

Amoral Politics and Democratic Instability in Africa: A Theoretical Exploration

EGHOSA E. OSAGHAE
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

At the heart of democratic instability in most African countries is the fact that the state operates in a largely amoral milieu which makes it possible for politicians and other managers of state to abuse their positions in pursuit of private ends. This paper examines the origins and manifestations of this amoral milieu, and the ways in which it leads to a pervasive belief that the state is neither credible nor capable of pursuing the collective good of citizens. This exacerbates the endemic legitimacy crisis which has characterized African statehood since colonial times. The paper shows how *amoral familism* is linked with the legitimacy crisis and argues that democratic stability will be difficult to attain for as long as the amorality of the political order remains.

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria's First Republic, a leading politician in the then Eastern region was said to have told a campaign rally: "We use what we have to get what we want; politics is not like going to church!" Another politician in the former Western region told another rally: "Whether you vote for us or not, we will remain in power!" Assertions like these which have been replicated in other ways all over Africa tell us a lot about the amorality of politics, particularly of the civilian (democratic) kind. From them we can infer the following characteristics of politics:

- (1) The political arena is amoral, and behaviours which would normally be considered morally reprehensible in other contexts are permissible within it;
- (2) Government, even a supposedly democratic one, does not have to be representative of the people, and the politicians who govern do not necessarily have to have their (voluntary) consent or support to hold power;
- (3) Government is perceived in terms of personal rule;
- (4) Politics and government are approached in extractive or instrumentalist terms, meaning that people rarely become politicians or seek public office for altruistic reasons.

The foregoing provides an insight into the problematic moral order within which politics takes place in most African countries. The problem manifests principally,

but not only, in two debilitating ways: the negative perception of politics and politicians including the popular notion that politics is 'a dirty game', and the legitimacy crisis. These two underlie democratic instability in Africa, and the purpose of this paper is to show how and why this is so.

1. DEMOCRATIC STABILITY AND THE MORAL IMPERATIVE: AN OVERVIEW

An examination of the moral basis of politics would be considered rather old-fashioned by some students of politics in Africa today. It is an issue which they think ought to be left to moral philosophers or to latter-day students of Plato, Aristotle, Locke and other political philosophers. But the morality question is not simply one for political philosophy even though this is the traditional perspective in which such issues have normally been addressed; it is even much more a matter for political sociology and political economy. In fact, it is in the latter terms that concerns germane to the question have generally been treated in the study of African politics by students of prebendalism, neo-patrimonialism, patron-client relations, *strong society-weak state*, political corruption and so on. Although Robert Goodin's (1992) criticism that sociological analyses of morality in politics place too much emphasis on the instrumentalist uses of morality in terms of their rationalist assumptions applies to many of these perspectives, their search for deeper motives for morality or lack of it is crucial for any meaningful study of the subject.

Much the same can be said of psychological perspectives like the moral development theory applied recently by Richard Wilson (1991) in his "political pathology" approach. In this case however, although the central question of motivation for morality is addressed, the emphasis on personality factors tends to underplay the overall historical, economic and socio-cultural context of amoral politics which is much too complex to be so narrowly treated.

But all this is not to say that amoral politics has been given the attention it deserves. Despite the popularity of issues of corruption and non-accountability in the literature, the study of the endemic nature of amoral politics and its consequences for democratic transformation in Africa has not proceeded far enough. Why, for example, is amoral politics so pervasive? Why do politicians continue to insist that *politics* and *morality* should be kept as far apart as possible? What political attitudes flow from this, and how do these attitudes affect the legitimacy of the state and therefore democracy? How can these linkages be properly analysed? These are the issues dealt with in this paper.

1.1 MORALITY AND LEGITIMACY

We shall begin by establishing the linkage between morality and legitimacy within the framework of political philosophy which remains the best for this purpose. According to Locke and other political philosophers, a state compels obedience when the citizens perceive it to be representing their interests and pursuing their common good (or at least capable of doing these). In other words, it is when people are able to relate to the state as **their own** that they are most likely to obey it. The question of the individual relating himself to the state is not, therefore, simply one of identity as is assumed by students of national integration. It also involves an acceptance by the individual that the state is capable of pursuing his good. This is where the morality question comes in because morality is a theory of "the right" and "the good": "If morality is necessarily good, then motivating people to act upon it must surely be good as well" (Goodin 1992: 160). Accordingly, the moral foundation of the state not only relates to its capability to express the common good but also its claim to legitimacy.

If the state exists to pursue the interests of only a few (which Marxists and Weberians believe to be the case but point to how ideologies are formulated to hide class interests) then it has no right to expect obedience, and no matter who its operators may be and no matter their benevolence and capability, as long as this **perception** persists, obedience will be problematic. If the perception is that the state is an opportunistic contrivance whose apparati are used to pursue personal or private interests **a la** prebendalism, support for it is most likely to be weak and instrumentalist (principally in patron-client terms). The point is that the state and its operators should be **credible** (that is, be perceived as capable of pursuing the collective good) in the eyes of the people in order to compel (voluntary) obedience. As Max Weber (1977) points out, legitimacy is based on the belief among people that a political order has such credibility. It can be argued therefore that in the absence of credibility, the political order is unlikely to be stable.

1.2 THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

Before going on to examine what exactly this credibility consists of, let us briefly elaborate on the concept of democratic stability to which amoral politics is linked in this paper. The question of stability in under-developed countries dominated much of the modernization scholarship of the 1960s and early 1970s. One of the most popular arguments at the time was that political stability was **sine qua non** for economic development. However, the worsening material conditions of the citizens of countries like pre-1980 Liberia, Gambia, Senegal, Malawi and Sierra Leone whose one-party regimes were relatively stable, and the deeper crisis of development in others, indicated that the linkage was more complex than this. The problem was not that political stability was not necessary for development, but

what stability actually meant. Did it mean, in the context of developing countries that authoritarian regimes were not bad as long as they could ensure stability, an exception some American political scientists made in the 1960s? (c.f. Huntington 1965). Could stability be desired for its own sake? What was clearly missing from formulations of political stability at the time was the critical role of the citizens in the whole process. The fact that it is they who, in the final analysis, determine whether a government will be stable or not was discounted. But this is not the case with democratic stability.

The premise of democratic stability is that what sustains government and ensures stability is voluntary support or consent of the citizens rather than reliance on coercion. This is not to say that force is the opposite of consent as we find strongly supported governments having to sometimes use force to compel obedience (to put down demonstrations or workers strikes for example), but that as Cassinelli (1961: 102) says, even if the government has to use force, it should have the moral right to do so. These democratic ingredients of stability have been well summarized by Diamond, Lipset and Linz (1987: 7) thus:

All governments rest on some kind of mixture of coercion and consent, but democracies are unique in the degree to which their stability depends on the consent of a majority of those governed. Almost as a given, theories of democracy stress that democratic stability requires a widespread belief among both elites and masses that democracy is the best form of government for their society, and hence that the democratic regime is morally entitled to rule.

In line with this, it can be argued that an undemocratic or bad government, adjudged to be so by the citizens themselves presumably on the basis of its performance, can only sustain itself in power by means other than consent, usually brute force and, in some cases, support by foreign super powers. In the political thought of Max Weber (1977) such a government cannot last long. It is to emphasize the critical role of the citizens in the stability calculus that the concept of **democratic stability** is to be preferred to that of **political stability**. While the latter adopts a top-down approach and sees stability from the perspective of orderly (not necessarily good or democratic) government, the former, from a bottom-up perspective, sees it as a function of the level of consent enjoyed by government.

Democratic stability does not however end with the sustenance of a particular government. It also includes the possibility that the government will not remain in power once it loses the peoples support and that, in that event, the people have an alternative party or parties to choose from. Such alternative party(ies) must be serious and not merely cosmetic contestants for power and should be capable of winning elections. Finally, the elections should be free and fair, such that it would not be impossible to remove an unpopular government from power. To the extent that these conditions have been absent in most African countries, even where they have been politically stable in terms of having long staying regimes and sit-tight rulers, they have been democratically unstable. In some of them like Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the only **real** alternative to the party in power is the military whose

intervention has seriously compounded the problems of democratic instability. To sum up, democratic stability presupposes that a people have, at any given time, the government which they choose and that, being rational beings, they are most likely to support a government which represents and pursues their interests.

1.3 MORALITY AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY

What then is the place of the moral imperative in democratic stability? It is that, in the final analysis, a government can be stable only to the extent that the people believe it has a **moral right to be obeyed**. Where therefore the norms governing behaviour in the public realm or government more specifically are not the same as those in the wider society, there is likely to be democratic instability. In specific terms, where people who themselves have notions of good and bad, right and wrong, and are guided by these notions perceive of the state as operating in an **amoral milieu**, they are not unlikely to believe that it has the right and capability to govern them. An amoral milieu in fact debilitates the state and renders it incapable of enforcing its policies, making it what Myrdal (1968) has called a "soft state". To fully bring to light the nature and consequences of amoral politics in general, we shall discuss Banfield's expositions in his seminal work *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (1967).

2. THE NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF AMORAL POLITICS

Although Banfield's case-study was the small peasant commune of Montegrano in the Potenza province of southern Italy, his findings and conclusions are highly applicable to the African situation. It is as such that his study shall serve as a point of reference for the rest of this paper.

The underlying theme in Banfield's study is that knowledge of what motivates people to participate in politics is the key to unravelling the morality or lack of it that envelopes the polity. As it were, the underlying considerations which motivate an individual to become a politician or seek elective office as well as why he might decide to support or oppose one party or politician rather than another, are tied to the stakes he or she has in politics or the returns expected from it. The stakes of politics and the attendant motivations to participate in it vary from one individual to another as well as across and within societies, but in every society, there are tendencies which become dominant usually as products of historical processes. These dominant tendencies condition peoples perception of the state, politics and politicians. Generally, in most societies, only a few people become politicians for altruistic reasons, altruism being behaviour motivated by self-sacrifice and in which, as Margolis (1982: 15) says "the actor could have done better for himself had he chosen to ignore the effect of his choice on others" (also see Wilson 1991).

The vast majority of them do so for the purposes of actualizing themselves materially and also in terms of status, power holdership and influence.

Thus, on balance, for most people, the stake in participation is the expectation of (mainly) material and non-material gain. However, and notwithstanding that the utility maximization motivation of rational choice theory has universal applicability, the material gain motivation is highly (perhaps more) pronounced in African and other third world countries where the disarticulated peripheral capitalist formations which has the state as the major means of socio-economic reproduction has made politics an instrument of accumulation and the political class a highly opportunistic class. From a historical point of view, the instrumentalist conception of politics in Africa is largely the consequence of an **emergent political culture** which evolved under colonialism. The perception popularized by the nationalists in the struggles to end colonial rule that the state was not **credible**, and that it was *morally* right to prebendalize it engendered this emergent culture. This historical insight offers a more profound explanation for corruption and other manifestations of amoral politics than those which allude to indigenous reciprocity involved in gift exchanges (Wilson 1991) or exertions of the extended family (Barkow 1980).

Banfield attributes the material gain expectation of politics in "backward societies" to the prevalence in such societies of what he calls **amoral familism**, a tendency to become involved in politics only in so far as it promises material gain for self, family and possibly, the community (where there is a strong element of inter-community competition):

In a society of amoral familists, no one will further the interest of the group or community except as it is to his private advantage to do so. In other words, the hope of material gain in the short run will be the only motive for concern with public affairs (Banfield 1967: 83-84).

This description aptly fits the African situation. Leopold Senghor, former President of Senegal, once lamented the lack of altruistic motives for public service:

We lack a moral tension...a true commitment to the service of our country. It is this that I consider the most difficult task among all those I have undertaken (as President). To instill in my people...that taste for work well done... that sense of public good, without which nothing lasting can be accomplished (quoted in Markovitz 1969: 5).

A further elaboration of the African variant of amoral familism is provided by Owusu (1970) who points out in his analysis of the uses and abuses of political power in Ghana that political participation at every level is an expression of economic interests built around the individual, family, class, community or local-regional unit. The only thing that seems to distinguish African amoral familism from the one described by Banfield is the critical importance attached to ethnic interests in addition to personal and family interests by those involved in public affairs. But, even so, many studies have shown that although public realm

competitions in Africa are often anchored on ethnicity, this veils the underlying class and individualistic character of supposedly ethnic interests.

The main strategy of amoral familists is to use public office to pursue private advantages. According to Owusu (1970: 325), "The exercise of power (is) seen as a major means of achieving, protecting and advancing individual, family, and status-class or group economic and other material advantages and interests". Joseph (1987) has described the process of using government positions to pursue personal and group interests as prebendalism.

2.1 THE NATURE OF AMORAL FAMILISM

What are the manifestations of amoral familism? According to Banfield, they include the following.

- (1) Only officials who are paid to do so are likely to concern themselves with public affairs and even when they abuse their powers and are corrupt, the ordinary people will leave the task of checking them to other officials.
- (2) Officials often see their positions as instruments of accumulation and as weapons to be used against others for private advantage.
- (3) The law is not easily enforced and is often disregarded by both officials and ordinary people where there is no reason to fear punishment.
- (4) An office holder will take bribes when he can get away with it; "But whether he takes bribe or not, it will be assumed by the society...that he does".
- (5) The weak, i.e. the ordinary people tend to favour regimes which will maintain order with a strong hand.
- (6) Ordinary people do not trust politicians and hence take voting as the highest bidder's market and whatever group is in power is assumed to be self-serving and corrupt: "Hardly will an election be over before the voters conclude that the new officials are enriching themselves at their expense and that they have no intention of keeping the promises they have made".

Described in these terms, it should be fairly obvious that a polity where amoral familism holds sway cannot be a stable democracy. An amoral order not only attenuates the credibility of the public realm, it also puts legitimacy in perpetual crisis because the system lacks the capacity to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions and their operators are the most appropriate ones for society.

The root of amoral politics as suggested by Banfield's study of Montegrano and Ekeh's (1975) theory of the two publics in Africa lies in the disjunction between the public and private realms in morality terms which comes as a result of a high degree of "otherness" or "alienness" of the public realm. In the case of Montegrano, government and its local officials who came predominantly from other parts of Italy were seen as outsiders and this made it difficult for the local peoples to identify

themselves with the government. The vacuum thereby created gave ample room for amorality to thrive in government.

2.2 THE AFRICAN SITUATION

A comparable but much deeper disjunction accounts for the amorality of the public realm in Africa as explained by Peter Ekeh's (1975) theory of colonialism and the two publics in Africa. Ekeh attributes problems of corruption and nepotism which he regards as the main manifestations of public amorality to the interface of the participation of the state official or politician in the *primordial* public governed by the morality of his duty to his kin and the *civic* public governed by the amorality of a state which exists to provide public goods, but whose apparatus and resources are misappropriated to serve private individual and corporate interests. In contradistinction to the primordial public in which social exchanges are based on mutual reciprocity between rights and duties, in the civic public, the individual feels "no moral urge on him to give back...in return for his benefits". Consequently, the politician or government official is altruistic in the primordial public but is opportunistic and instrumentalist in the civic public. These perceptions and patterns of behaviour toward the state evolved as a consequence of the fact that the modern state was imported by colonial authorities and oriented towards serving metropolitan interests rather than those of the colonized and from the struggle that ensued between the colonial bourgeoisie and the African bourgeoisie for support of the ordinary peoples and control of the state. In the latter struggle, both sides presented the state as a kind of Santa Claus, with the African bourgeoisie to whom power passed at independence encouraging the notion that it was not morally wrong to abuse public office to fether private nests. This was because the state was seen as the external or alien 'other', much in the same way that Montegrano locals saw government as belonging to others rather than to themselves. These perceptions have persisted in varying degrees in the post-colonial period with the phenomenal expansion of state power to virtually every sector of resource allocation and because the dependent character of the state has not changed (in fact it has worsened in most cases) and, partly as a result of this, the failure of governments and politicians to behave differently from the self-serving colonial managers of the state whom they replaced. Ekeh's (1975: 107) conclusion is that "the destructive results of African politics in the post-colonial era owes something to the amorality in the civic public".

Ekeh's thesis while being widely acknowledged as useful for explaining problems of post-colonial politics especially those of amoral politics has nevertheless attracted some criticisms. Joseph (1987: 194) questions his assumption of a dual public, arguing that the two publics actually overlap. Ekeh does not deny that they overlap - to the extent that the same actors operate in the two publics - but

his point is to emphasize the moral/amoral contexts within which the two publics function.

A second criticism advanced by Joseph is that the roots of some of the problems identified by Ekeh lie in indigenous social structures; in other words, that they did not evolve under colonialism. This criticism obviously derives from the modernization assumptions made by Joseph and either ignores the fact that colonialism had epochal effects on Africa's development or simply downplays it. The point is that only a few of the social formations in Africa today can be regarded as truly indigenous or autochthonous (Osaghae 1989; 1993). Colonialism created new demands, opportunities and challenges which transformed indigenous social structures in fundamental ways. The disjunction between the state and society, and the development of the public realm as two rather than one are consequences of that colonial interface. Indeed, Young (1988) has traced the amorality of the public realm not even to the interface of indigenous and imported structures, but to the failure to import the state apparatus along with their moral milieu from Europe.

All this is not to say Ekeh's theory is without fault. It is particularly weak in explaining the material gain motivation of politics, a point which Joseph also emphasizes. The reason for this is that Ekeh fails to attach as much importance to personal interest motivation as opposed to what he calls "constitutive" interests; in fact he places too much emphasis on how primordial loyalties underlie political relations. Nevertheless, there is an implicit assumption that material gain motivation is a concomitant of amorality. A more general explanation lies in pervasive abject poverty and the belief that the state which, anyway, has no social security scheme as it is known in the West, is incapable of protecting the citizens in times of need (c.f. Raheem 1993).

So, most people would rather seize the opportunity of government service to 'save for the rainy day' for themselves and their families and, if their positions are influential enough, to also corruptly favour their ethnic groups (ostensibly to confer their actions with a known and accepted 'morality'). The culture of poverty explanation might be oversimplified, but it tells us a great deal about the problematic circumstances under which the state exists in Africa. From its inception under colonial rule, the state was not designed to be a welfare state, as it was geared more towards serving the interests of international capitalism than ensuring the development of the national society. Attempts by some first-generation African leaders to foist African socialism whose essence was to make the individual and community the objects of development as the organising principle of politics failed because the leaders found it difficult to reconcile their contradictory claims to power and serving the collective interests. African socialism ended up being an ideology of one-party rule.

The product of the foregoing was a political order that lacked and continues to lack credibility. Politics and its players as well as the state and its officials are believed to be harbingers of amoral familism. Even those officials and politicians who are altruistic, God-fearing and honest are not spared: they are seen as *clever rogues* or yet-to-be exposed rogues. But amoral familism goes further afield

because the instrumentalist approach to state matters is not restricted to government officials and politicians alone. Anyone 'opportuned' to have a link with government or to serve the state (whether as a member of a board or a peace-keeping operation or even as a member of the national football team) is expected to get as much from the state as possible, with the result that things like *love of country* or *patriotism* count for little in the political calculus. Under the circumstances, the state lacks any abiding basis for support and, because of the pervasive instrumentalist attitudes toward it, it is not perceived to be capable of engendering the common good.

This is the nature of the credibility crisis which has continued to plague democratic stability in African countries. The only way the crisis can be overcome, it seems, is for the operators of the state to foist a reorientation from the **extractionism** of the 'de-rooted' state in which people relate themselves to the state only in terms of what they can get in return, to the **productionism** of a people-centred state in which the emphasis would be on giving to the state or, in the popular parlance, helping to produce the proverbial national cake rather than waiting to share the fast depleting cake. In order for this to happen however, the orientation of the state itself and of its operators has first to change. We shall return to this point in the concluding part of this essay. For now, let us turn to examine the major debilitating consequence of the credibility problem of the state, namely, the legitimacy crisis.

3. THE LEGITIMACY CRISIS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF AMORAL POLITICS

There is general agreement among scholars on the meaning of legitimacy, as can be seen from the similarities in three sample definitions. Lipset (1983: 64) defines legitimacy as "the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society". For Friedrich (1963: 234), it involves the belief that a given rulership is based on good acceptable title by most men subject to it. Finally, Dahl (1963: 19) defines legitimacy as the "Belief that the structure, procedures, acts, decisions, policies, officials or leaders of government possess the quality of *rightness*, propriety or moral goodness and should be accepted because of this quality, irrespective of the specific content of the particular act in question". Belief in the right of government - its institutions and officials - to be obeyed is what is common to all three definitions. That belief, as was pointed out earlier, emerges from a perception that government and the state which it represents embody and express the common good.

One of the implications of this is that the effectiveness or performance of government (as adjudged by the citizens themselves) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for legitimacy. It is not sufficient because it is possible for ineffective governments to enjoy the support of the people. How do we account for

this seeming contradiction in terms which is true of several African states? Rabushka and Shepsle (1972: 32) provide an expectations-about-outcomes explanation: "Individuals remain loyal to a regime so long as they **expect** the regime to implement some of their preferences in the future, despite their unhappiness with current policy outcomes". It is easy to see in the almost permanent revolution of rising expectations which began as part of the legitimating ideology of the African bourgeoisie in the independence struggles, the basis for the tenuous support given to successive governments, even though many of them have been failures. Even with disorderly succession to power, the expected outcome is usually that the next government will perform better than the present one.

Care must be taken however not to mistake acquiescence which comes from a feeling of resignation or helplessness for support because it is often the case that people are forced to support (or be passive towards) a regime for fear of possible reprisals. In Doe's Liberia, Idi Amin's Uganda, Banda's Malawi and Buhari's Nigeria for example, most people simply acquiesced to repressive forces though in amoral familist societies it is also quite normal for people to support strong regimes. Acquiescence cannot be considered a genuine basis for legitimacy because "The individual who expects frustration of his goals as a matter of course, who perceives political institutions as biased in favour of goals incompatible with his own, who feels systematically discriminated against, is not likely to confer legitimacy on the regime responsible" (Rabushka & Shepsle 1972: 32).

Another point on which many students of legitimacy, especially those of the modernization genre agree, is that legitimacy is in crisis during periods of transition; in fact, some see legitimacy crisis as a crisis of change (c.f. Sahlin 1977; Lipset 1983). Lipset offers two explanations for this. First, changes brought about by transition may threaten the dominance of established or conservative institutions which explains why few transitions are allowed free rein by incumbent regimes and even fewer end up with revolutionary change. For example, notwithstanding the numerous transitions they have been through, many European democracies retain monarchies. In Africa, transitions, including that from colonial rule to independence, have been closely guided to prevent revolutions which would drastically alter extant power and neo-colonial structures. This is why the legitimacy crisis presents a fairly stable and endemic character.

The second explanation offered by Lipset is that transitions usually involve the entry of new political groups and the displacement of some hitherto powerful groups. The entry of new groups creates new expectations which, if not quickly responded to, could complicate the legitimacy crisis: "After a new social structure is established, if the new system is unable to sustain the expectations of major groups (on the grounds of 'effectiveness') for a long enough period to develop legitimacy upon the new basis, a new crisis may develop" (Lipset 1983: 65). What can ameliorate crisis at such times is the retention of traditional integrative institutions. To this extent, it can be argued that the destruction of traditional bases of legitimacy in Africa both in the colonial and post-colonial periods and the

discrediting of old regimes which have attended post-colonial transitions, make this second explanation very relevant to the situation in Africa.

The legitimacy crisis in Africa is not, however, a transitional crisis *per se*. Although some dimensions of the crisis have been more pronounced during periods of transition, the peculiar feature of the legitimacy crisis in Africa, if we may describe it as such, is its endemic character. The root of the legitimacy crisis in Africa lies in the fact that legitimacy was not vigorously pursued as part of statehood under colonial rule. As Dudley (1973: 25) puts it:

Whatever legitimacy, if one could talk of legitimacy in such a context, the colonial authorities possessed, derived not from any set of agreed rules, but from the monopoly of the means of violence. The system of rule was kept in being, for as long as it was politically practicable to do so, by the systematic, if sometimes judicious, use of military or para-military violence.

Dudley's characterization of the colonial state fits, to a large extent, the circumstances of several African states today (not just those under military rule). The failure by various colonial authorities to foist legal-rational structures of legitimacy in the final days of colonial rule to fill the legitimacy vacuum created earlier by the destruction of pre-colonial political structures left ample room for the amoralization of the public realm.

With this failure, initial efforts by post-colonial leaders to build legitimacy bridges only led to the entrenchment of personalised power structures founded on tenuous charismatic and contrived traditional legitimacy. Where these failed for reasons that had to do with the inability of the leaders to make good their promise of life more abundant, the state managers turned on the violent and repressive powers of the state. This repression was either outrightly terrorist, or it involved the establishment of systematized patronage systems in which those who refused to support the leaders were precluded from benefits and privileges. The growth of the post-colonial state as the *mode of production* and, in many countries, the sole repository of all economic and social activities and privileges engendered such abuses of power and position.

The cumulative effect of these processes was the gradual (or increased) loss of faith by citizens in their political systems and new managers, and withdrawal of support for the leaders. In many cases, the military intervened, but after initial correctionist promises and actions, they themselves got eaten up by the amorality of the public realm. That really is the crux of the legitimacy crisis: that the amorality of the public realm reduces the capacity for the effectiveness of governments. Does this mean that instability has become inevitable in Africa, because of the endemic nature of the legitimacy crisis? The answer will be found in the next section. In closing this section, the point made at the beginning of this paper, that the question of stability is a democratic question, should be reiterated. All non-democratic efforts at resolving the legitimacy crisis, especially those by military and authoritarian civilian regimes end up bolstering the legitimacy vacuum bequeathed by the colonial authorities to the extent that the fragile legal-rational structures of

legitimacy were replaced by neo-patrimonial and personalized structures and accountability was discounted as a principle of governance. Recent democratization schemes all over the continent should therefore be seen as the first serious attempt to resolve the issues raised by the morality question to the extent that they hinge on bolstering popular sovereignty and institutions of democratic governance. Just what are these issues, and how have they been dealt with? What is the hope for the future?

4. ISSUES IN THE MORALITY QUESTION

Thus far this paper has tried to explain democratic instability in Africa in terms of the amorality of the public realm. The situation is complicated in countries where military intervention has become part of the political process. For example, not many observers would have been surprised that the democratic *experiments* launched by the military in Ghana and Nigeria in 1979 failed to survive. Were these simply cases of self-fulfilling prophecy? In a sense, especially from the perspective of the military, the answer is yes for at least two reasons. One is that because of the pervasive nature of corruption and basic distrust of politicians, many people in an amoral familist society prefer *strong arm* to *soft* governments. But strong military regimes have been equally corrupt and unaccountable. The other is the allurements of power which makes military intervention recurrent. Any serious effort at addressing the morality question in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Sierra Leone which have repeatedly experienced military intervention therefore, must involve considerations of the reasons for military intervention and how to prevent it. From what has been said here, reduction if not eradication of corruption in democratic civilian regimes, is a necessary condition for prevention of military intervention.

Another factor that has complicated the morality question and attempts at resolving it is that these attempts have been highly discontinuous. Most leaders and governments have followed personalized schemes of legitimacy anchored on implicit and explicit schemes of social mobilization which, elsewhere, I have described as political myths (Osaghae 1990). This is to the extent that the goals of mobilization are stated in terms which convey them as the common good on the basis of which people are expected to support the regime (for example Obote launched the *Common Man's Charter* in Uganda). As they have been articulated in the various schemes, these goals have included liberation of the state from colonial and neo-colonial hegemony, self-reliance, economic development, eradicating hunger and poverty, social justice and national unity. Obviously these goals are consistent with the peoples hopes and aspirations and have actually been implemented with a sincerity of purpose in a few instances (like Nyerere's Ujamaa in Tanzania), but the mobilization programmes come to an end the moment the initiating government is overthrown or defeated in an election. In other instances

where the initiating government manages to remain in power, the value of mobilization wanes after it has helped to justify the leader's claim to power. This was how the euphoria of mobilization schemes situated within the framework of African socialism died quick deaths. Discontinuities in mobilization and legitimizing schemes bolster the place of personal rule as they tend to destroy whatever useful structures previous regimes may have managed to put in place. In recent times however, countries like Nigeria and Ghana (and Liberia under the Second Republic, 1985-1990) have begun to seriously address the issue of putting in place constitutional focal points for continuous mobilization. In Nigeria, both the 1979 and 1989 Constitutions have chapters devoted to outlining *The Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy*.

Marked discontinuities are also observed in the efforts to deal with the most seemingly intractable aspects of the morality crisis, namely, corruption and ethnicity. In acknowledgement of the disablement which these problems cause the state in terms of credibility, most governments in Africa commit themselves to their eradication. All over the continent, probes have revealed various forms of corruption and guilty officials have been punished, in some extreme cases with death, yet the problem of corruption gets worse each passing day, especially as the level of economic hardship becomes more desperate. Law-enforcement agencies to which the citizens have left the task of checking corruption in a typical manner of amoral familism have so far not been able to rid themselves of the same problem. The case of ethnicity is even worse. While it is condemned in its entirety, the morality of the primordial public makes it acceptable to the extent that everyone, especially in the public realm, assumes that everyone else is influenced by ethnic interests. This seeming paradox, and the fact that ethnicity is not **criminal** as it often becomes pronounced under conditions where only the losers (who played the game) complain, makes it very difficult to deal with.

The **ad hoc** manner in which problems of corruption and ethnicity are dealt with has not enabled the development of sustained approaches to the problems. But even in the attempts that have been made, emphasis has been placed on formal and, in the case of corruption, corrective, measures. This is a branch rather than a root approach because the bases of these problems lie too deeply in the social fabric to be dealt with in such superficial ways. The prevalence of these problems is explicable, not in terms of constitutional or institutional failures **per se**, but in terms of the instrumentalist perception of the public realm that people have. Whereas in the primordial public everyone is expected to **contribute** to the well-being and development of the group and possibly in return for nothing, in the civic public, the amoral norm is to take from it and not give anything in return. This, as was said earlier, confers an **extractionist** rather than **productionist** perception on the civic public. This is the critical issue that needs to be addressed: how to change, in materialist terms, the perception of the civic public to a productionist one. In this regard, most governments have failed woefully. In fact with the desperate economic situation in most African countries, the amorality of the public realm has become more serious with the increase in primitive accumulation by state managers,

politicians and state officials. This situation definitely complicates the credibility problem and reduces the prospects for democratic stability.

What we have tried to establish is that even though the morality crisis in general, and the legitimacy crisis in particular, are endemic to the state in Africa, they are not insurmountable. The problems persist, in large part, because governments have laid emphasis on social engineering rather than on seeking ways to change the materialist basis and perception of the state. The responsibility lies squarely with governments to properly align the state with the values of the people which retains a high moral content.

5. CONCLUSIONS

At independence in the 1960s, several African countries, having received in part or whole, ingredients of western liberal democracy, including two or multi party system, rule of law, independent judiciary, free press, bill of rights, periodic elections, and so on, held forth the promise of being successful transplant patients. A few years into independence however, the transplant turned out to be unsuccessful. In fact, some of the systems were so completely turned round (in some cases by military intervention) that they bore little semblance to those inherited at independence. To put it simply, democratic governance failed to survive and subsequent efforts have not fared better. This paper has tried to show why this is so on the premise that democracy can only survive when people believe the state has the moral right to compel their obedience and consent. The argument has been that it is not the form it takes that sustains democracy, but rather the basis upon which that form is built. This foundation is anomalous in most African states because the public realm is amoral and the political order lacks credibility in the popular perception. Except this pitfall of democracy is given the attention it deserves, the expected stability which, in the final analysis is the major index of democratic success will continue to be elusive.

REFERENCES

- Banfield, E.C. 1967.
The Moral Basis of a Backward Society. New York & London: Free Press & Macmillan.
- Barkow, J.H. 1980.
Return to Nepotism: The Collapse of a Nigerian Gerontocracy. Cited in R.W. Wilson (1991), *Political Pathology and Moral Orientations*. **Comparative Political Studies** 24(2).
- Cassinelli, C.W. 1961.
The Politics of Freedom: An Analysis of the Modern Democratic State. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Dahl, R. 1963.
Modern Political Analysis. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Diamond, L., Lipset, S.M. and Linz, J. 1987.
Building and Sustaining Democratic Government in Developing Countries: Some Tentative Findings. **World Affairs** 150(1).
- Dudley, B.J. 1973.
Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Ekeh, P.P. 1975.
Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement. **Comparative Studies in Society and History** 17(1).
- Friedrich, C. 1963.
Man and His Government. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Gifford, P. and Louis, W.M. (eds.) 1988.
Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960-1980. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Goodin, R.E. 1992.
Motivating Political Morality. Cambridge Mass. & Oxford: Blackwell.
- Huntington, S.P. 1965.
Political Development and Political Decay. **World Politics** Vol. XVII.
- Joseph, R.A. 1987.
Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipset, S.M. 1983.
Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics. London: Heinemann.
- Margolis, H. 1982.
Selfishness, Altruism and Rationality: A theory of Social Choice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Markovitz, I.L. 1969.
Leopold Sedar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude. New York: Atheneum.

Myrdal, G. 1968.

Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations. Hammondsouth: Penguin.

Osaghae, E.E. 1989.

The Character of the State, Legitimacy Crisis and Social Mobilization in Africa: An Explanation of Form and Character. **Africa Development** Vol. XIV, No. 2.

1990 *Social Mobilization as a Political Myth in Africa*. **Africa Quarterly** 30(3-4).

1993 *Colonialism and African Political Thought*. **Journal of Asian and African Studies** Vol. 45.

Owusu, M. 1970.

Uses and Abuses of Political Power: A Case Study of Continuity and Change in the Politics of Ghana. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rabushka, A. and Shepsle, K.A. 1972.

Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability. Columbus: Charles F. Merrill.

Raheem, K.T. 1993.

Problems of Social Security and Development in a Developing Country: A Study of the Indigenous Systems and the Colonial Influence on the Conventional Schemes in Nigeria. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä Press.

Sahlin, M. 1977.

Neo-Authoritarianism and the Problem of Legitimacy: A General Study and a Nigerian Example. Uppsala: Political Science Association.

Weber, M. 1977.

From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, H. Geerth and C.W. Mill (eds.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Wilson, R.W. 1991.

Political Pathology and Moral Orientations. **Comparative Political Studies** 24(2).

Young, C. 1988.

The Colonial State and Postcolonial Crisis. In: *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960-1980*, P. Gifford and W.M. Louis (eds.).