example, notes that, in South Africa, one in every three women is in an abusive relationship, a woman is killed by her partner every six days and there is a rape every 35 seconds.

<sup>12</sup>Mamdani's (1996) dichotomy between rights discourse—urban and tradition discourse—rural is problematic. In Botswana, for example, a discourse on women's rights does have some resonance among rural communities as does particularly a discourse on citizenship and group rights. On the other hand, corporal punishment is meted out regularly under the legitimacy of customary law and the latter tends to be the dominant form of rule over the popular classes, whether rural or urban based.

A liberal discourse on individual rights tends to be a middle-class phenomenon in that country, the discourse on tradition or group rights more of a popular discourse.

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