African Realism: Reconceptualising Notions of State Weakness in Western Thought

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Abstract

This paper critically engages dominant understandings of African state (in)capacity, particularly notions of state 'failure', 'fragility' and 'weakness'. Drawing from Ali Al'amin Mazrui's delineations of latent, imminent, and active instability, it is argued that the contemporary 'Westphalian' international system and the nation-state are characterised by latent-imminent instability.[1] Using Zimbabwe as a case study, it is argued that it is neither a weak, fragile or failed state. Rather, it is a strong unstable state and thus, highlights the need to reconceptualise democracy in Africa.

Keywords: democracy, policy transfer, weak states, governance, Zimbabwe, sovereignty

Introduction

Ali Al'amin Mazrui (1977) drew a distinction between *economic development* and *economic power*. Because of the abundance of their natural resources, the countries of the Middle East and Africa have greater *economic power* in comparison to the Western world. The question, therefore, is what are the mechanisms preventing African nations from strategically utilising their economic power to overturn the human insecurity challenges confronting Africa? Mazrui argued that the global system is characterised by more stability than what at first *appears*. Thus, each country of the 'Third World' is a hostage of latent, imminent, or active instability within its borders. This state of affairs gives rise to a paradox of stability at the level of the international system, with internal upheavals characterising domestic political landscapes. Therefore, the 'stability' that Mazrui identified in the international system is more accurately revealed to be rigidity.

Mazrui compared the international system to a caste structure with four defining characteristics, including: *heredity*, whereby hereditary descent determines one's caste or racial membership; *separation*, whereby segregation characterises relations between different castes or races, with intermarriage a taboo; *division of labour*, whereby particular vocations or professions are associated with a particular caste or race, and *principle of hierarchy*, which determines one's societal rank and status.

Caste systems are highly rigid and provide little ability to transcend the demarcated boundaries, let alone overturn the system itself. Mazrui argued that it is the inflexibility of rigid systems that makes them vulnerable to abrupt revolutionary upheavals. Thus, rigidity should not be conflated with stability. The appearance of stability that characterises rigid systems is tautological, and thus, due to the resilience and continued sanctioning of custom over a protracted period of time. Rigid systems are strengthened by their prior survival as well as some degree of responsiveness to changing circumstances. Additionally, the international system and its veneer of stability are maintained partly through the drawing of a sharp distinction between caste and class, and their treatment as mutually exclusive categories. Mazrui himself upheld this dichotomy in his assessment of the international system as more like a caste structure, than a class structure.

Calling the above dichotomy into question is the case of the emerging economies or the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) coalition which highlights that social mobility and limited flexibility exist at the level of the international system. This is so even as "Southern" nations like South Africa and Brazil continue to be dependent on commodity exports, despite diversifying their revenue bases. Class adds much needed flexibility to rigid systems, because it allows those belonging to a low caste to establish a new status, despite the constraints they face. The acceptance of a dichotomy between caste and class obscures the mutually constitutive nature of these categories and serves to maintain the so-called "Westphalian" state system by providing a veneer of stability (Jakwa 2016). The latter refers to political sovereignty as a principle of international law whereby each nation has sovereignty over their territory and domestic affairs to the exclusion of all external powers, on the principle of non-interference in another nations' domestic affairs. Furthermore, each state is equal in international law, regardless of size in relationship to other states.

Mazrui (1977) distinguished between active, imminent and latent instability. Rapid changes and severe political uncertainty characterise active instability. The rise and fall of institutions, emergence and submergence of leaders and fluctuation in policies define it. Imminent instability refers to the absence of turbulence and expectation of its sudden eruption at any time. Latent instability is, therefore, when change and turbulence are expected in the long-term. Imminent instability necessarily entails latent instability. Thus, thinking about both the nation-state and the international system as being characterised by latent-imminent instability by virtue of their exclusionary ethno-racialist foundations, has significant implications for how we understand state instability in Africa, and provides a nuanced point of departure for critiquing prevailing understandings of 'weak', 'failing', 'failed' or 'fragile' states.

Must The Occident Speak?

The perceived deficiencies of African nations are associated primarily and solely with internal shortcomings in leadership. This conceptualisation relies on implicit notions of a pathological 'African personality' and African parochialism. Indeed, the latent-imminent instability of the nation-state and international system is unacknowledged. Many analyses of and approaches to addressing Africa's governance challenges are founded on shaky and problematic ground. From colonisation to the post-independence period, the 'filling' of 'failed' or 'failing' national jurisdictions in Africa has followed the following schema:

- Indigenous modes of socio-political organisation were and/or are thought inadequate and in need of supplanting by the nation-state;

- The nation-state in Africa is thought inadequate due to African parochialism, primordialism and patrimonialism, which necessitates open economies and external private and public governance;

- National, regional and global multilateral institutions are caught between order-affirming and order-challenging tendencies, and;

- Consent (or 'compradorisation') is operational at each 'stage', and these 'stages' are concurrent with each other, further complicating resistance(s) to and practices of 'good governance'

The next section will elaborate on the third (3) element of this schema. However, this schema is central to the maintenance of the veneer of stability at the global level, because it identifies instability as a feature unique to individual nations and particular regions. In order to illustrate this schema's operationalisation, it is important to elucidate and critique the tradition of thought from whence it emerged, and conventional understandings of juridical sovereignty.

Much scholarship on state instability is informed by two paradigms which are presumed to be distinct: realism and liberalism. Although there are different varieties of each of these views, realism, is generally thought to be rationalist and objectivist, whereas liberalism is thought to be subjectivist because it emphasises (economic) interdependence and inter-state cooperation under anarchy. Generally speaking, for liberals, commonly shared institutions, norms and values mean that nations are not simply constrained by anarchy's structural imperatives to increase hard power capabilities and to balance (or bandwagon) behind other powers in the international system. However, despite liberalism placing emphasis on the interdependent nature of inter-state relations, both realism and liberalism are objectivist views because they share the same constitutional rules or onto-epistemological assumptions about the nature of the world. Both take individual state actors as the primary point of reference. These actors are intrinsically self-interested, utility-maximising agents, and thus the primary cause of conflict between actors, which is a necessary feature of inter-state relations.

The nation-state is therefore necessary and required as the primary mode of socio-political organisation and as a precondition of peace. Consequently, relations between nations in the international system are theorised to be anarchic, because there exists no central governing authority or supra-state. The international system is one of self-help, and individual nations primarily look after their own interests, even as they work through multilateral arrangements.

Upon closer inspection, these two views are inseparable and form a single liberal-realist paradigm. Liberalism and realism share an individualist ontology, with differences existing with regards to the possibilities realists and liberals see for cooperation and the effective management of inter-state relations. Disputes occur only at the level of methods or 'regulative rules' states should implement in navigating an anarchic international system (Reus-Smit 1997). Realists emphasise hard power (military capabilities, population, geography, alliances) and liberals emphasise soft power (shared institutions, norms, interdependence). Another difference is the greater or lesser extent, respectively, to which the constraining nature of structure on agency is emphasised. Thus, the inseparability of these two views lies in their *identical* individualist ontology. Additionally, the disputes about methods that have characterised the liberal-realist *intra*-paradigm debate is misguided, given hard and soft power, persuasion and coercion, concurrently characterise(d) the 'rise of the State' in Africa and African states' relations with each other and external actors (Bobulesca 2011; Guilhot 2014; Gartzke 2007).

Constructivist thought is generally held to present a sharp departure from liberal-realism, which upholds scientific realism. Liberal-realism emphasises the constraints that structure places on agency; agency does not exact much influence on structure. Rather, it is exercised within the bounds of existing structural arrangements so as to limit the negative impact and effects of structure on national material realities and states' relations with each other. However, on constructivist views, actors are argued to have both ontological and epistemic influence (Hynek & Teti 2010). Thus, for constructivists:

> Because the existence of both physical and social objects depends on thoughts and linguistic structures (ontological mind-dependence), scientists cannot construct knowledge about these outside their own ontological representations. The point is not to deny the existence of material reality…but to focus on the consequentiality of representations of that reality. (ibid., p. 175)

In International Relations scholarship, Alexander Wendt (1992) demonstrates the marriage between constructivist thought and the liberal-realist paradigm. He upholds "'a kind of structural idealism'" whereby structure and agency are mutually constitutive, but the form structures take is also a function of historical necessity (Hynek and Teti 2010). This is notable when critiquing predominant understandings of African state (in)capacity. Wendt (2003) proposes a 'teleological theory of the 'logic of anarchy'' which suggests that a world state is inevitable' (p. 491).

Although he acknowledges that 'at the micro-level the process is neither deterministic nor linear, and forward movement may be blocked for periods of time,' and that 'there are many pathways by which a world state may be achieved, [with] human agency [mattering] along every one', he unquestioningly upholds a Eurocentric teleology that disavows global coloniality (ibid.). The world state whose emergence Wendt anticipates 'within 100-200 years' is a logical and structural-historical necessity. That is, it is not contingent on well-functioning 'international institutions, interdependence and/or democratic states [which] can lead to cooperation and peace within anarchy' (ibid, p. 492). However, Wendt's Eurocentrism is not dissimilar to that of liberal-realists who posit Western forms of socio-political organisation, institutions and local Western values as the desirable "end-state" for African nations and peoples. His Eurocentrism differs only in his *explicit* disavowal of contingency in the achievement of various end-states, including world government. The following passage illustrates this; he states that:

> Historically, politically autonomous groups have taken many forms – tribes, city-states, empires, leagues, and so on – but over time this variety has been reduced to a single form today, the territorial state. If the theory [of the inevitability of a world state] is correct this convergence was itself inevitable… (504).

The above implicitly constructs colonisation and the imposition and transplantation of the nation-state form on non-European peoples as a structural-historical necessity. It upholds predominant conceptions of juridical sovereignty and equality amongst states in the post-independence period. Wendt does not believe 'our imagination' should be constrained in thinking about what the international system's 'end-state' might be 'in light of the internationalisation of political authority that has already occurred without a centralisation of force – in the form of the UN, EU, WTO, ICC, and so on' (ibid., p. 506). Commensurate with this view and further demonstrating the marriage between Wendt's structural-constructivism and the liberal-realist paradigm is Robert Jackson's (1987) conception of juridical sovereignty and 'quasi-statehood' which belongs to the liberal-realist tradition. Jackson believes that the juridical statehood of African nations was derived from a right to self-determination that did not require the possession of empirical statehood by newly independent African nations. Empirical statehood or sovereignty is characterised by the capacity for effective and civil government, preferably with consent from the governed. Juridical sovereignty is, on this view, de-facto recognition of state legitimacy and non-interference in other states' affairs. In the 21st century, emphasis is placed on the need for empirical sovereignty as opposed to non-interference.

For Jackson, the nation-state, despite having been a colonial imposition, is not inherently problematic. Indeed, it is desirable; however, its value as an organising principle is undermined by the ethnic primordialism (the argument contending that nations are ancient, and thus, a natural phenomenon) of the state in Africa. This understanding of African statehood is flawed, including Jackson's conception of juridical statehood. Juridical sovereignty should instead be understood to mean *recognition of state legitimacy only when a given state is organised in accordance with external actors' interests* (Jakwa 2016, p. 77).

Jackson's view and others who see the possibility for re-dressing the instability and so-called "weaknesses" of the state in Africa in global governance arrangements, disavow the multi-causal nature of Africa's governance challenges. These causes include not only internal shortcomings in leadership, but the latent-imminent instability of the nation, the international system and accompanying processes of policy transfer, diffusion and convergence. These processes are facilitated by global multilateral organisations and institutions, and therefore, they provide the conditions of possibility for so-called 'quasi-states' in the global present, while they also constrain African regionalism(s).

Global Policy Convergence and State Instability

According to Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), policy transfer refers to "'processes by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in a given political setting (past or present) informs the development of these same instruments in another political setting'" (quoted in Knill 2005, p. 766). It is 'concerned with processes rather than results' (ibid.). Policy transfer is complementary with policy diffusion which 'refers to processes…that might result in increasing policy similarities across countries...' (ibid.). And significantly:

> … policy diffusion is not restricted to the operation of specific mediation mechanisms, but includes all conceivable channels of influence between countries, reaching from the voluntary adoption of policy models that have been communicated in the international system, diffusion processes triggered by legally binding harmonization requirements defined in international agreements or supranational regulations, to the imposition of policies on other countries through external actors. (ibid., p. 766)

Policy diffusion leads to policy convergence, and the latter refers to:

> … any increase in the similarity between one or a set of policy characteristics (e.g. policy objectives, policy instruments, policy settings) across a given set of political jurisdictions (e.g. supranational institutions, states, regions, local authorities) over a given period of time. Policy convergence thus describes the end result of a process of policy change over time towards some common point, regardless of the causal processes. (ibid., p. 768)

Answering the question of which actors engage in policy transfer, this paper argues for the multi-causal nature of African state instability. Colonisation, the 'rise' of the state in Africa, post-independence national, regional and global multilateral arrangements have been marked by processes of policy transfer and diffusion, and political-economic convergence. Convergence is a result of a combination of top-down, bottom-up and horizontal transfer and diffusion processes. Bottom-up causes refer to shared norms between nations which result in emulation of new or emerging standards. These standards are often adopted out of belief in their ability to advance mutual understanding between actors and increase state legitimacy.

Thus, policy adoption can be understood in terms of shared norms and competition amongst domestic political actors pursuing their respective interest(s) which are represented in terms of a broader 'national interest'. Horizontally, this translates into cross-national competition, whereby individual nations seek to occupy leadership roles regionally and/or globally in the pursuit of the national interest. Top-down causes include coercion of local, national and regional actors to adopt particular sets of policy, 'when institutions [and other states] leverage financial resources for policy replication' (Sugiyama 2011, p. 32). Common examples of top-down processes include the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements which have restricted Africa's ability to harness their collective economic power as they have been subject to regulatory capture due to traditional or former colonial powers' re-strategizing their power-bases in the post-independence period. They also include the very "rise" of the state in Africa and its continued upholding as an ideal-type model of socio-political organisation by African leaders and external actors. These processes and the multi-causal nature of African state instability ground the third (3) element of the schema outlined in the previous section, which is that national, regional and global multilateral institutions are caught between order-affirming and order-challenging tendencies (Phillips 2016). And in keeping with the above analysis, Olukoshi and Laakso (1996) rightly argue that:

> … the approach to nation-building which was favoured by the post-colonial authorities was one which, by its increasingly centralising, top-down logic, was also authoritarian especially as the legitimacy of the state and of the post-colonial nationalist project started to weaken. (p. 16)

Furthermore, the weaknesses inherent to the nation-state project were exacerbated by the global economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s, with African states' continuing their dependency on their former colonial powers and the export of raw materials in a volatile world market. Diminishing terms of trade and the introduction of austerity measures to counteract poor-performing economies resulted in the further destabilisation of African nations. These dynamics revealed the unsustainability of the capitalist global economic order, shattering the veneer of stability and the class-caste-racial dichotomy that underpins it and informs inter-state relations in the global present. And additionally, a worsening global economic environment has undermined African states' ability to provide welfare and other public services to their populaces, thus calling the legitimacy of the state into question.

This diminishing of state legitimacy was exacerbated by the fact that across the continent, African leaders sought to consolidate one-party regimes and ethno-racialist patronage networks. Thus, whilst the Western world was discrediting Keynesian principles for a neo-liberal world order that advocated a decreased role for the state in the economy, African nations were experimenting with state-led development, but soon found themselves buckling under neo-liberal pressure which is generally associated with deregulation and the decreasing role of governments in determining national economic policies. However, the locus of regulation has merely been shifting since the 1970s, and in reality, there is no such thing as deregulation. And in this light, Bell and Hindmoor are correct to argue that:

> Even where governments do not govern directly but, instead, choose to govern in partnerships with non-state organisations, governments still retain authority for the 'metagovernance' of these arrangements…which requires governments to undertake a range of functions in relation to the support of governance arrangements. These include overseeing, steering and coordinating governance arrangements; selecting and supporting the key participants in governance arrangements; mobilising resources; ensuring that wider systems of governance are operating fairly and efficiently; and taking prime carriage of democracy and accountability issues. (p. 155)

Whilst the above is true, governments around the world neither possess nor exercise the same level of authority in the meta-governance of global governance arrangements. States do not have an equal say in the steering of the internationalisation of political authority and accompanying organisations such as the United Nations, WTO, World Bank, IMF and the International Criminal Court, amongst others. This is due to the coloniality of power in the global present. "Coloniality" explains the continuation and prevalence of colonial forms of domination, despite the end of direct colonial rule and administration in much of the world, including in places not formally colonised historically, e.g. China and Ethiopia. Thus, it refers to the racial:

> … social classification of the [world] population – expressed in the 'racial' distribution of work in the imposition of new 'racial' geocultural identities, in the concentration of productive resources and capital, as social relations, including salary, as a privilege of "Whiteness". (Quijano 2000, p. 218)

Another contributor to the destabilisation of African nations in the post-independence period was the Cold War, which saw many African liberation movements and nations become actors and sites of great power proxy wars and struggles for influence (Willet 1998). This experience exacerbated the proliferation of small arms across the continent and the consolidation of pre-existing ethno-racial fault lines. These factors continue to characterise relations between states, and states and non-state actors.

Additionally, they underpinned inter-state border disputes. The Cold War also added another tier to African nations' dependency on external actors for development and other funding. Its conclusion, following the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) under Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991, and its rebirth as the Russian Federation, which signalled the end of the bipolar world system and the emergence of an unipolar era dominated by the United States. However, this unrivalled post-Cold War dominance was short-lived as the 1998 Asian economic crisis illustrated Chinese state capitalism's resilience to the too often active instability of the Western-dominated global financial system. In a limited sense, Chinese state-led development ushered in 'a return' to Keynesian economics, albeit under an illiberal political system. These events facilitated the rise of the 'emerging economies', Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), whom are believed to present an alternative to Western-dominated global multilateral arrangements. Largely because of these emerging economies, today we live in a multipolar world where the United States and Western bloc's hegemony continues to be challenged. This is despite the BRICS' acceptance of neoliberalism as the *raison d'être* of global politics.

The interlinked and mutually constitutive nature of security, trade and investment matters cannot be under or overstated. Despite the BRICS increasingly presenting a formidable global force, their acceptance and adherence to neoliberal logics means structural adjustment programs, and so, processes of policy transfer and diffusion continue unabated. Much like the debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s provided the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) with the leverage they needed to make loans or funding to African nations conditional on the acceptance of various policy prescriptions, so too this continues today. Olukoshi and Laakso (1996) summarise the content of these prescriptions succinctly when they say:

> …the programme entailed massive and repeated currency devaluations, exchange and interest rate liberalisation, public enterprise privatisation, liquidation and commercialisation, the withdrawal of all subsidies and the introduction of user charges on a variety of social, welfare and other services, the liberalisation of trade, including the abolition of state marketing boards and trading agencies, the retrenchment of large numbers of public sector employees and the imposition of a freeze on public sector employment in the quest for the elimination of budgetary deficits, attempts at the reform of civil service of African countries, and a generalised curb on state intervention in economic processes. Increasing donor co-ordination and cross-conditionality meant that most African governments had little or no option than to accept the adjustment package whether or not they agreed with its policy thrust. (p. 18)

Richmond (2014) further argues that, '[p]eacebuilding and statebuilding have become central to international relations… and the search for a sustainable international and domestic order through a range of forms of intervention' (p. 449). Human rights, democracy, capitalism and the rule of law are central to the liberal-realist paradigm, including its structural-constructivist iterations. Inequality is a necessary feature of not only capitalism and its contemporary neoliberal variant, but also the modern nation-state itself.

Indeed, 'its tolerance is built into the modern state and global governance' (p. 450). Furthermore, 'if inequality is a root of some dimensions of conflict – especially related to power, material resources and identity – then *the state being built is already failed by designed*' (ibid., emphasis added). The global economic and international system is founded on a competitive individualist ontology that upholds the "sanctity" of state sovereignty and territorially-bounded, homogenous identities. Inequality and the conflict that stems from it are symptoms of the instability inherent to the nation-state and international system and their exclusionary ethno-racialist foundations.

In the post-independence period, peacebuilding continues to be inextricably tied with 'democratisation and economic recovery' (Manning & Malbrough, p. 145). Democratisation is equated with multipartism, that is, with strong opposition politics and electoral practices. State sovereignty is inextricably bound with both the ballot and the barrel of the gun. African nations, including through regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), continue to be dependent on countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), particularly the European Union (EU), for peace funding. The EU's member nations and other OECD countries exercise the most influence in international trade and financial organisations. This is an issue for peacebuilding initiatives and security cooperation, because:

> [w]hile all of the donors involved in a peace process may share the goal of ending the fighting and building a durable peace, they may have very different ideas about how to go about it. They are unlikely to have identical or even compatible ideas about which tasks should be prioritised, how tasks should be sequenced, and how to measure and respond to compliance by domestic actors. (p. 146)

The problem is not only donor governments' competing foreign policy objectives and the obstacles these present for cooperation, coordination and responsiveness to local realities (Boyce 2002, p. 1025). It is also the profitability of attending to narrow national interests as donor governments seek to re-strategise their power bases and influence in the post-independence period. Additionally, emerging powers such as China are increasingly key players in African peacebuilding initiatives (Sun 2016). Thus, when assessing the material realities of most African nations today, we must trace continuities between their historical past and post-independence trajectories, and the ways in which global governance arrangements militate against African leaders viewing the nation-state as *a transitional mode of governance*. The development of productive approaches to conflict resolution and the strategic use of African economic power to meet their development goals require a nuanced appreciation of the hybrid and rigid governance environment within which African nations are situated. Focusing on Zimbabwe, the next section illustrates how these dynamics continue to shape the country's post-independence trajectories.

Zimbabwe: Strong State, Weak Player and Instability's Hidden Dimensions

Zimbabwe's post-independence experience tells us a lot about state "weakness" and "failure". Zimbabwe is neither a weak nor a failed state. It reveals the excesses of the nation-state form in the continued upholding of an ethno-racialist exclusionary mode of rule inherited from its experience with colonisation. This has resulted in acute levels of human insecurity exacerbated by post-independence global governance arrangements. Zimbabwe is a strong, unstable state confronting numerous challenges to human security. This section looks at the identifiable processes of policy transfer, diffusion and convergence that have constrained the nation-building project in Zimbabwe, and undermined peaceful domestic political transitions. It asks what are the continuities and discontinuities that can be traced between colonial and post-independence Zimbabwe?

Very few discontinuities exist between post-independence African nations and their predecessors. In the context of the modern nation-state, "democracy" refers to the diffusion of power amongst and between different legislative bodies which possess different powers and provide limitations on each other's exercise of power. In Southern Africa, British colonial rule brought more than the nation-state, because:

> … colonial authorities based their rule on highly centralised, bureaucratic and quasi-military structure, [and] the constitutions introduced upon independence were founded on the principles of Western-European constitutionalism, with its characteristics of diffusion of power, checks and balances, limited government, and the protection of individual rights and minorities. (Reyntjens 1988, p. 59)

The difficulty with democracy in Africa is not simply that independence did not result in a departure from the colonial constitutional past as this continued 'under another label' (ibid.). Neither is it a matter of identifying the so-called emergence of authoritarian regimes with the post-independence period and colonial powers' establishment of political systems with strong executive branches that 'exercised power in a manner that could bear only very few institutional checks' (ibid.). Doing so would beg the question of what makes post-independence rule any more authoritarian than colonial rule when the latter was primarily concerned with the protection of white minorities and those indigenous groups who were awarded privileges as part of colonial powers' divide and rule strategies. The nation-state's principal function in the colonial era was to entrench the rights of some over others through the valorisation of the rule of law through the introduction of formalised legal codes. Power diffusion in the colonial context was, therefore, limited to those actors who were central to the colonial regime's power consolidation efforts, and the broader checking of power in the repression of disaffected majorities.

The multi-party system similarly emerged as a means of buttressing these divisions and reinforcing the ethno-racialist foundations of the nation-state. Up until the 1950s, Rhodesia was a one-party state, with the ruling party under changing names, regularly returning to power with each successive election until 1962. Initially, the party was known as the Rhodesia Party until 1933, the United Party until 1954, and the United Federal Party until 1962 (Utete 1979). Under Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front government, the one-party state structure became deeply entrenched. Elections continued to be upheld to perform the primary function of serving white minority interests. The constitution and rule of law that stemmed from it resulted in the introduction of legislation such as: The Subversive Activities Act of 1950, the Public Order Act of 1955, the Indemnity and Compensation Act of 1975, and the Emergency Powers Maintenance of Law and Order, Regulations of 1976, amongst others. Each of these Acts sought to restrict and criminalise the African majority from organising itself or demonstrating against the white minority regime. It also sought to entrench socio-economic inequalities and inequities through the continued dispossession of Black people. Indeed, early iterations of regionalism in Southern Africa were under the auspices of colonial governments, beginning with the short-lived Federation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland from 1953 to 1963, otherwise known as the Central African Federation (ibid.).

Democracy's normative content has thus far been authoritarian, that is if we understand authoritarianism to mean the upholding of what Silva (2009) calls "necessitas". The latter:

> … produces both the subjects of ethical life, who the halls of law and forces of the state protect, and the subjects of necessitas, the racial subaltern subjects whose bodies and territories have become places where the state deploys its forces of self-preservation. (p. 14)

A strong executive with little accountability and no adequate checks and balances is not the only form of authoritarianism. Arguably, as colonial settler states, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia are paradigmatic cases of liberal-democratic authoritarianism. The ongoing disenfranchisement of indigenous Australians reveals the "whiter side" of electoral politics. Any political regime that upholds "necessitas", irrespective of its different configuration in relation to others is authoritarian. Thus, liberal-democratic authoritarianism should not be promoted as a model of good governance in Africa, for it is characterised by:

> … an extreme concentration of power in a personalised Executive, who controls both the Legislature and the Judiciary, one-party military rule and lack of limited government, and the effective denial of a number of fundamental rights, particularly those that may have a political impact (such as freedoms of the press, assembly and association). (Reyntjens 1988, p. 67)

In Australia, the 'personalised Executive' can be understood to mean white domination of legislative structures and membership in a hegemonic Western bloc that has 'over-extended' itself in the post-independence period vis-à-vis Washington Consensus and War of/on Terror, as part of its power consolidation efforts. Illiberal democracy is, therefore, a desirable and achievable end in the African context, particularly given African nations' inheritance of regime hybridity. The implications of this argument for contemporary notions of 'good governance' is that if it is to gain currency, we will move away from the universalisation of a single historical and developmental experience towards greater responsiveness to local peculiarities. It presents a means of overcoming strong and unstable nations and the rigid international system they buttress.

Zimbabwe's colonial inheritance is rich and diverse. Zimbabwe's experience of settler colonialism means, as with other parts of Africa, that foreign intervention is a characteristic and historical feature of Zimbabwean domestic and foreign relations. Furthermore, upon becoming juridical in its independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited an army situation of divided loyalties; a factionalised and fractured political system; tactics and methods of repression, and; a dichotomy between so-called constructive politics and the politics of negativism. The latter led Prime Minister Robert Mugabe to proclaim during an interview in 1981 that, 'My position is, it's a luxury to engage in the politics of opposition' (ThamesTv 2016). The rule of law is sacred in Zimbabwe as the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), as previous colonial governments, has frequently turned to the constitution to consolidate its rule. The work lies in remodelling the rule of law so it is primarily utilised to safeguard human security.

These "inheritances", which were buttressed by the Lancaster House Constitution 1979 which Zimbabwe inherited at independence in 1980, created the conditions of possibility for the instability the country is faced with today. This Constitution restricted the form land redistribution was to take post-independence and entrenched a power-sharing agreement, mandating a Government of National Unity (GNU) that maintained the white minority's political-economic dominance. The Gukurahundi Massacres or genocide against Ndebele people classified as dissidents in the 1980s or Zimbabwe's unacknowledged civil war, increasing land hunger and the introduction of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) in 1990s at the behest of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), resulted in a deteriorating political and economic situation. Post-independence and post-Gukurahundi opposition politics arose in this context in the form of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) under Morgan Tsvangirai's leadership. Opposition organising, particularly after the introduction of the much maligned Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000 (FTLRP) which resulted in capital flight and smart sanctions on the ZANU-PF regime, resembles the mobilisation efforts of the armed liberation struggle. As Utete (1979) notes:

In the early 1960s the nationalists put so much emphasis on lobbying Great Britain, the United Nations, and other sympathetic countries in Africa and elsewhere, that what had begun as a tactic to gain external support appeared to develop into an overall strategy of political struggle. The attempt to generate external pressure against the Rhodesia regime threatened to become a substitute for internal political organisation and mobilisation of the masses. (p. 90)

Indeed, 'the movement substituted the general African decolonisation paradigm for a strategy that should have been based on the special socio-economic and historical circumstances of Zimbabwe' (p. 94). Thus, Zimbabwe post-independence rule under ZANU-PF and accompanying opposition politics, including iterations of power-sharing the country has seen to date, have all been characterised by top-down, bottom-up and horizontal processes of policy transfer, diffusion and convergence. Zimbabwe's political-economic crisis continues to worsen, with ruling party and opposition fractures amidst mass disaffection and demoralisation. The former has shown no willingness to step down with upcoming harmonised elections in 2018. Many opposition parties have arisen since the 1990s, a secessionist movement is underway in Matabeleland, and the economic crisis has worsened as the country undergoes another set of structural adjustment reforms at the behest of the IFIs. Due to the FTLRP, Zimbabwe's relations with the West became strained, if not hostile. This resulted in the country's 'Look East' foreign policy, characterised by a dispersal of economic dependence to non-Western actors, principally China and Russia. Arguably, this is an attempt at political-economic non-alignment; however, it is yet to yield positive outcomes for Zimbabweans.

From the colonial to the post-independence period, Zimbabwe has only experienced strong leadership which has made a strong state out of the country. Zimbabwe reveals that today; strong statehood is simply a government's ability to mobilise state apparatuses to safeguard regime security. The more resources a government has to deploy to do this in the face various internal and external constraints, the weaker the state becomes. Weakened state apparatuses present an opportunity to build a more inclusive political system. However, a lack of foresight can result in protracted conflict situations. Despite the leadership and political-economic crisis facing Zimbabwe, it is still a strong state, but one that is weakening. Given the country's complicated history with elections, as with much of the continent (Goldsmith 2015), a transitional power-sharing arrangement that avoids the pitfalls of previous iterations, in lieu of elections in 2018, is necessary to prevent Zimbabwe's further destabilisation as it undergoes a period of active instability. A Government of National Unity is potentially a means to leveraging weakening state structures in the re-conceptualisation of democratisation in Zimbabwe and Africa more broadly.

Conclusion

Drawing from Mazrui's (1977) delineations of latent, imminent and active instability, this paper has argued that the international system is characterised by latent-imminent instability with frequent instances of active instability. It is inherently unstable and to date has seen very few "weak" or "fragile" states. Rather, a common feature is strong but highly unstable states confronting numerous human insecurity challenges. Furthermore, processes of policy transfer, diffusion and convergence undermine, if not preclude, peaceful nation and state-building projects in Africa. The regulatory and jurisdictional competition that characterises the global present grounded as it is in a liberal-realist *individualist* ontology, incentivises forms of rule and regimes that undermine human security, due to complementarities and tensions between external (global and regional, state and non-state) and domestic actors. The continued valorisation of state sovereignty continues to sanctify strong nations and multiparty liberal democracy. This paper has argued for the desirability of weak states and illiberal democracy in order to chart out present and future trajectories for Africa that prioritise human security. Using Zimbabwe as an example, the multi-causal nature of the instability confronting the country is revealed, with emphasis placed on continuities between its colonial past and post-independence present. It is revealed to be a strong state, which today is partly maintained through exclusionary electoral practices. It is argued that in lieu of the elections scheduled for 2018, Zimbabwe should pursue a transitional power-sharing arrangement, towards a future political system that is not centred on party politics, single or multiple. Furthermore, the nation-state must be understood as *a transitional mode of governance*.

Note

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