Globalisation and the state: implications for the state of human rights in Africa

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Abstract

This article interrogates, in theoretical cum descriptive fashion, the linkage(s) between neo-liberal globalisation, the state, and the state of human rights, using sub-Sahara Africa as a research backdrop. Drawing majorly from secondary data, it found out that the post-colonial states in Africa have been at the mercies of this technologically driven post- cold war phenomenon. It argues that globalisation has incapacitated African states and thus unable to safeguard and protect the human rights of their citizens
The article recommended that the state, the epicentre of the socio-economic space in Africa, needs to be reconstituted via an autochthonous process.

Keywords: globalisation, the state, autochthonous, neoliberalism, human rights

Introduction

That the state exists in furtherance of good life presupposes that it exists to recongnise and to protect fundamental human rights. Right from ancient Athens, the state has been credited to be the custodian of good life (Aristotle 1981), but with the decline of Athens this ideal declined too. As Sparta superseded Athens, the ideal of an all-inclusive Polis which guaranteed the good life was gradually superseded by the notion of *homo militans* which eventually prevailed from the ascendancy of Sparta to the end of Roman interregnum (Ake 2001:8). During the Christian middle ages, the ideal of *homo credens* reigned supreme as the Christians, rather than seeing the state as the arena for advancing the good life, saw themselves as mere pilgrims passing through human society.

Although in Renaissance Italy attempts were made by philosophers, notably Machiavelli, to reach back to the classical Athens, the outcomes were more Roman than Athenian. However, this morally inspired ideal that had been eclipsed for centuries resurfaced by courtesy of the liberal onslaught launched by John Locke and other liberal theorists of his age (Held 1984:3). Gradually, liberalism, which seeks to isolate the private sphere from the state, became associated with the doctrine that freedom of choice should be applied to matters as diverse as marriage, religion, economic and political affairs. In this view, the political universe consists of 'free' and 'equal' individuals with natural rights which God had freely given and thus the *raison d'etre* of the state is to recognise and to protect the rights of individuals in the community.

Accordingly, the notion of and 'civil rights' and 'civil liberties', which began to be developed in the domestic law of England in the seventeenth century, found its first full flowering almost simultaneously in the French *Declaration de droits de phomme et du citoyen* in 1789 and the US Bill of Rights' of 1791 (Nwabueze 2003: 8-9). However, for a long time these principles found no echo in international law as private individuals were still not the subject of the law but subjects of the sovereign, having those rights which they were allowed at the level of domestic law. This remained the position until 1945. The atrocities perpetrated by Hitler and Mussolini against their citizens were not only moral outrages which shocked the conscience of all mankind but were a very real threat to international peace and stability. Thus a challenge was thrown to the international community (Pagels 1979). At the Yalta Conference, the victorious allied powers agreed to create a new body to supplant the League of Nations.

This time, however, they chose a different path from the one they had trodden in 1919; instead of imposing peace treaties on the vanquished, they sought to establish a new legal order founded on the three principles declared in article 1 of the UN Charter:

> The peaceful settlement of international disputes in conformity with the principle of justice and international law; friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of people and respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without discrimination as to race, sex, language or religion.

However, by the time of the adoption of the UN Charter, it had not proved possible to define in detail what these human rights and fundamental freedoms were and in order to repair this omission, the United Nations proceeded to draft the famous Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which they adopted three years later, on 10 December, 1948.

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Conscious of the fact that the Universal Declaration was not a binding treaty in international law, the United Nations proceeded to try to transform it into detailed treaty law. But it was not until 1966 that they were able to adopt the product in the form of the twin UN Covenants – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – and it took yet another ten years before these two treaties would enter into force in 1976. Thus, with the establishment of human rights regime at the global level, various measures were taken at the regional levels to entrench human rights. For example, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom (ECHR) was adopted as early as the 1950s and entered into force only three years later

In Africa, states individually and collectively under the auspices of the OAU (now AU) sought to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Thus, a continental legal framework that binds African states to one another with regard to the practice of human rights was put in place. In Africa today, not only have states ratified the African Charter but they havethe universal bill of rights entrenched unto their constitutions. Evidently, the state in Africa is the custodian of human rights.

This article considers African experience with regard to the practice of human rights by arguing that underlying the litany of human rights violations in Africa in contemporary times is the issues of a declining state capacity, a phenomenon that has been exacerbated by market-oriented globalisation. In other words, one of the greatest challenges facing Africa today is how to strike the right balance between the push for human rights and the forces of globalisation. This is turn provokes some questions, such as: how can the state's systemic loss of capacity to manage the economy be reconciled with the demands for human rights? How can the African state be reconstituted to serve as a bridge between human rights and development?

The central thesis of this paper is that globalisation has profound implications for the realisation of the goal of promoting human dignity as encapsulated in the United Nations Universal Declaration and the Africa Charter on Human and People's Rights. The arguments in this chapter have been developed into five sections, including the introductory background. Section two sets the framework of the study by defining concepts. The third section reviews literature on Africa's practice of human rights. Section four analyses African's contemporary dilemma. The fifth section puts forward a number of recommendations and options for state reform and concludes the chapter.

Conceptual discourse

In a study of this nature, it is apposite to conceptualise, giving operational meanings to some important concepts to facilitate their contextual operationalisation and comprehension. As a result, four concepts which in all indications are essentially contested concepts (Gallie 1962) are identified, vis; Africa, the state, human rights and globalisation. In essence we begin with the conceptualisation of Africa, later proceed to that of the state, human rights and globalisation.

Defining Africa

What constitutes Africa has always been problematic to scholars studying the continent. Geographically, it is sometimes used to refer to all countries on the mainland continent plus the six island nations of Cape Verde, Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, and São Tomé and Principe. However in much of the literature, including this paper, the term, 'Africa' is instead used synonymously with what more accurately would be called sub-Sahara Africa, to mean just the forty -eight African countries excluding Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (Moss 2007:2). Although such distinction is arguable, in development circles countries of North Africa are typically placed in the Middle East because they are in many ways more part of the cultural and political life of the region.

The state

The nature of the state, remarks Held (1984:1), is hard to grasp and thus remains one of the most problematic in the field of political science (Basiru 2009). But despite the difficulty in grasping the nature of the state, the fact remains that as an apparatus of rule, it appears to be everywhere regulating all facets of life. As Ralph (1969 : 49) avers, 'it is not a thing as such, what it stands for is a number of particular institutions which together constitute its reality and which interact as part of what may be called the state system.' In other words the state, because of its being largely an abstract entity, is concretised by the medley of institutions which operate in its name.

From institutional perspectives, the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the public bureaucracy, and the army and the police are often included. Apart from these institutions, argues Egwu (2006: 410), other ontological features of the state include the specific personnel that occupy specific positions within the state apparatus and the activities of those who may be broadly defined as governing elites. Aside from the institutional manifestation of the state as pointed out by some writers, violence is also associated with the structure of the state. Max Weber more than any other writer on the state emphasises this criterion. According to him: 'A state is that human community that successfully claims the monopoly

of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Geerth and Mill 1967). Another issue in the analysis of the modern state is the nature or character of forces which structure its behaviour. Thus in extant literature, two broad perspectives have emerged: the society-centred and the state-centred.

However, within each perspective there are different traditions. For example, the society perspective has three theoretical offsprings which according to Egwu (2006) are not epistemologically related. According to the pluralist school, the state emerges as a neutral arbiter to mediate in the struggle among the various groups in the society (Dahl 1961). The elite theory of the state contends that there exists a tendency for the elites as opposed to the mass to monopolise public power and authority and thereby to ensure stability; the state must exist for the elites. The third model in the society-centred perspective is the Marxist theory of the state which is further polarised into two because its progenitor, Karl Marx, never really formulated a coherent theory of the state.

Thus, the instrumental school drawing from the Communist Manifesto 1848 contends that the modern capitalist state is an instrument in the hands of the ruling class or more specifically as the executive committee that manages the common affairs of the bourgeoisie. The structuralist on the hand argues that the state does not serve the interests of the dominant class as claimed by the instrumentalists. According to Poulantzas (1974), the state promotes the interests of the ruling class not because the personnel of the state share the social and biological background with those who control the economy. Instead, it is because of the objective role of the state as an important structure in the capitalist society.

Unlike the society-centred perspectives, the state-centred viewpoint that is echoed in the works of Skocpcol (1985) and others sees the state as an independent variable. In other words, the state is a set of structures that is set apart from the society. It is, however, important to remark here that each of the approaches to the analysis of the state represents an attempt to highlight different aspect of the reality of the state. Thus, whether the state is an independent variable or not, the fact remains that it does exist in modern society and appears to be everywhere regulating people lives.

Human rights

The concept of human rights like the concept of democracy is riddled with definitional controversies. As Nwabueze (2003:3) avers, 'the concept of rights bristles with difficulty but the difficulty is infinitely greater in relations to human rights.' One notable area is the tendency in literature to conflate human rights with human dignity. In fact, the latter is invented while the former in innate. Again, Nwabueze reasons thus: 'being innate in man human dignity thus is coeval with him; he is born with it, not so the concept of human right.' Another area of controversy is the nature of human rights. In other words, whether they are legally created or natural.

However, in recent times, there seems to be a consensus as some writers have contended that man with his in-born dignity existed before the state and could not have had human rights from inception and before the advent of the state. Elaine Pagels (1979) summarises this position thus: 'surely the individual could have no human rights independent from and ever prior to participation in any social or political collective'.

The foregoing suggests that humans rights are a concept, a device, invented in response to the growth of state power and the danger it poses to the liberty of the individual. Thus, in modern usage, human rights are legal rights because they derive their binding force from the law of the state. Another grey area that is often identified in htoday uman rights literature is whether human rights are coterminous with liberty. In fact, in some constitutions, the two concepts are used interchangeably. For example, the preambles form in the body of Bills of Right in the constitutions of nine anglophone countries reads thus:

> Whereas every persons is entitled to the fundamental human rights, and freedom of the individual, that is to say the right to life, liberty, security of person and the protection of the law (Nwabueze, 2003:38).

In the Fifth Amendment to the US constitution, liberty as guaranteed suggested that 'no person shall be ... deprived of life liberty or property without due process of law'.

Thus, the US Supreme Court in 1897 categorically defined liberty as:

> The liberty mentioned in the amendment (fifth amendment) means not only the right of the citizen to be free from the mere physical restraint of his person as by incarceration but the term is deemed to embrace the right of the citizen to be free. In the enjoyment of all his faculties; to be free to use them in all lawful ways to live and work where he will, to earn his livelihood by any lawful calling, to pursue any livelihood or vocation and for that purpose to enter into all contracts which may be proper, necessary or essential to his carrying but to a successful, conclusion the purpose above mentioned (Nwabueze, 2003: 56)

As defined above, liberty is wider in scope than human rights. It embraces all a person's rights and interests in a free society. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, what constitutes human rights? As implied above, human rights are rights attached to man because of his humanity (NWLR 1987:589). As Donnelly (1982:305) avers, 'human rights are not the result of one's actions, they arise from no special undertaking beyond memberships in the human race.' Thus, not all

rights held by human beings are human rights. For example, rights created by contract between two human beings arise otherwise than by virtue purely of their humanity and are therefore not human rights. Finally, much of the literature has embraced a more holistic and integrated conception of human rights. The rights of man include not only rights inherent in man's humanity but also rights relating to the material things necessary for the maintenance of a dignified existence as a human being (food, shelter, health, clothing, medical care, education, etc.).

The concept of globalisation

Globalisation is perhaps one of the most fashionable but controversial terms in political economy today. As Patman (2006:4) puts it, 'despite vast literature on the subject, it is difficult to give a precise definition of globalisation.' In a similar vein, Obadan (2004) contends that:

> The concept of globalisation is perhaps today the most recurrent term employed by scholars and world, leaders alike to rationalize, the development and underdevelopment of the various part of the world. As a result of this, it has *assumed the status of an essentially contested concept.*

Thus, definitions have proliferated in literature. Basically, it refers to the development of increasingly integrated systems and relations beyond a nation's borders. It is a multidimensional and multifaceted process that encompasses political, economic, social and cultural dimensions. To Ikeme (2008:2), globalisation is the trend of the increasing integration of economies in terms not only of goods and services but of ideas, information and technology.

According to him, globalisation means trade liberalisation, free capital mobility, privatisation, commercialisation and the empowerment of transnational corporations. In a similar vein, it has been described as a neoliberal ideology which tries to elevate the role of the market as an instrument for nurturing innovation among social actors and as an instrument also for rationalisation in the distribution of the planet's resources (Hamouda 2000:31; Toyo 2002:17). Among other things, the process of globalisation involves a compression of time and space, shrinking distance through a dramatic reduction in time taken either physically or representationally to cross them. As Scholte (2005: 14) claims, 'a shift in geography whereby borders have become increasingly porous.'

From the foregoing, it is clear that 'globalisation' is a development buzzword and it replaces 'modernisation' which is now widely seen as a failed capitalist development paradigm. Thus by following Olayode (2006), globalisation for the purpose of this paper is a process consisting of technological, economic, political and cultural dimensions that interconnect individuals, firms and governments across national borders.

Human rights practices in Africa

No region of the world benefited from the spirit of San Francisco more than Africa. Courtesy of Article 1(2) of the United Nations, the process of decolonisation was given legal backing. Consequently by 1960, a year the United Nations declared that lack of independence was no reason for delaying it, many African colonies achieved statehood. Like other regions that went through tortuous colonial experiences, the African region immediately faced challenges of development and nation building, but it was not long before African leaders realised that some of these challenges could only be surmounted at the pan-African level. Thus in May 1963, a Pan-African organisation, the Organization of African Unity (now Africa Union), was formed. With the formation the continental body, Africa was set to the organisation of furthering its interests in the global system.

Thus, like other regional bodies, the OAU aimed at using the post-1945 international legal order to pursue African interests. It sought to terminate all forms of colonialism that continued to erode the dignity of Africans. To face this challenge squarely, an OAU liberation committee with a special liberation fund was set up (Ajala 1998). However, despite the efforts of Africa to ensure the liberation of oppressed Africans, it did not have an African framework for guaranteeing human rights; it was not until 19 January 1981 that the organisation adopted a regional charter on Human rights – African charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which came into force on 21 October 1986.

With this instrument, the protection of the fundamental rights of the individual was carried beyond the confines of the domestic laws of the individual African countries into the arena of the community of all Africa states, thereby engaging the collective conscience and the common concern of the entire continent in the matter (Nwabueze 2003: 57). With the coming into force of the charter, opinions were divided among analysts. The Afro-pessimists contended that the charter is a watershed in the history of human rights practice in Africa (Umozurike 1983: 902).

The Afro-pessimists argue that it does not tally with genuine African interests (Ake 1987:56). Resolving this controversy is outside the scope of this article, but the fact remains that in today's Africa, the charter has become the *grundnorm* of human rights practice in Africa as it has been virtually ratified by all states. At this juncture, a poser is apt: have the principles of the charter translated into reality? The next section will attempt to offer an answer.

The African state, human rights and the challenges of globalisation

What is the nature of the state in Africa? What is the link between the African state and human rights? How has globalisation affected the capacity of African states? This section of the paper attempts to provide answers to these questions by drawing from relevant empirical examples on the African continent. Thus, to understand the nexus between the African state and human rights calls for the deciphering of the nature of the African state which must be set within the context of African state formation and the model of politico-economic development adopted by the state managers to legitimise it.

This necessarily implies that the *modus operandi* of the African state – as defined by its colonial origin, the nature of the class that inherited state power at independence, what is defined by this class as the basis goal of the state and the strategy it has evolved for sustaining its leading position in the political economy – all become very critical issues to engage (Egwu 2006:420). However, to appreciate the central role of the state in Africa in the creation of rights, and by extension democracy, we must begin with the analysis of the role it plays in the organisation of economic production and the regulation of the society.

The specificity of the state in Africa is marked by the historical conditions that led to the emergence of the post-colonial state, namely the imperative of responding to the crisis of accumulation created by colonialism. Thus, right from the inception of colonialism, the colonial state had been charged with the onerous responsibility of tailoring the African economy toward the needs of the market; to achieve this goal, it needed to be all powerful (Ake 2001:2). At independence, despite the change in the composition of the state managers, the character of the state remains the same much as it was during the colonial era.

In essence, the statist character of the over-developed post-colonial state (Alavi 1972) spurred the emergence of a class of predatory political elite whose main preoccupation was in using the state power to further their material interests (Schwartzberg 1980). The dominant faction of the ruling class, knowing that its *de facto* position was under constant threat, had to invent an ideology of development in order to legitimise its rulership. To them, since national development required a unity of purpose and utmost discipline, it cannot be served by oppositional attitude. What invariably emerged was the dictatorship of development. Multiparty politics came to be regarded as being foreign to Africa's historical experience.

In fact, the first president of an independent Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, in 1963 referred to multiparty politics as 'football democracy' (Anyang Nyongo 1995: 34). According to him:

> Where there is one party and that party is intensified **[identified?]** with the nation as a whole, the foundations of democracy are firmer than they can ever be where you have two or more parties, each representing a section of the community (Nyerere 1969 :195).

As the dominant faction of the ruling class was not really interested in real development (social transformation), but rather in how to survive, the class passed on the responsibility for development to foreign patrons, by extension embracing the Western model of development, thereby giving the custodians of the global capitalist system unfettered access to the African economy.

Thus, from the 1970s, the Bretton Wood twin institutions, the IMF and World Bank, assumed a major responsibility in charting the direction of African economies. By the early 1980s, with the coming to power of right-wing governments in some Western capitals, the IMF and the World Bank had to shed off their Keynesian outlook and embrace a new monetarist agenda **(**World Bank 1981). So the consequence of a changed outlook no doubt had far-reaching consequences for African states, which by then were the chief customers of the two institutions (Ohiorhenaum 2002: 10 -11).

And since African states' leaders neither had the desire nor the will to resist the encroachment of these institutions, they had no choice but to embrace the new neoliberal philosophy of getting the price right (Ake 2001: 34). The market reforms, as hinted earlier, were initiated and promoted by the IMF and the World Bank through the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Thus, in a sense, it is the global application and implementation of SAP which is now more appropriately referred to as globalisation. The elements of the structural adjustment reforms include deregulation and liberalisation of the economy, privatisation of public enterprises, and withdrawal of subsidy from some public services where this used to be the case and devaluation of the national currency and other related market reforms (Alli 2006: 337).

Thus, with the adoption of market-oriented SAP, the African states had to withdraw from developmental roles; this hampered the recovery of many countries and led to further deterioration in the social services. This is why the greatest impact of globalisation on African social formations and on its citizens is in the area where the state used to play significant roles in the lives of people (Knor 2001:20). Such burdens of the transition from state-centred economies to free market economies has been borne by the masses. Market reform in Africa has meant increased prices for basic necessities,

service fees for health and education, retrenchment in the formal employment force, etc. In the early 1980s an estimated 130 million people were living in poverty; by the early 1990s, the number of poor people increased to about 180 million (Olayode 2006: 18)

The foregoing has indicated that market oriented globalisation in whatever guise has unleashed much aggression on the state in Africa. This development in all indications has two implications for human rights. First, the inability of the state to provide basic social needs to the people has led to the denial of fundamental rights and freedoms. Obviously, a state that has lost its sovereignty cannot guarantee fundamental freedoms that are the essence of life. Second, in order to implement some of the reforms, the African state has become more repressive and anti-democratic, thereby further depriving the people of their basic rights (see Mkandawire & Olukoshi 1995). As Issa shivji (2009:130) puts it, 'with neoliberalism, the state disowned its responsibility to educate, clothe, maintain and care for its people.'

Conclusion

The previous sections of the chapter established that contemporary Africa faces the dilemma of how to reconcile the demand for human rights and the weakening capacities of the state brought about by neoliberal globalisation. If the state, as this paper has suggested, is the custodian of human rights and fundamental freedom, its integrity is supposedly vital. A free republican state, as once remarked by Machiavelli, guarantees freedoms, but historical evidence suggests that the state in Africa is not independent of both endogenous and exogenous forces. In fact, its edges have been shaped and re-shaped by imperialist forces. In the present epoch, market-oriented globalisation symbolises such a scenario.

Therefore, if the state is the major obstacle, how do we strengthen the African state? Strengthening the state should go beyond superficial 'reforms', as the continent's experience has suggested. It calls for an all-inclusive process in which all state structures and institutions are democratised. A truly democratic, autonomous state has the best prospect for promoting the national interest and human rights.

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