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THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PROCESS OF  
NATION-BUILDING IN AFRICAN STATES

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AFRICANA

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The resurgence of the term 'civil society' has been intimately linked to the developments of 1989/91. The dissident movement in Eastern Europe had put the confrontation of 'society', i.e. politically active and independent groups, with the apparatuses of 'power' on the agenda. Thus, the seminal accords of Gdańsk in 1980 were seen as articulating a new 'social contract', the parties of which were 'society' on one side and 'power', on the other. 'Social contract' has thus been conceived, not as the founding act of society, but as a fundamental re-ordering of basic relations of power. 'Society' was seen as fundamentally opposed to institutionalised power. Its constitution by a self-conscious act meant an exemplary challenge to existing structures of dominance that denied any independent forms of debate, and above all, of organisation (cf. Keane 1988.).

The treaty of Gdańsk brought into focus the long-term struggle around the monopoly of the ruling party on politics, organisation and public life (Kurón/Modelewski 1969). Thus, the constitution of 'society' was co-extensive with the struggle for the very conditions of its existence. In itself, this juxtaposition of 'society' and 'power', which has been articulated with particular clarity in Poland, may be seen as an exemplary experience.

This is re-enforced when we look at the immediate historical background leading up to the turning-point of 1980. Consecutive waves of open socio-political struggles in Poland may be seen as phases of a process of social learning. They are marked by the 'Polish October' in 1956; the student movement of 1968 and the shipyard strikes of 1971; the strikes of 1976 and finally, the formation of independent trade unions as permanent organisational nuclei in 1980/81. In the process, the experience of social confrontation had demonstrated the importance of permanent organisation surpassing ephemeral 'councils'; it had also shown the importance of (relative) autonomy from the state apparatus. This had become

particularly clear from the experience after the dissolution of the strike committees in 1971 as a response of the change in government with the downfall of Gomulka. In 1980/81, a host of independent union organisations represented a network of organisation independent of the state. And these groups inevitably, under the circumstances, articulated political questions besides immediate bread-and-butter issues. We shall not go into any details of the ensuing processes which have lead up to the overthrow of political monopolies in Eastern Europe. What is important here is the fact that the eventual break-up of these monopolies turned out to be coterminous with the implosion of the entire power structure, as happened successively, in 1989/91, in the then Warsaw Pact countries as well as in the former Soviet Union.

We have sketched this model process in order to demonstrate that the issue of 'civil society' addresses premises that are of central importance for the structuring of any modern political system. Further, the extent of actual opportunity for public debate and the structure of the public sphere form instrumental preconditions for determining modes of decision making in such vital areas as development projects to be pursued - at least where these are conceived to rest on some measure of public consensus. In terms of this provisional clarification, a whole range of conceptions employing the term of 'civil society' would have to be rejected beforehand - those that do not reflect civil society in juxtaposition to, but rather as an adjunct of the state. Other variants see 'civil society' as co-extensive with concrete state-bounded societies, thus also eliminating the critical impulse which the concept receives, not least from recent historical experience as has. However, this does pose some problems upon closer inspection. To clarify our own position, we shall first give a somewhat more detailed critique of some of these conceptions.

Certainly one the most influential of the various versions of

the identity theorem has been represented by Edward Shils. To him, 'civil society' appears largely to be the same as 'bourgeois society', geared to the institutional framework of the U.S. in particular, to 'representative institutions' and to the market as the main structuring principle. Consensus and public solidarity are seen to restrain the tendency towards universal warfare or tyranny which for Shils are inherent in 'public pluralism'; these features are seen, at the same time, to foster 'civil', viz., 'civilized' behaviour (see Shils 1991a, pp. 4, 9; 1991b, pp. 18sq.). In the tradition of Talcott Parsons, Shils conceives 'civil society' as the aim of social evolution which is at the same time congruous with U.S. society. Further, the close linkage between 'civil' and 'civilized' is indicative of a Hobbesian bias which sacrifices in favour of order the tension that exists between civil society and the state, but also tensions and debate within the realm civil society. Only if we are prepared to take into account and to theorize such tension and conflict can we hope to reach an understanding of civil society that eschews any 'cult of civil society' (Woods 1990, p. 63), while rather accentuating its critical potential.

On this account, it may be called intriguing that a further representative of the identity theorem is precisely the main witness for a radical or leftist version of civil society, Antonio Gramsci. In looking at his conception of *società civile* in greater detail, we hope to sharpen our own notion of civil society.

Gramsci moves squarely within the occidental intellectual tradition when he states that 'in actual reality civil society and the State are identified' (1980, p. 153). A recent German treatment of Gramsci follows this through in identifying *società civile* as an aspect of the state, while however seeing it at the same time as a complex of hegemonial structures with deep consequences even in everyday life (Kebir 1991). But the entire position may also be reversed when *società civile* is

read as 'the mediating factor between the base and secondary superstructures', i.e. the state, and thus as an 'autonomous space'; furthermore, this is seen as Gramsci's specific theoretical achievement over and above the position taken by Marx (Bobbio 1988, p. 93).

It is our own contention that precisely Gramsci's treatment of the relationship between civil society and the state opens up the path towards a better understanding of the tension which in Gramsci is highlighted by a further pair of central concepts, i.e. 'positional warfare' and 'hegemony'. At the same time, Gramsci's treatment of *società civile* is closely linked to the importance he accords to culture. This may sound out of place only at first sight. Gramsci relates the problematic of 'positional warfare' directly to the existence of *società civile*. In Russia, the absence of such a space had enabled a quick Bolshevik victory in 1917, using the tactics of a 'moving battle': 'In the East, the state was everything, civil society was still only in its beginnings'; whereas in the West, 'where social structures by themselves could turn into well-armed trenches', 'there prevailed a balanced relationship between the state and civil society' (1967, p. 347). For Gramsci, this kind of relationship meant, in the first instance, not so much checks and balances setting off against each other the power positions of state and 'society'. Rather, Gramsci saw above all the entrenchment of bourgeois hegemony, of multi-faceted class dominance. The point is about the stability of the 'historical bloc' once established (ib., p. 291). This is meant when Gramsci continues his analysis of civil society in the West: 'The state was a forward trench, and behind it, there was a string of battlements and casemates ...' From this strategic strength of the state and of civil society, Gramsci inferred the necessity of taking a discerning view, of 'thorough reconnaissance on the national character' (ib., p. 347). This is the strategic place of the 'struggle for a new culture' (id. 1983, p. 108) which loomed so large in Gramsci's thought. And this also served as

a starting point for a refined notion of 'base' and 'superstructure' and, in turn, of the ambivalent potentials for action inherent in *società civile* (cf. Bobbio 1988).

This refers us back to the courses history took in various European societies. In France, above all, 'civil' - or 'bourgeois' society might indeed appear to be congruous with the state or 'nation' (cf. id. 1955, p. 51). To the east of Rhine and also in Italy, things were more complicated. Here the bourgeoisie, even during the 19th century, saw the need to constitute itself against the state, only to be absorbed later on into an alliance with the *ancien régime*.

For most European countries outside Western Europe, this meant that the programme of personal and collective freedom and emancipation had to be taken up beyond the realm of 'bourgeois' society, in the first instance to be organized by social democracy. These demands were combined here with the overruling demands for social emancipation, and this may explain the disdain authors like Karl Kautsky showed for personal rights and liberties. Gramsci placed himself squarely into this tradition.

Still, the matching of *società civile* and the state is by no means unequivocal in Gramsci. On closer inspection, civil society turns out to be viewed by him as a field of contradiction and political contention, in the broad sense that 'culture' is given pride of place, in spite of the economist bias of orthodox Marxism. This is due above all to the dual character of the state (cf. Priester 1981, p. 51) which has to be taken into account in order to understand the full meaning of the notion of 'positional warfare'. What is at stake is the mode of mediation between the general interest and particular interests under the hegemony of a class claiming to represent the 'nation'. To Gramsci, this is inconceivable as the mere forcing of the interests of just this one dominating class: 'The fact of hegemony undoubtedly

presupposes that the interests and strivings of the groups over which hegemony will be exercised are taken account of, that a certain balance of compromises be formed, that ... the leading group makes some sacrifices of an economic-corporative kind' (1980, pp. 154sq). And Gramsci carries this further when he characterises hegemony as 'the ethic-political bond that exists between the governing and the governed' (1975, p. 1236sq).

Seen in this light, hegemony presupposes some fundamental consensus which mediates between the two poles of a relation of dominance and which must find some ground in actual social reality. Of course, for Gramsci, this does not change the economic base of hegemony. But the balance does form a vital precondition for any stability of class rule and dominance, in other words, for the formation of a sustainable historical bloc.

In keeping with this view, Gramsci sees the division of powers as a 'consequence of the struggle between the civil society and the political society of a certain historical period' (1980, p. 186), where 'political society' clearly denotes the state, precisely in contradistinction to 'civil society'. Consequently, Gramsci sees the three powers tied, in varying degrees, to civil society whose influence is naturally greatest over Parliament and least over government - all this notwithstanding 'bourgeois' hegemony.

Only on the basis of these consideration it would appear meaningful to talk about 'organically developed "civil societies"' which manifest themselves, e.g., in 'parties and unions ... in a consumer oriented popular culture or in modernised religions' (Kebir 1989, p. 58). Even though all this points to hegemony, still it also documents ambivalence. In the case of subordinate classes, this ambivalence means the concurrence of tendency towards both resistance and adapting to given circumstances, the latter by succumbing to



discipline, but also by self-discipline. This is to underscore that the levels of resistance and of dominance are intimately intertwined.

When he pointed to the absence of *società civile* in Russia and in other 'backward' societies, Gramsci therefore did more than just to explain why the revolution of 1917 could take on the features of a 'moving battle'. Certainly, the absence of 'casemates' protecting the core-area of bourgeois dominance was instrumental for the Bolshevik success in a quick frontal assault. But at the same time, this also meant the absence of chances for open debate and organisation usually go with 'positional warfare', at least in bourgeois democracy. In spite of all these ambivalences, a critical concept of civil society requires still some further considerations.

Capitalism is unique in history by a discontinuity between class dominance and actual political rule. The bourgeoisie, while the dominant class, does not actually rule or govern. Rather, the state apparatus with the government at the top acts as an arbiter between the various bourgeois groupings pursuing mainly their own private aims; at the same time the state and government, as we have seen in our discussion of Gramsci has to safeguard some minimal measure of societal over-all consensus. This means giving at least some minimal material content to the claim to represent the general interest of all citizens (see also Schiel 1992).

This has deep consequences for the notion of the modern state that all existing states are required to conform with, at least in some minimal way. As members of the international community of states, they are expected to control their territory and to represent the population living in it. Inasmuch as these states rest for the fulfilment of these minimal functions and for their internal legitimacy on some kind of consensus and not on brute force alone, they usually have recourse to the concept of the nation, as an 'imagined

community' (Anderson 1985). This community is imagined in the sense that it is never realized in the sense of a face-to-face situation, but nonetheless it has a measure of reality - it is by no means simply imaginary (cf. ib., p. 15, 108n and passim).

'Community' is to be taken serious in a Gramscian sense. The formation of a 'nation', not in the sense of some ethnically defined community but rather, as a collective bound together by some kind of common past experience or 'tradition' and solidarity based thereon (cf. Benan 1993, p. 309), presupposes such communal feelings but also their concrete base, some kind of material communal relations (see also Kössler/Schiel 1991). If communal feelings which may refer back to a common history, including the experience of liberation struggle against colonial or neo-colonial domination, are not substantiated by tangible forms of solidarity, the consensus on which the legitimacy of any political regime necessarily rests at least in the long run will collapse or evaporate sooner or later.

This process has been demonstrated drastically by the collapse of political monopoly in Africa as far as its legitimacy was derived from the promise of 'development' (cf. Goulbourne 1987; Shivji 1990). This will be detailed in the following section, while in conclusion of this first part we should like to point out already the vital role played by existent, nascent or resurgent forms of civil society in the processes that followed the loss of legitimacy of the old regimes. The fortunes of the movements for democracy, in Africa as well as elsewhere in the Third World, may also serve to remind us of a vital lesson that may be derived, i.e., from Gramsci's treatments of civil society: While undetermined and ambivalent, or even prone to serve the interests of the powers that be, civil society still denotes that vital space and network of potentially independent organization that proves instrumental in the authentic articulation of interests, in

the airing of conflicting perspectives of societal projects, and in the definition of a over-all concept and perspective of development that commands a measure of consensus that is prerequisite for political legitimacy.

In midst of Algeria's long and bloody fight for national liberation Frantz Fanon (1965, esp. ch. 3) already foresaw contradictions between a national 'consciousness' and the social motives of a complete 'people's mobilization'. The national movement, he predicted, would in any case only end in a fragile form without content. For him the misery of nationalism and the weakness of a nationalist ideology was by no means the doubtful privilege of European colonisers and members of the master-race. His deep insight into forthcoming social processes and transformations, which he himself never had to witness due to his untimely death even before Algeria's formal independence, is not only underlined by the collapse of the command economies in the Eastern European countries and the consequent centrifugal tendencies in terms of ever more particular sub-nationalism emerging. Evidence offer also the ruins of former Yugoslavia and the numerous (hollow) populist nationalisms meanwhile discredited in most of the so-called Third World countries.

Among the more important (although not so widely acknowledged) insights offered so far into the critical debate on nationalism, are those of the late Nicos Poulantzas. His theoretical thoughts concerning capitalist/bourgeois state formation and structures are still relevant. He shows (1990) like others such as Hobsbawm - that the phenomenon 'nation' grows into a new dimension and quality in the context of emerging capitalist (nation-) states. 'Territory', (seen as the spatial component) as well as 'tradition' and 'history' as components of time, enter a new inter-related combination, resulting finally in the specific new type of "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983) and "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983). As Poulantzas has pointed out already prior

to these essential new analyses, the relations between territory and time/tradition/history constitute the 'modern' nation. The capitalist state draws the border lines by constituting (and defining) what is inside its boundaries - namely people and nation - and consolidates this inferiority (also by means of internalisation through social norms and values, last but not least however materially in terms of a legal apparatus designed accordingly and following the defined criteria). The national unity, says Poulantzas (1978) becomes the historicity of a territory, the territorialisation of history, while the national tradition of a territory materialise within the nation-state (see also Bauman 1990).

Nationalist movements in the 20th century are characterised by a historic situation markedly different from the factors constituting the emergence of nationalism and nation-states in Western Europe during the late 18th and 19th century. The combination of national superiority with the perspectives of an industrial-capitalist model of development became increasingly precarious, the more the world was linked towards strong, industrialised nation-states or fell directly under their spheres of interest and influence.

Among probably the most important of the new movements of resistance against this system, provoked by old and new dependencies, were during the 20th century the anti-colonial ones. They reacted towards the further expansion of the direct spheres of domination especially of Western European nation states in overseas territories. Their colonial systems explicitly denied the constitutional equality to the colonized population, in marked contrast to the formal equality offered to citizens within their own nation states.

Anticolonial movements as a result emerged in direct conflict with features and phenomena of a nationalism developed in Western Europe. It would be erroneous, however, to equate anticolonial movements with nationalism. Quite contrary, a

number of anticolonial movements originally had a genuine internationalist perspective. This applies i.a. for the anticolonial resistance movement in Indonesia early this century, but also for the orientation towards the colonial power as the common enemy in the early stages of the national liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies in Africa during the 1950s. The actual turn towards nationalism often took place only after the internationalist perspective was frustrated, or met limitations, such as the orientation of the anticolonial struggle on a particularly, colonially defined and structured territory.

The colonial case normally was confronted with the constellation, that the construction of a continuity in terms of state was not applicable. With very few exceptions, anticolonial movements had to orientate at those colonial boundaries, which so often have been criticised as deliberate and artificial. The constitution of post-colonial states based (at least on the African and Asian continent) essentially on the acceptance and immunity of these border lines drawn around territorial entities during the colonial era. In Latin America, where decolonisation and state formation took place more than a century before, sometimes drastic changes in territorial boundaries took place by means of wars between the now formally independent states. The definition of these states as 'nations', however, thereby were neither more rational than anywhere else, nor did it offer their inhabitants more homogeneity and solidarity among themselves. With very few exceptions, therefore, post-colonial states do not offer convincing evidence for an ethnically determined, state-centred nationalism. Such exceptions might include specific products of colonial rule, where especially in the case of British 'indirect rule' pre-colonial state-formation not only became conserved, but even more so thoroughly transformed and modernised. This applies to a certain extent to Lesotho and Swaziland, less so to Botswana in the Southern African region, but certainly to the

emirates at the Persian-Arabian Gulf or to Brunei. In these cases, 'indirect rule' included the conscious selection of ruling groups and the re-construction of traditions to legitimise their dominance.

Where anticolonial movements had a nationalist orientation, they had their point of reference normally in the existing colonial boundaries of a so defined territory. This also applied for such movements, which under the misleading claim of representing a national organisation clearly articulated ethnically defined ambitions. A prominent example for such cases has been the FNLA in Angola: Its ethnic basis were without doubts the Bakongo. Their settlement area includes not only the North of Angola, but also the West of Zaire and bigger portion of Congo. But FNLA-leader Holden Roberto was not bothered at all, to claim nevertheless the leading political rule for the whole of Angola. Ethnic affinity, however, very much so influenced and determined his strategic alliance with dictator Mobutu in neighbouring Zaire. This is one of the more prominent examples of a group of a more 'tribalist' nature, which (mis)used the colonially determined boundaries as definition for its own field of activity as a 'nationalist' movement.

Nationalist movements in colonised societies normally emerged within small circles and social groups who had specific experiences with colonial oppression and discrimination, but also with modernisation. Often these were students, who originally started to organise themselves abroad, in the colonial 'motherland', and finally build up a national ideology with reference to their common colonised home country. It is not very surprising, that these groups of mainly intellectuals not only served as a point of departure for the organisation of anti-colonial parties, but also as a framework for the formation of alliances and strategic networks. These were later potential recruitment agencies or the basis for operations to use the social transition towards

decolonisation for securing access to decisive positions within the new state apparatus, thereby gaining opportunities for appropriation (cf. Bayart 1989).

The post-colonial situation is more demanding with regard to a national ideology. Post-colonial states face the problem to relate to fixed points of reference for the own existence, exceeding the more or less incidental and arbitrary drawing of border lines around certain territorial entities. In some cases - especially in South East Asia, Ethiopia, Mexico or fragile lines of tradition recurring to precolonial phenomena. Independent of their credibility, such legitimising attempts cannot remove or solve problems of a diversity of different local and regional, often ethnically defined identifications within the given territory of the state. Next to the strategy, to define 'minorities' and either oppress them or compensate them by means of offering particular rights, feature therefore exercises prominently, which build an own identity and strengthen it ideologically.

Such strategies were often applied in the post-colonial era of African governments. They propagated specific 'national' ideologies, often combined with more or less serious claims of 'socialism'. The Kenyan 'harambee', Tanzanian 'ujamaa' Zambian 'humanism' might serve as such typical examples of designing an own brand or label. More seriously have been the conscious and deliberate - often explicitly declared - efforts to constitute national identity in the context of national wars of liberation - following the slogan "to be born a nation" (Swapo of Namibia 1981) in the process of a militant and military struggle. In such cases, national cohesion was expected and supposed to be created within the struggle for national liberation by means of a common historic experience shared, which at the same time would overcome regional differences. A step further move concepts of national liberation struggles taking into account and acknowledging the competition between several 'national projects', possibly

because of different orientations in terms of 'class interests' (see esp. No Sizwe 1979). Into this category falls the admission (i.a. by such prominent activists like Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral), that with the removal of direct 'national' oppression, i.e. the unifying motive of a national liberation struggle, the internal antagonisms and contradictions shall be disclosed. The definition of nation as a peaceful community in harmony turns out as a dangerous illusion. Also because it might well become the point of departure for new oppression, which is now directed towards the articulation of inner-social conflicts.

The national perspective promises the colonised a hitherto denied acceptance as free and equal citizens within a state. An 'imagined community' of this type is by no means only fiction. Instead, it demands a more substantial level, which realises also in material terms such expectations for participants in such a national project. This might be one of the driving forces for a number of post-colonial states, to embark so vigorously upon a strategy of 'developmentalism' (see i.a. Shivji 1990 and 1991). The driving force for such 'developmentalist' exercises and promises could often be located within the expectations of the masses directed towards national independence. This applies especially in those cases, in which sovereignty was achieved only after long, bitter and bloody struggles demanding serious sacrifices from the people.

The created expectations aimed at receiving the final reward by means of the minimum of what states in other parts of the world offer to and secure for their members: security not only in the sense of protection against physical violence exercised either by the (colonial) organs of state or individual representatives of such state power, but also security in the sense of a minimal material living condition. The inability of post-colonial states, to achieve by means of successful development strategies economic growth of the



desired and needed type of the benefit of the majority of people, has questioned their credibility: There is a lack of the substantial basis of such states as the legitimate representatives of the imagined communities. As a result, in most post-colonial states on the continent the attempts to construct and constitute a non-ethnic national identity have ended in a fundamental crisis if not even failed completely.

In spite of this it remains a fact that anticolonial movements first of all acted on basis of a 'national' programme. Post-colonial states also are still defined as national entities. It is therefore worthwhile to reflect and consider, for what reasons the nation even as an obvious fiction has played (and still continues to play) such a prominent role.

The colonial state has not only been the opponent and enemy of the anti-colonial and nationalist movements. At the same time, it also was the direct predecessor of those states, which emerged after independence. The colonial state formation in Africa was to a high degree a "cultural project" (Young 1988). It had to do with the transfer of administrative techniques and skills, as well as political processes, to secure the hegemony of the colonial power. As a model for both, the colonial as well as the post-colonial state, therefore, served the metropolitan state. This model, however, as was indicated above, did not meet the different social conditions of development of state and action in these countries.

Essential aspects that had been fought for and were secured within the metropolitan states only during the 20th century (especially the constitutionally guaranteed participation of the general population as formally equal citizens) had in the case of the colonies been denied to the people outside of the settler communities. Such a practice of exclusive rule over decades of foreign domination resulted in a fatal historic legacy. Not only was colonial rule oriented towards the

metropolis imposing the system: even worse, its dictatorial character and rigid strategies of domination and oppression led towards infantilisation of the population, the creation of a subordinate culture of obedience and the adaptation to authorities (cf. Fatton 1990). These dispositions and structures of personalities, created or at least decisively enforced during and under colonial socialisation processes, left little room for open resistance, protest and revolt, even less for the training and experiencing of democratic behaviour.

In contrast and parallel to this process of fostering the 'authoritarian character', particularist-regional, especially ethnic-tribal identities were enhanced or even created in cases where not being already available (see i.a. Melber 1985). Amílcar Cebal, the president of the PAIGC, assassinated in early 1973, concluded in his analytical writings that there was therefore a need to distinguish carefully between the (potentially destructive) ethnic-tribal and (potentially constructive) regional-cultural identities. The liberation movement would have to acknowledge the contradictory state of the cultural panorama and to assess which positive values should be maintained.

In the situation of the anticolonial struggle, defined already as national, the nation became the predominantly politically determined anti-thesis to the colonial system of an ethnic-particularist apparatus of power designed and directed by a white minority. Such a nationalism is decisively based on the negation of foreign rule by the organisation of the liberation struggle, i.e. the 'national' liberation movement. Its essential slogan appeals to the one nation in contrast to manifold particular, especially 'ethnically' oriented loyalties (the prominent slogan "one xyz, one nation" is a special case in point). The myth 'nation' is thereby challenging the colonially enforced myth 'tribe'. The fiction of a unification and homogenisation of a territory's

population through a nation created by means of a liberation struggle, can rely upon the social polarisation established through the colonial system of oppression. The political-cultural tendency towards uniformity is therefore complementary to the colonial strategy of 'divide and rule'. The even more radical confrontation within a struggle of liberation led militarily, increases and enforces such a tendency.

The idealistic, voluntaristic over-emphasis of nationalism must be seen in this light also as a compensation for the missing material reality. It represents the desperate attempt to create the substantial basis through the compensating ideological weapon of nationalism. This serves as the idealistic engine for escape. Consequently, aware of this interrelationship and linkage, we ought to define anew the dialectics of 'tribe' and 'nation' as symptoms of a material reality and function of a political process. The anti-colonial nationalist resistance turns against the 'tribalisation' of the colonized by means of demanding a 'nationalisation of the consciousness'.

Resentments created or at least enforced by a colonial 'tribalism', however, are not liquidated simply through the mere existence of a national movement. Neither can they just be ignored nor declared as garbage and put aside to become history of a past. Although such an approach has very often been practised within decolonising African societies, whose new rulers decided to establish strictly organised hierarchical and centralized unitarian states. Real experiences nevertheless point into a different direction. Social conflicts of distribution after independence in many cases documented, that after the removal of the negative point of reference, i.e. the colonial regime resulting in common rejection and resistance, internal contradictions already existing but being of a secondary nature for the time of the anti-colonial struggle for liberation, emerged anew. In

contrast to most other leaders of national liberation movements, Amilcar Cabral had predicted such a revitalisation already long before state power could be taken over (which unfortunately he himself was not able to witness and experience any more). Too little attention, however, has originally been paid to the fact, that those inner-social contractions basically also use an ethnic-particularist body for their articulation. This is to a certain extent also an immediate response to the post-colonial state's power structure, to use the national costume for maintaining at least parts of a loyalty and legitimacy among the people, who have expected more in terms of material well-being and social equality. This is doomed to fail, however: If the state should achieve a minimum of legitimacy as representative of the common interest, objectively existing collective identity is as much a prerequisite as its internalisation by the individuals affected (see van Cranenburgh 1990).

Particularly under the specific condition of African societies exists to a certain extent the alternative of a retreat from state in the sense of the tradition of the 'exit option' (Bayart 1989, Hyden 1980 and 1983). For a few communities this might seem to be an alternative that makes sense. The 'national project', of course, under such circumstances would be doomed to failure, however. More realistic and closer to reality is another option practised in many cases: the competition of ethnically defined (or self-declared) interest groups for the control of the centralized state apparatus. Such rivalry for access to power and wealth has often resulted in military conflicts. Prominent cases are Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia. But also in Angola the military conflicts after the collapse of the Portuguese colonial rule were basically influenced by ethnic mobilisation (in this particular case however admittedly and obviously enforced externally through the South African and US-American policy).

For post-colonial states on the African continent (and more

generally in so-called Third World regions) the challenge lies i.e. in the situation characterised by a particular social situation of heterogeneity and a resulting need of cohesion and consensus not existing. Political-cultural factors have a particular relevance in such a constellation, not least for the said 'national' and 'ethnic' identities. The question remains, whether such norms and values and their internalisation, serving the interest and needs of a more homogeneous 'national project', can be imposed from the commando heights of formal state power occupied by the new elites. In most cases, such attempts have only resulted so far in the emergence of once again narrowly defined and limited relations of dominance and subordination. If there are solutions, then it seems that they have to deal in much more detail with aspects of political-cultural hegemony and the basis of social systems.

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