

## The Liberation of Civil Society: Neo-Liberal Ideology and Political Theory

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The state versus civil society debate is an arena where competing class projects confront each other, each seeking to ensure a social basis for its own control over the state. The state plays a central role in the construction of civil society. The neo-liberal project seeks to de-legitimise the state as a locus of nationalist aspirations and resistance, drawing on theories of 'rent-seeking', 'patrimonialism' and 'state autonomy'. The neo-liberal project conceals its own massive use of state power, transnational and local, for the construction of a civil society in its own image while suppressing actually existing civil society which it defines as 'vested interests'.

### 'State vs Civil Society' as an Arena for Ideological Contestation

The 'liberation of civil society' from the suffocating grip of the state has become the hegemonic ideological project of our time. The emergence of the new hegemony is dramatised by the collapse of the socialist-oriented states in Eastern Europe, the weak performance of statist and nationalist strategies in much (but not all) of the third world, and the crisis of state welfarism in the West, all linked to the restructuring of class relations in these societies and the related disintegration of state-centred development coalitions.

A range of political forces across the political spectrum think that civil society has been constrained by the state and needs to be liberated. Neo-liberals claim they want to free its entrepreneurial potentials. But also socialists, of many shades, seem to accept that the failure of socialist experiences so far has been due to the suppression of civil society. Also in the social democratic middleground is the retreat from 'excessive statism' argued in terms of more freedom for civil society. In the third world, neo-liberals spearheaded by the World Bank, seek to roll back the state. But forces on the left are also disenchanted with their own statist experiences. They cling to the freedoms of civil society in defence against a hostile state. Organised interests seek to assert their autonomy.

Current arguments, however, are concerned not just with the liberation of

civil society but with its very creation, especially in the third world and East European context. Socialism as well as post-colonial statism have not only repressed civil society but prevented it from emerging. It is fatal for the state itself because it has not been subjected to the necessary discipline provided by the forces of civil society and has opened the way for authoritarianism, parasitism, and inefficiency. The road to the creation of a 'proper' state therefore goes via the promotion of a 'proper' civil society.

Is this the 'end of ideology' proclaimed by the victorious cold-war warriors or the coming of a new global consensus as heralded by the World Bank (1989; Beckman, 1992)? Not at all. All sides have their own designs on both state and civil society. Interestingly, all depend heavily on a presumably redundant state in their efforts to develop the right type of civil society. The consensus is a conjuring trick — an attempt to assert hegemony. In the name of consensus, the World Bank, for instance, draws on radical populist positions, incorporating metaphors of the indigenous, the grassroots, and the development from below as against the alien, elitist and anti-civil society practices of the past.

This article is primarily concerned with the role of the state-civil society dichotomy in the ideological strategies of the current neo-liberal offensive. In the effort to de-legitimise the principal ideological rival, economic nationalism, neo-liberals seek to de-legitimise the state, the main locus of nationalist aspirations and resistance to the neo-liberal project. In order to undercut the claims by the state to represent the nation its alien nature is emphasised. Its retrogressiveness is explained in terms of its separation from civil society. I will also examine some principle elements in this analysis of state separation, the notions of 'rent-seeking', 'patrimonialism' and 'state autonomy'.

The article does not attempt a definition of either 'state' or 'civil society', nor does it attempt to solve the difficult riddles of their interconnectedness which are also actively debated in the African context (cf. Mamdani, 1990b; for the Hegel/Marx/Gramsci attempts in this direction, see Sassoon, 1983). 'State vs civil society' is treated here primarily as a metaphor that suggests, in a rough manner, a terrain of ideological struggle. I argue, however, that the state plays a central role in the constitution of civil society which is an issue which goes beyond ideology.

### **The Neo-liberal Project**

Why 'neo?' Why not just 'liberal?' While the project is clearly liberalisation, the prefix is justified in order to distinguish current liberal strategies from those which have dominated the agenda of international development institutions since the decolonisation phase. They were also predominantly liberal in as far as they sought to promote capitalist development and world market integration. The World Bank was involved since the 1950s in support of market forces, foreign investment and local entrepreneurial classes. Because of the weakness of the domestic bourgeoisies, state sponsored development

schemes were treated as nurseries. The state was expected to act as a trustee of a budding capitalism. State enterprises and parastatals proliferated not so much from a commitment to public ownership, as in the absence of alternatives. Partnership with the state gave national legitimacy and the necessary political protection to foreign capital and international development agencies (Beckman, 1977, 1981, 1985). The 1970s witnessed a deepening of state-promoted commercialisation within foreign-sponsored large-scale rural development projects, covering vast parts of national territory and developing foreign-managed administrative apparatuses that often overshadowed existing 'national' state institutions (Beckman, 1987). Agency-encouraged foreign borrowing for such projects contributed to the debt crisis, which in turn opened the way for the current neo-liberal offensive.

The new strategy is therefore neo-liberal, not because it promotes capitalism, commercialisation and markets, which all liberal strategies do, but because of the redefinition of the role of the state in this process. It is neo-liberal not in an abstract orthodox sense but in a specific historical and regional context. This redefinition has taken place, not just or even primarily because of the failure of the previous strategy but because of a shift in the balance of forces, undermining the bargaining power of post-colonial nationalism. The global dimensions of this shift require no further elaboration. It is important to stress that it is also supported at the level of bourgeois class formation within post-colonial society.

This is not to downplay the crisis of the post-colonial statist development model. The neo-liberal option, however, does not emerge as the 'only' or 'natural' response to the crisis. Nor is it necessarily the most capitalist one, in the sense of leading to the most rapid transformation of African societies on capitalist lines. This continues to be contested, for instance, on the basis of the successful statist East Asian experience. The neo-liberal project is promoted in competition with other nationalist and statist options.

The 'liberation of civil society' plays a vital role in the struggle to legitimate the shift in the balance forces, both internally and globally, and to de-legitimise resistance and contending options. While the shift itself is quite dramatic, it is important not to lose sight of the basic continuities in the commitments of the leading international agencies in their efforts to lay the institutional pre-conditions for world-market integration, both at the level of state and civil society. Nor should we underestimate the centrality of state intervention to the liberal project in its new 'anti-statist' phase.

### **State vs Civil Society and the De-legitimation of Post-colonial Nationalism**

The post-colonial state emerged in the context of global contradictions between dominant and dominated positions in the world system. It became the focus of national aspirations and of resistance even if neo-colonial and

accommodationist forces often gained an upper hand. Yet, post-colonial nationalism provided in most cases a real constraint on the world market integration of the post-colonial world. Nationalist aspirations were reinforced in the 1970s by the military victories of the national liberation movements in Vietnam, Central America and southern Africa. UNCTAD and the Non-Aligned Movement asserted the right of third world economies to protect themselves politically against a world market.

The de-legitimation of the state is central to the ideological de-construction of post-colonial nationalism as the state continues to be the locus of resistance to world market subordination. 'The state vs civil society' discourse offers an arena for de-legitimation. 'Civil society' is therefore substituted for the 'nation' as the principal locus of legitimation. The contradiction between state and civil society is propagated as the dominant one. The more 'alien' the state can be made to appear the less legitimate is its pretence to represent the nation.

I have discussed elsewhere how the World Bank plays skilfully on nationalist sentiments in this de-legitimisation exercise. Post-colonial 'statism' is presented as the result of foreign ideologies, not just marxism and socialism but also the statist ideas that had dominated development thinking in the West (Beckman, 1991;1992). The foreign-ness of the state becomes a means of explaining its irrelevance to the needs of civil society and its failure to establish appropriate roots. The international agencies present themselves as the spokesmen of the forces of civil society that have been suppressed. The 'empowerment' of civil society is supposed to lay the foundations of a future more genuine state, more responsive to the requirements and aspirations from below.

### **Political Science and the Academic Foundations of Neo-liberal Ideology**

International intervention on the side of civil society draws on academic theorising about the nature of the African state. Political science has become useful to the 'international development community', having previously been marginalised by economists. The World Bank's (1989) long-term plans for Africa are prepared in consultation with political science scholars (World Bank, 1990). While economists focus on the dysfunctional impact of the state in African development, political scientists offer to explain the weakness of the state itself. Professional organisations such as the US African Studies Association and new institutions, like the Carter Center in Atlanta have provided fora for a new discourse on African 'governance' (Carter Center, 1989, 1990).

Reviewing the proceedings of one of the Carter Center conferences, Mamdani (1990a) outlines a critique of this new paradigm where polarity between state and civil society is a core feature. He argues that it misrepresents the manner in which 'forces within society penetrate the state differentially, just as the

state power reinforces certain social interests and undermines others.' The paradigm fails, according to Mamdani, to address the relationship between social processes and state power. It downplays fundamental differences in the manner in which production is organised and wealth generated in African societies, whether, for instance, the base is large-scale commercial agriculture, small-scale peasant production, or mineral rent. Such differences 'shape the contours of social groups, their demands and their capacities to wage struggle around these' (Mamdani, 1990a:8-9).

In theorising the state its 'class character' is defined in terms of the appropriations ('rent-seeking') of the 'political class' or the 'nomenclature', not in terms of the role of such appropriations and functionaries in the management of the contradictions of the wider social formation. State and politics is reduced to rent. The logic of rent-seeking is extended to the 'vested interest' which share, directly or indirectly, in the appropriation of political rent. These include wage earners, public sector contractors, and private businessmen whose profits are an outcome of state patronage and preferential treatment. The relationship of these classes to production is seen as essentially unproductive and predatory. Public enterprises are subsidised and thus part of the rent-seeking order. Theories of rent-seeking are firmly linked to 'neo-patrimonialist' theories which stress personal rule and clientelistic relations. Both sets of theories obscure how power relations and appropriations articulate with social forces, reinforcing or modifying the manner in which social contradictions are resolved. Government spending is reduced to the distribution of patronage, favouring some sectional interests and discriminating against others in a pattern of ethnic or clan politics (Beckman, 1988a).

In a recent text, Gibbon (1992) develops the critique of this new political science-dominated paradigm. Like Mamdani, Gibbon demonstrates how patrimonialism and rent-seeking are abstracted from the social and economic relations that define their actual content and the failure to focus on their articulation with other social processes. Patrimonialism, for instance, becomes an 'empty box tied to personal rule', making it difficult to distinguish what it means and the limits within which it operates in different contexts, whether Nigeria, Kenya or Zaire (Gibbon, 1992:4). He also notes that clientelistic relations may be combined 'successfully' with 'free markets' as in Pinochet's Chile or in a state-civil society 'symbiosis' as in Japan. Gibbon shows convincingly how Robert Bates, one of the theoreticians of the new paradigm, separates politics from production relations. The entire focus is on politics as source of accumulation, neglecting all other forms (Gibbon, 1992:8).

### **Rent-seeking and the Contradictions of Post-colonial Society**

The failure to situate rent-seeking and patrimonialism in relation to the wider dynamics of production serves to conceal the manner in which the neo-liberal project intervenes in these contradictions. For instance, in a mining or oil

economy, 'rent' concerns the terms under which mining and oil companies extract these resources, including their access to deposits, the terms on which labour is 'made available' and profits transferred. The function of the state in this context cannot be reduced to the parasitism of rent-seeking classes, however extensive it may be. The relation involves both national and class contradiction. The state represents national territorial interests. The 'political rent' that is appropriated by the 'political class' must be discussed in relation to what happens to this 'national rent'. It is in the interest of the neo-liberal project to blur the distinction between the two and to reduce the issue of rent to that of 'political rent' in a narrow class or 'nomenclatura' sense. It diverts attention from the underlying national contradictions and, in particular, from the way in which the neo-liberal project intervenes in those contradictions on the side of transnational capital. But also, class contradictions are obscured by the focus on rent-seeking. The state acts as gatekeeper for the terms under which local labour is made available to foreign capital. The issue of 'political rent' needs therefore to be related to the manner in which the state performs this role. Does the state collaborate with management in obstructing workers' rights and suppressing wages? Or is it supporting workers' interest? The neo-liberal intervention has implications for this relationship.

Agricultural marketing boards are favourite villains in the neo-liberal world view. Producers are prevented from reaping the full value of their labour. By reducing the boards to rent-seeking, however, it becomes possible to pursue liberalisation without addressing the problems of improving market access, price stability, extension services, access to inputs etc. which were supposed to engage the boards, apart from their fiscal functions. If the boards are reduced to rent-seeking it also blocks an attempt to relate their functions to dynamics of social forces and contradictions within agrarian society itself. At the one end we merely find an amorphous suffering 'peasantry' and at the other a parasitic bureaucracy. While there may be much truth to such a picture, it blots out the highly differential manner in which board activities involve different strata among the producers, intermediary structures, co-operatives, traders, and village/community power-relations, including the struggle of such local forces to reform the marketing system in their own interest (for a discussion of the politics of Ghanaian cocoa marketing, see Beckman, 1976; on recent Nigerian experiences of liberalisation, see Mustapha, 1992). All this can be brushed aside in the bold neo-liberal sweep. Neo-liberal theory has no need for any knowledge about the demands and aspirations of the particular social groups affected in order to offer its solution. The medicine is supposed to work anywhere anytime. If not now, later.

### **Radical Reinforcement of the Separation Theories of State and Civil Society**

Rent-seeking and patrimonial features are readily identified in most African societies and are dramatically conspicuous in some. Theorising about these features in terms of state-civil society polarity is not necessarily linked to sup-

port for the neo-liberal project. Some of it is rooted in concerns with popular emancipation, social movements, and democracy. My argument so far has been to demonstrate how a narrow, seemingly 'materialist' conceptualisation of the state in terms of rent-seeking and patronage abstracts those features from the relations of production with which they are articulated and which will influence their content and meaning. Moreover, as everything becomes subordinated to the logic of patrimonialism and rent-seeking, the model also obstructs an understanding of the functions performed by the state where rent is not a significant feature, for instance its actual role in regulating land, property and labour relations.

Radical scholars are of course as disturbed as the neo-liberal crusaders by the venality and parasitism of African ruling classes. In trying to explain the failure of the state to respond reasonably and efficiently to the imperatives of social and national emancipation they also draw on theories about state-society disjunctures. A 'comprador' model of the post-colonial state explains the separation of the state from society in terms of its international dependence. Local ruling classes have been reduced to agents — compradors — in the subordination of their societies to the requirements of neo-colonial or transnational capital. The commissions that they collect in this relationship is their rent. I have elsewhere developed a critique of these positions which fail in my view to take the dynamics of local bourgeois class formation seriously enough and underestimate the significance of access to state and territory as a basis for bargaining power (Beckman, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1985). At this point, however, my concern is with the manner in which such radical positions draw on theoretical assumptions which are appropriated by the neo-liberal project (Beckman, 1988a).

One such 'common' assumption is the absence of a 'proper' bourgeoisie. While neo-liberals would certainly not think in terms of a 'national' versus a 'comprador' bourgeoisie, there is common ground both in the rejection of the existing one and the search for a substitute. While some radicals, at an earlier point at least, were preoccupied with finding a more progressive replacement for the missing national bourgeoisie, e.g. in patriotic military quarters, neo-liberals have gained the upper hand in their pursuit of an 'enabling environment' in which new entrepreneurial classes will emerge, less dependent on the state, with their own autonomous institutions (e.g. Chambers of Commerce), and ultimately destined to transform the state from below (with some little help of their foreign friends) into a proper capitalist state (see my critique of the World Bank's long-term perspective for Africa; Beckman, 1992). While radicals find such transnational intervention objectionable, their way of posing the problems in terms of a missing bourgeoisie opens itself for co-optation.

In theorising the separation of the state from society, neo-liberal theory can also draw on the vulgarisations of theories of the 'autonomy of the post-colonial state' borrowed from the radical tradition. An elaborate analysis by

Hamza Alavi (1972) of ruling class factions, primarily in Pakistani post-colonial society, was at an early point adopted within radical discourses on Africa, revised out of recognition, and finally incorporated into the 'populist' luggage of neo-liberal ideology. The original argument concerned the relative strength of the state bureaucracy, civilian and military, within the arrangement of ruling class forces, local and foreign, dominating the Pakistani state. This was seen as enhancing the relative autonomy of the state. It was explained in terms of the history of class and state formation in the colonial context, including the crucial role of external forces in imposing a particular state on the society. In its application in the African context, the 'autonomy' aspect of the argument has tended to be drastically inflated. No domestic social forces seems to count in explaining the class character of the state except those who inhabit the state itself, the bureaucrats and politicians, who 'inherited' the colonial state, itself an imposition. To some radicals such special autonomy held out the prospects for struggles within the state apparatuses on primarily ideological grounds and therefore also the possibility that socialist-oriented forces may gain an upper hand, capable of confronting the continued domination by transnational capital (for a review of the debate, see Goulbourne, 1979).

As such radical aspirations waned with the deepening financial difficulties, indebtedness and dependence of the state itself, the autonomy argument was modified and incorporated into the new liberal discourse. Hyden (1983) speaks of 'the existence of a state with no structural roots in society', suspended 'as a balloon' in mid-air. African societies, according to him, lack a social class which is in command of society which is 'an inevitable prerequisite to development and there is no way that Africa, if it is serious about development, can escape taking the challenges therefrom' (Hyden, 1983:19,195). Hyden's argument about the separateness of the state, its lack of roots, is coupled to the 'neo-patrimonial' model. The absence of a genuine class base makes the state wide open to penetration by 'the economy of affection', his euphemism for nepotism and clientelism, which prevents the state from performing its legitimate functions and ruling it out as an agent of development (Hyden, 1988 and my critique, Beckman, 1988b).

The 'autonomy' that is attributed to a state can only be meaningfully defined in terms of the social parameters that delimit and specifies its content. Questions must be asked about 'autonomy to do what?' 'autonomy in relation to what?' The original Alavi argument contained some efforts in this direction. Notions of states 'without roots in society' serve no analytical purpose and only help to obscure an understanding of the balance of forces within which they operate. It is essentially an ideological position suggesting that the state lacks the roots which you think it ought to have.

## **Civil Society and the Construction of the Post-colonial State**

The neo-liberal project is able to draw on a radical critique of the state, claim-



ing that the post-colonial state is primarily driven by its own internal 'class' logic (rent and patronage), in separation from the people. Both have good ideological reason for projecting this reductionist image of the state. It serves to prepare the way for their own alternative orders. Radicals may be in good faith. It is so obvious that the state fails to represent popular and national interests as these are perceived by them. However, the radicals are the ones to loose most from the promotion of the myth of the root-less state. If the neo-liberals indulge in self-deception it does not matter much. They currently have good access to state power and can promote their own project with the help of the very state they have declared redundant. In the case of the radicals, self-deception on these lines is bound to obstruct their own projects. In particular, it obstructs an understanding of the popular roots of ruling class politics, past and present.

The analysis of state-civil society relations must start from what has constituted the state historically at the level of civil society. What are the demands that 'society' has made on the state and how has the state developed 'as a state' in response to such demands. The fact that the post-colonial state was 'inherited' from colonialism does not make it any more 'cut off from society' than any other state. While originally having developed in response to the requirements of colonialist interests, transformations at the level of local society internalised these demands. The contradictions generated by the transformations created new sets of demands on the state which it sought to manage, combining promotion, repression and other means of regulation. Colonial capital and other foreign capital had a primary stake in the state and continues to do so. The state offers protection and services. While neo-liberal more than radical theorising can be blamed for obscuring this relation, the latter tends to neglect the manner in which such seemingly external determinants of the state were internalised into local civil society. While Cadbury, the chocolate manufacturers, wanted the colonial state to protect its interests, the cocoa farmers organised in their own defence, pressuring the state. The colonial state, which was very rudimentary at inception, was itself formed — constituted — as part of this process. Some of the interests in the state were of a pre-colonial origin, seeking protection, for instance, for pre-existing relations of power and privilege. Others represented emerging social forces, challenging such 'traditional' relations and their mutations under colonialism, as well as new ones, specific to the colonial economy and society. In its management of these contradictions, the colonial state developed its own 'popular roots'.

The state at an early point became the focus of demand for public services. Local civil society developed largely in the way in which claims on the state were increasingly taken on organised, collective forms. Roads, schools and health services were, and are, basic popular demands. It was natural that the competition for these services came to take on a territorial character, reinforced by the uneven penetration of commercial relations in peasant agriculture and other economic activity. Commercially more advanced areas were usually better placed in the struggle for services because their civil societies

were better organised and more articulate (access, information, education etc).

One of the most unacceptable aspects of the neo-liberal paradigm is the tendency to reduce the relations which developed on the basis of these demands to questions of state rents and patronage. If instead the point of departure is taken in the legitimate popular aspirations contained in these demands and the genuine conflicts of interest that they involve, the irrelevancy of the neo-liberal recipes of rolling back the state and breeding more entrepreneurs should be apparent.

### **The State and the Construction of Post-colonial Civil Society**

The demands along the public service nexus have been central in shaping the state as well as in the construction of post-colonial civil society itself. For the notion of civil society to make sense it must involve some structuring of relations that distinguishes it from just being society. It seems to me that it is the relationship to the state that is this structuring principle. Civil society does not exist independently of the state, it is situated in rules and transactions which connect state and society. Chambers of Commerce, for instance, a popular representative of civil society in the neo-liberal world view, organise and represent the interest of business in a public arena as defined primarily by relations to the state (legislation, taxes, licenses, duties etc). If we are to look for the institutions of post-colonial civil society we therefore need to pay special attention to the public service nexus. This is where we find a plethora of organised community interests, seeking to ensure that the new road, school, market, borehole etc. will come their way. This is also where we find the organisations of public service workers, teachers, doctors, nurses, railway workers, etc. who in the neo-liberal world view are the 'vested interests' which obstruct their designs. It is not surprising that such groups play a leading role in the articulation of popular demands on the state (Bangura and Beckman, 1991).

The construction of civil society is centred on the rules that regulate the relations between competing interests in society. Interests demand from the state that it should lay down and enforce rules in their favour. People seek the protection of the state in the pursuit of their productive and reproductive life. They want protection for life, property and contract, access to means of production, rights of employment and tenancy. They want due process. Little of this is natural which should be apparent when considering, for instance, the ongoing transformation of property and family rights as part of the commercialisation of the social relations of production. Most rights are situated within relations of domination and unequal power. Most relations are contested.

Both state and civil society are formed in the process of this contestation. Law is at the centre of the contest, not just the law of the book and the court room,

but in its interpretation and application as determined by social struggles. It is in this contest that the neo-liberal project intervenes, prodding the state to be more responsive to interests of capital and private property. The intervention is made in the name of civil society as opposed to the state, while its consequences are to intensify state intervention in suppressing existing forces of civil society, including those converging within the public service nexus. It is also an intervention on the side of capital within the capital-labour relation. In either case, actually existing civil society is portrayed as 'vested interests' which need to be combated in the interest of a civil society yet to come.

The organised social groups that most actively articulate the defence of the autonomy of civil society vis-à-vis the state can be found within and around the public service nexus, e.g. teachers, students, doctors, nurses, lawyers and journalists.

## Conclusions and Implications

The state versus civil society debate has been discussed in this article as an arena for ideological contestation. Competing class projects confront each other, each concerned with the promotion and defence of different civil societies, populated by different NGOs, social movements and encapsulating different civil rights. Each project seeks to ensure the long-term social basis for alternative configurations of state power. The state plays a central role in both the construction and the liberation of civil society. The functioning of civil society, also in its autonomy from the state, depends on state intervention, including the enforcement of the rules which constitute and regulate property, markets and other rights. The freedoms of civil society are gained in struggles against inherited constraints, including feudal, patriarchal, religious and other restrictions. The freedom and emancipation of subordinated social groups depends on the ability of the state to restrain the exercise of power in society, based on arms, property, gender, ethnicity and other factors which discriminate between people in access to resources.

This article has been concerned with the manner in which the state-civil society dichotomy has been appropriated by and geared to the neo-liberal agenda. By pretending to be civil society's best friend and by assigning the state the role of the enemy of civil society, the neo-liberal project conceals its own massive use of state power, transnational and local, for the purpose for constructing a civil society according to its own image. In so doing, it is busy suppressing and disorganising much of the civil society as it actually exists, with its aspirations and modes of organisation centred on influencing the use of state power. While pretending to act on behalf of all civil society — NGOs, social movements, grassroots — by a definitional trick, groups which are not supportive of its own project are defined out of civil society. They are 'vested interests', benefiting in one way or the other from state and therefore not truly civil society in the way the polarity has been falsely constructed. The hypocrisy of this ideological construct, however, is that the beneficiaries of neo-

liberal state intervention are as profoundly dependent on state promotion and protection, including the state enforcement of their own type of property rights. The neo-liberal project exploits successfully the radical and populist critique of the bad state but ignores that such critique is based on radically different expectations about what the state could and should do for the people.

How do third world radicals respond to this ideological challenge? The state was identified as the principal agent of development in most radical development theories, be they primarily socialist or nationalist by orientation. As socialists, radicals sought to turn the state into an instrument of popular class power. As nationalists they aspired to use it to liberate the nation from its subordination to transnational power that obstructs national development. Faced with the neo-liberal hegemonic thrust, responses from radical democratic and nationalist forces have been ambivalent. While vocal in denouncing the retrogressive and oppressive nature of the existing state, including the parasitism and rent-seeking behaviour of its functionaries, the state is still defended as an instrument of national aspirations. In the past, solutions may have been more commonly thought of in terms of the capturing of state power. The defunct post-colonial state was to be reconstructed under radical leadership. With the likelihood of this happening being even more remote, radical expectations on the state are rescinding.

The focus of radical democrats has shifted towards the construction and protection of popular democratic power in society. To that venture the state appears as a threat. There is a primary preoccupation with enhancing the autonomy of popular organisations vis-à-vis the state. The liberation of civil society makes sense in that context. A radical retreat into civil society may reflect a sobering of expectations and a more realistic understanding of local and global determinants of state power. It does not necessarily mean an abandonment of the quest for it. Disenchantment with state politics has created new strategies of influencing the exercise of state power from organised and autonomous bases of popular power in civil society. The experience of the Nigerian labour movement, for instance, points to the manner in which the laws, institutions, and practices that define the freedom of the civil society develop in the context of class struggle (Andrae and Beckman, 1992).

A critique of neo-liberal ideology, its hypocrisy, its false consensus, and its hegemonic pretensions, does not exclude, of course, that radical democrats and neo-liberals have areas of common interest in the liberation of civil society. There may be a scope for alliances based on a platform of pluralism and constitutionalism in defence against arbitrary state power. Radical democrats have their own agenda for the reconstitution of state civil society relations, and not one but many, depending on concrete experiences and openings. In Algeria, for instance, the 1988 events are seen by some as of the final breakdown of state civil society relations built on an element of social consensus inherited from the liberation struggle and a certain societal acceptance of state

violence in the national interest (Bourenane, 1990). In this perspective, the real rupture only occurred as a result of the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s, as linked to the disintegration of the income support and welfare services which both agriculturalist and wage earners had received. It went hand in hand with the intensified enrichment by state and related elites. Other Algerian scholars situate the origin of the rupture much earlier, in the nature of the liberation struggle itself, where the capturing of state power from the colonialists at an early point opened up for the private enrichment of entrenched cadres (Talahite, 1992). Mamdani (1990c), drawing primarily on the Ugandan experience but referring to a wider African one, suggests an even earlier rupture, coupled to the rise of state nationalism linked to the suppression of the popular and democratic elements in the origins of the nationalist movement. Such differences will of course affect radical strategies vis-à-vis the current crisis of the post-colonial state.

At present the primary preoccupation of radical democrats may be to fend off state repression and widen the democratic space. In this there is room for alliances with both liberal and neo-liberal forces, foreign and domestic. Similarly, the rights of labour may be advanced and protected within the context of 'social contracts' with state and capital. The real meaning of such rights to the popular classes, however depend — as always — on struggle and organised strength.

What about the project of national liberation? Economic nationalism has been retreating in the face of advancing neo-liberalism, causing a dissolution of previous nationalist dominated radical alliances. Does the retreat into the defence of its own civil society mean that nationalism has been abandoned as the other leg of the radical project? Current experiences suggest that this is not necessarily the case. The resistance to the neo-liberal thrust of 'structural adjustment' as promoted by the international finance institutions has opened up a renewal of alliances which are both national and democratic (Beckman, 1990).

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