

## AFRICAN POLITICS AND HEGEL'S CONCEPT OF THE STATE

Godwyns Ade' AGBUDE

Covenant University, Department of Political Science and International Relations,  
School of Social Sciences, College of Development Studies, Ota, Ogun State  
Tel.: +2348034854242 E-mail: [agodwins1@yahoo.com](mailto:agodwins1@yahoo.com);  
[godwyns.agbude@covenantuniversity.edu.ng](mailto:godwyns.agbude@covenantuniversity.edu.ng)

### Abstract

*The most obvious pattern of African post-colonial States revolves around Hegel's theory of State as the ultimate objectification or self-projection of the Absolute Spirit in which the drivers of government policies are superior to the people. This paper investigated and outlined the consequences and the remedy to this Hegel's foundation of African States and emphasized the necessity for sustainable development to become the goal of those in the position of power in Africa. The remedy is located in the reconstruction of the concept of State in Africa with the purpose of producing a State that integrates the people into its policies and pursues development ideology that is people-oriented. This paper placed the responsibility of service and respect for the voices of the demos (the people) on the political leaders and their bureaucratic counterparts and recommended the provision of a viable socio-eco-political platform for the realization of the holistic development in Africa.*

**Keywords:** Hegel, state, reconstruction, sustainable development, good governance, absolute spirit

### INTRODUCTION

The definition and the purpose of the State have assumed a controversial dimension long before the modern theorists emerged. Like every social-political concept, the State had a long line of theorists trying to delineate its existence as a central concept in the region of human existence. It is important we run a brief analysis on classical scholars' thoughts on the purpose of the State before we officially subject Hegel's concept of State to serious interrogation. For instance, both Plato and Aristotle held that the State exists to procure the good life for the citizens. Aristotle conceived the State as having an ethical dimension, which is the provision of the platform for man to enjoy the good or happy life. Happiness is the goal of every man. If man does anything evil, for Aristotle, it's with the view of deriving some form of happiness from the evil. 'Happiness, therefore, being found to be something final and self-sufficient, is the end at which all actions aim'

(Aristotle, 1962). The actions of the State also must aim at the happiness of its citizens.

But for scholars like Hobbes (1946) and Locke (1952), the State is a product of the peoples' willingness to transcend the state of nature, which inhibits the possibility of a peaceful co-existence. In Hobbes (1946), the state of nature is reputable for brutality and violence, while in Locke (1952), it is a state of peaceful co-existence through the guidance of the moral laws, but with the possibility of violence due to man's moral weaknesses.

The State is the highest form of association that allows the realization of man's project of self-fulfillments. This definition is traceable to the ancient political philosophers' conception of the polis (the State) as the moral ground for the attainment of man's rational goal and as a product of natural necessity, which will enhance man's meaningful living. In other words, the State is not just a willing transition from the State of nature but a natural phenomenon; a human necessity built on the natural nature of man as a political animal. Aristotle (1962) argued that man is by nature a political animal. This implies that man is intended by nature to live within the purview of his society, which is the collection of his fellow men. The family is the fundamental unit established by nature to cater for man's immediate needs. But because of the unlimited nature of man's needs, a higher form of association was necessary. According to Aristotle, the village emerged as the first association of a number of houses for the satisfaction of something more than daily needs. The dynamic nature of man's needs resulted in the highest form of human association, which is the State. Thus, the Aristotelian State exists primarily to cater for the endless needs of man in the society. The State has no other justification for its existence than the provision of a viable means of man's realization of his goal.

The sovereign has only three duties to attend to: the duty of protecting society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of society from the injustice or opposition of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain because the profit yielded would never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, although it might frequently do much more than repay a great society (Smith, 1937, cited in Appadorai, 1975). By the sovereign, Adam Smith meant the State. The State is to prevent external aggression against its own unique and authentic existence. It should ensure justice in all interpersonal relationships within it. In other words, no member of the State should impoverish, exploit and oppress the others, unjustly. Also, the State and its institutions of governance and administration should not only service the need of some minority (those in power).

They should rather be used to enhance the profitability of the whole society at large.

Max Weber's (1972) definition of the State 'as a human political community that has a monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (cited in Irele, 1998) becomes problematic. If our conception of the State is in terms of physical use of force alone, whether legitimate or illegitimate, then the danger of the tyrannical usage of the State's power of governance becomes a possibility in any polity. The Weberian conception of the 'State' in terms of legitimate use of physical force, alone, could lead to a problem due to the moral weaknesses of men. This physical force has the tendencies of being used by tyrannical leaders to the detriment of the lives of the citizens. Laski (1967) said, concerning the State, that it becomes an organization for enabling the mass of men to realize social good on the largest possible scale. The State enables the individuals within its jurisdiction to realize and achieve social goods. For these scholars, the State exists for certain ends or, put in another form, the State is the means to an end which is the self-fulfillment, self-realization, and self-development of man in the society.

Hegel, who forms the basis of our discourse, projects an idea of the State that exists as an end itself. The State in Hegel's political thought evolves as the supreme body in the society. The destruction of such projection becomes a necessity in our modern time. This is because Hegel's conception of 'the State', in the hand of despotic leaders, will inhibit both national and individual developments of the citizens.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed qualitative method. Qualitative study refers to the method which relies on text and image data. An intellectual engagement with Hegel's political thought calls for a unique and rigorous method of textual analysis of his political ideas through a discursive method as paraphernalia of qualitative method of research. This is due to the nature of Political Theory as a branch of Political Science that relies on analysis, critical evaluation and logic.

#### **THE STATE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Given the peculiar nature of the State as the center of governance and the unification of the society, the idea of development, as well as sustainable development, cannot be discussed without the State being a central player. Development is not just infrastructural, but it is also human-focused. Kayode (2002:31) underscored it thus:

Development is not just to make the poor wealthy, but to make the poor productive. The need of the poor...is not relief but the release of their inherent potential for individual growth, enhanced

productivity and higher social and political responsibility. This way, development turns man into an asset, not a liability.

Thus, the State is supposed to focus on the developments of its people. In other words, the State ought to provide a conducive environment for the citizens' realization of their dreams, aspirations and projections.

Markandya (1990) posited thus:

What constitutes development depends on what social goals are being advocated by the development agency, government, analyst or adviser. We take development to be a sector of desirable social objective... The elements of this sector might [be]:

- Increase in real income per capita;
- Improvement in health and nutritional status;
- Educational achievement;
- Access to resources;
- A fairer distribution of income; and
- Increase in basic freedoms

The pursuit of these ideals of sustainable development is the goal of an ideal State (a proper State) whose citizens' welfare guides the formulation and implementation of all policies and laws. Any State that does not focus on development as its priority could be said to fall within the purview of the Hegel's State that occupies our attention.

Reflecting on the character of the African States and their agenda for sustainable development, Ake (2001) succinctly stated that the problem is not so much that development has failed, as that it was never really on the agenda in the first place. By all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediment to development.

Thus, the absence of development in Africa can be located in the absence of the ideal political leadership that could use the forces and the resources of the State to spawn viable development. The State, in the hands of corrupt political leaders, becomes a predator and a supreme entity whose policies are meant primarily for the minute elites, who control it without recourse to the undeniable existence of the teeming masses.

Elliot (1999: 9) defined sustainable development in terms of:

A political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making;

An economic system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development;

A production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development;

A technological system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance;

An international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance;

An administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction.

He argued that sustainable development is about reconciling development and the environmental resources on which society depends. Therefore, we can posit that the State has the responsibility of channeling the resources within its territory to promote developmental projects for the benefit of the larger society.

World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defined sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This implied that sustainable development entails maintaining development over time, focusing on the unborn generations. Therefore, the present African States must begin to redress their ideological base in order to accommodate the *prima facie* tenets of sustainable development.

### **THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION OF HEGEL'S POLITICAL THEORY**

However, in order to be able to do justice to Hegel's concept of the State, there is a need to understand the metaphysical foundation of his theory. For Hegel, the whole universe is the self-projection, self-externalization, self-manifestation, and self-development of the Absolute Spirit. The Absolute Spirit is the grand finale, the ultimate, and the totality of all beings. It is the unification of all that exist in this world of material experience. The appearance of man on earth signified the highest projection of the Absolute Spirit. When man comes to know the Absolute through reason, it is simply the Absolute that has come to know itself through man. The self-development of the Absolute is through the dialectical process, which entails the synthesizing of conflicts and contradictions into a new form. A thesis is negated by an antithesis. Both form a synthesis which, in itself, contains another thesis and antithesis. This process continues, for Hegel, as the order of change and transformation in the society.

In projecting itself in the form of material or physical universe, the Absolute negated itself by being a spirit. The Absolute is the unification of both spirit and matter and takes different dimensions within the cosmic process of development through the logic of dialectics. The Absolute reaches its highest development in the emergence of the State as the supreme will of the Absolute Spirit. The State is the highest externalization of the Absolute Spirit.

Hegel's metaphysics does not accommodate duality in nature. All is encompassed within the whole. Everything in the world is a manifestation of the Absolute. The known and knower, consciousness and its objects, the finite and the infinite are all moments in the dialectic process of the Absolute. Nothing in the universe is self-contained. World history is the history of the development of the

Absolute. Different civilizations in the world's history are all products of the stages in the development of the Absolute. From early civilization of the east, to the Roman Empire and to the German civilization in Hegel's time are all the developmental stages of the dialectic moments of the Absolute's self-projections. The State emerged as the material representatives of the Absolute in subordinating the wills of the individual to the universal will of the Absolute Spirit. The individuals have no concrete objective wills different from the universal will of the Absolute represented by the State. The freedom of the individuals is subordinated to the supreme will of the State.

### **HEGEL'S THEORY OF THE STATE**

Hegel (1967) posited that 'the State is the actuality of the ethical idea. It is ethical mind qua the substantial will manifest and revealed to self, knowing and thinking itself, accomplishing what it knows and in so far as it knows it. The State exists immediately in custom, mediately in individual self-consciousness, knowledge, and activity, while self-consciousness in virtue of its sentiment towards the State, finds in the State, as its essence and the end-product of its activity, its substantive freedom'. The State, for Hegel, is the final projection of the Absolute and it embodies its own unique ethical life. The State is unique and supreme to the individuals within it. The State is the unification of the human beings. For him, the State is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth. We must, therefore, worship the State as the manifestation of the divine on earth. The State is the march of God through the world. The Hegel's State swallows up the theory of rational free citizenship as the central concept in any political settings. The citizens have no life or freedom of their own, except the one the State attests to.

Hegel (1967) posited that 'the State is absolutely rational inasmuch as it is the actuality of the substantial will, which it possesses in the particular self-consciousness once that consciousness has been raised to consciousness of its universality. This substantial unity is an absolute unmoved end in itself, in which freedom comes into its supreme right. On the other hand, this final end has supreme right against the individual, whose supreme duty is to be a member of the State'.

The State has a supreme right and universal will against individual rights and wills. The Hegel's State does not pay much respect to the rights and wills of the individuals. The State's rights and wills supersede that of the individuals, not minding whether the State's will is wrong or not. As a matter of fact, the Hegel's State has no possibility of being wrong or pursuing the wrong kind of actions or policies, being that it is a direct objectification of the Absolute Spirit. The State is the ethical end of man in the society. The State is the mind or the Absolute on earth, directing the affairs of men according to its own unique, peculiar universal will, under which the individuals' wills must subsume.

Since our discourse surrounds the idea of the State in Hegel's political thought, we will take the liberty to extensively quote from Hegel's major treatise on this matter of the State. Hegel argued that the State is the actuality of concrete freedom. But that concrete freedom consists in the fact that personal individuality and its particular interests will not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right (as they do in the sphere of the family and civil society), but also that they pass over their own accord into the interest of the universal, and, for another thing, they must know, resolve, and accept the universal as their end. Lastly, they must be active in the pursuit of the universal will.

For Hegel, this implies that the universal does not prevail or achieve completion, except along with particular interests and through the co-operation of particular knowing and willing. Individuals likewise do not live as private persons for their own ends alone and their activity is consciously aimed at the universal end. Hegel notes that the principle of modern States has enormous strength and depth. According to Hegel, this is because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet, at the same time, brings it back to the substantive unity and so it maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity, itself.

The interpretation of this is that the State needs the collective existence of the people to authenticate its reality. However, their activity must be directed towards the realization of not just their own freedom, will, or aspirations, but rather the will and aspirations of the State. The modern States, for Hegel, seem to have given so much priority to individual freedom. For him, the State is the end of man's existence. As the final stage in the development of the Absolute Spirit, the State's universal will stands as the standard of operation in the society. Individuals' will can only participate in the universal will of the State.

#### **HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF ROUSSEAU'S IDEA OF THE GENERAL WILL**

Rousseau's (1968) postulation of the general will and the individual will stands as a contrast to Hegel's. What Rousseau called the general will, Hegel referred to as the universal will. Like the other social contract theorists, Rousseau located sovereignty in the general body, which he conceived as the conglomeration of the individuals who have submitted their wills to form the general will. In other words, the citizens form the sovereign body, which must be obeyed. The peoples' wills are integrated into the general will such that the people obey themselves in obeying the general will (or the sovereign body). This sovereign body operates like an association (assemblage of the citizens).

Rousseau (1968) described the association as 'a form of association which defends and protects the whole common force the person and the goods of each associate, and in which, each while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone and remain as free as before'. The main goal of the general will, by implication of the State, is the defense and the protection of peoples' lives and

property. Man's freedom is predicated on his submission to the general will, which empowers his own unique will. Freedom, therefore, implies conformity with the general will. Thus, a disassociation with the general will reverses the freedom of the individual. For Rousseau, the general will is nothing but the conglomerations of the individuals' wills. It is the general will that illuminates and brings a meaningful sense of importance to the individual's will.

On the subject of sovereignty, Rousseau (1968) located it not in the administrators of the association or assembly, but rather in the people whose individual wills form the general will. He argued that the moment there is a master, there is no sovereign, and subsequently, the body politics is destroyed. The people are their own rulers through a conscious submission to the general will, which is the collection of their own wills. According to Hegel, sovereignty lies in the State as the supreme body of governance and not in the people. Given the peculiar nature of the State as the highest stage in the Absolute's development, it holds the power of life and death as a representative of the Absolute.

Hegel (1967) found fault with Rousseau's postulations, which he captured thus: 'The merit of Rousseau's contribution to the research for a rational basis of the State is that by adducing the will as the principle of the State, he is adducing a principle which has thought both for its form and content, a principle indeed which is thinking itself...Unfortunately, however, as Fichte did later, he takes the will only in an indeterminate form as the individual will, and he regards the universal will not as the absolutely rational element in the will, but only as a 'general' will, which proceeds out of the individual will as out of conscious will'.

For Hegel, contrary to Rousseau's general will, the universal will is the living will of the political community. It is not the aggregate of the individual wills, but rather a supreme will under which individuals will must compulsorily participate. Rousseau's general will is formed by the individuals' wills, while the Hegel's universal will has an objective existence as the self-projection or self-objectification of the Absolute Spirit. The individuals who are also products of the dialectical developments of the Absolute must submit to the State as the highest stage of the Absolute's self-manifestation in the material universe.

Hegel (1967) posited that, 'in contrast with the spheres of private rights and private welfare (the family and civil society), the State is, from one point of view, an external necessity and their higher authority; its nature is such that their laws and interests are subordinate to it and dependent on it. On the other hand, however, it is the end immanent within them, and its strength lies in the unity of its own universal end and aim with the particular interest of individuals, in the fact that individuals have duties to the State in proportion as they have rights against it'.

The family and the civil society are the realms where men's freedom and rights are mostly celebrated. In the State, the freedom of individual is subjected to the dictate of the State, given its nature as the end of both the family and the civil society. Individuality is the central figure in both the family and the civil society.

But in the State, the concept of individuality is subject to the State. This is because the family and the civil society are both stages in the development process of the Absolute and, at the emergence of the State, as the final stage of the objectification of the Absolute, both the family and the civil society and their inherent values, traditions, and customs must be subjected to the State. The moral values, for instance, in both the family and the civil society do not hold in relation to the State. The State possesses its own unique moral sense that it is in a higher dimension from those of the family and the civil society.

### **THE ETHICAL DILEMMA IN THE HEGEL'S POLITICS**

The obvious problem in the Hegel's State stares us in the face. The State, as a self-manifestation of the Absolute, carries within its bowels a magisterial prowess that is subject to no questioning or gives no room to the voice of dissent. The State organizes itself as the supreme body in the society whose law is subjected to no review because it is the final stage of the Absolute, who is a supreme coordinator of world history. The Absolute is a rational conscious being whose activities illuminate human history as the force of progress in the communities of the human race. The Absolute cannot be wrong as the totality and the unification of all beings; so the State that emerged out of it cannot be wrong in the implementations of its policies. The people should willingly throw themselves into the hands of the State as the final objectification of the infallible Absolute Spirit. Man's freedom can only be realized in the State. The State is the only precondition of the attainment of individual ends and aspirations.

Hegel (1953) posited that 'the history of the world moves on a higher level than that proper to morality. The demands and accomplishments of the Absolute and the final aim of Spirit, the working of Providence, lie above the obligations, responsibilities, and liabilities, which are incumbent on the individuals in regard to their morality'. According to him, the concept of morality, as conceived in the family and the civil society, is quite different from the State's. The State is guided by its supreme moral sense, which is a derivative of the Absolute ideal of morality. The State, therefore, possesses its own unique morality that could be at variance with the private morality of the individual.

The historical figures (leaders) are nothing but mere stooges in the hands of the Absolute, who is the primary force behind the development of world history. These historical figures, like Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and others, were weapons in the hands of the Absolute. The Absolute is also behind the emergence of some of the best leaders the world has ever known. George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Nelson Mandela, and the rest were all handmaids of the Absolute.

The implication is that moral praise and moral blame cannot be adjudged in the Hegel's ethical framework. This is because the historical actors acted without possibly knowing why they did. The Absolute directed the course of

cosmic history through them without their self-consciousness. We cannot hold them responsible for their actions because they do not have absolute strength to act otherwise. The Hegel's political leaders are subject to the control of the Absolute Spirit therefore, they cannot be held responsible for the actions since it is the Absolute Spirit that act through them.

The citizens should, therefore, accept all laws, policies, and governmental decisions as the final projections from the Absolute Spirit, who is unquestionable. The leaders are only implementing the decisions of the Absolute, however, unknowingly. These political postulations gradually led to the emerging of tyrants, who consider themselves as nothing but helpless agents in the custody of the Absolute.

Hegel's exaltation of the State above the individuals and his justification of all social eco-political policies taken by the political leaders and the bureaucratic administrators as the arts of the Absolute's instigation of cosmic history through its dialectic process are unpardonable. This is because the cruel leaders in African politics have emerged as tyrants who can be considered in the Hegel's sense as historical figures under the usage of the Absolute's adventure to cosmic development.

### **THE STATUS OF THE AFRICAN STATES**

The early post-colonial African States experienced the emergence of tyrants who, possessing the Hegel's concept of the State, used the power of governance at their own disposals to enriching themselves to the detriment of the citizens they were to govern. Through them, the State assumed a patrimonial and exploitative dimension. Their actions must not be revolted against because they are the ideal representatives of the Absolute Spirit.

Nkrumah, the first independent African political leader, was the pride of the African continent after he rigorously led his country, Gold Coast (now Ghana), to independence on March 6, 1957. Not too long from the time of independence, Nkrumah's reign of leadership began to assume tyrannical disposition in that he got critics and political opponents arrested and unfairly judged, until he was ousted in military coup. Today, Nkrumah is referred to as the first African post-colonial dictator.

Sekou Toure, the first president of Guinea, was another dictator that emerged in the post-colonial African continent. Toure held on to power from 1958 until his uncelebrated death in 1984.

Mobutu Sese Seko held the political power of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) for thirty-two (32) years.

Zaire's troops have been involved in the looting that has been taking place since September 1991 when the first waves of anti-Mobutu demonstration swept the country. It might be argued that

Mobutu, as a civilian president, is not answerable for the misdeeds of his army. What is surprising about the whole Zairean episode is that the army, unlike in other parts of the African continent, has never posed a threat to the twenty-seven year old regime of Mobutu. While the melee would be going on in Zaire, Mobutu would be busy enjoying himself in a yacht (Echezona, 1992)

Bongo Omar ruled Gabon from 1967 until his death in 2009. On his demise, his son, Ali Bongo Ondimba, was installed as the president of Gabon.

The present African States have transited from a tyrannical leadership to an exploitative leadership. The State in most post-colonial African societies has become a tool of personal acquisition of wealth by the political leaders. According to Williams (1977), the increasing intervention of the State in economic life has caused it to control lucrative contracts and the disposal of monopolistic advantages. Consequently, politics has become the primary source of capital accumulation by Nigerians. Through the political process, professional men, bureaucrats, and merchants were able to accumulate capital and carve out monopolistic advantages for themselves within the neo-colonial political economy, and thereby form a "bourgeoisie".

Jomo Kenyatta, the first prime minister and president of Kenya, also went down as one of the ruthless dictators in the history of the post-colonial African States. He appealed to ethnic loyalists and banned the opposition party. He led Kenya democratic process under one party system and was succeeded by Daniel Arap Moi, who continued in the line of the despotic and authoritarian path of Kenyatta.

Gnasimbe Eyadema of Togo 'infused into the Togolese military, people of his ethnic group so that he was able to perpetuate himself in office for the past twenty-eight years' (Echezona, 1992).

These early African leaders and their accomplices rose as the minority, whose tenures of leadership were obvious displaced of tyrannical exercise of the governmental (State) power to the detriment of the common good or social good in which the majority (masses) participate.

The political leaders who are the obvious representatives of the State and its institutions are immune by the law such that their nonchalant attitude towards the plight of people is obvious, even in the ongoing fourth Republic in Nigeria.

Thus, Dukor (1991) describes the nature of the post-colonial Nigerian State this way:

It is significant that the present Nigerian socio-economic formations are one of conflicts between the State and the society. The State, instead of being means of executing the will of the

people, becomes a representative of selfish, ethnic, and narrow interests and, inevitably becomes coercive machinery. The coercive and violent nature of the State suggests that there is an inherent weakness in the concept as bequeathed to us by the colonial masters (Dukor, 1991: 62-63).

Given the advent of democracy in Africa, the contemporary African political leaders could not hold tenaciously to power, except for the few dictators. The African experience of the tyranny of the minority was with the early nationalists who took over power from the colonial masters. Their first hand understanding of politics and the State came from their experience with the colonial masters who used both politics and the State as coercive means of dictatorship and exploitation. These early African leaders seemed to have been exposed to the wrong concept of politics and the State as means of production instead of as means of providing a viable social order. The African experiences with military leadership worsen the State of the African post-colonial States. The military that were not trained in the art of dialogue imported warfare, which is the central theme in military into African politics. Democracy thrives on tolerance, negotiation, reconciliation and compromise which were variables African military leaders did not understand.

Ake (1990) further buttressed these ideals of democracy when he argued that democracy implies precisely the assumption of differences to be negotiated, to be conciliated, to be moved into phases of higher synthesis. If democracy means anything at all, as a form of relationship, that is precisely what it means. If there is social pluralism that is in fact an argument for a democratic form of governance (Ake cited in Daddieh, 2002).

Democracy, ideally, implies negotiation and dialogue, while “militocracy” is predominantly an art of war and aggression. The military dictators, who were not trained in the art of negotiation and dialogue, seized State power and employed all coercive means of enforcing obedience on the people.

Even the transition of the military governments to democratic government did not stop the abusive use of the State power conceived in the Hegel’s term as the central power under which all forms of power must be subjected. The minority (few leaders) maneuvered the State power of governance to the detriment of the well being of the majority.

Zaire’s experience is very illuminating. According to Schatzberg (1997), Zairians are constantly victims of a society expressively organized with the sole goal of assuring a profit and maintaining the power of a minority through the limitation of rights and the exploitation of the largest number.

This experience was the same for almost all post-independence African States. The minority, in the persons of the nationalists, and the military, who were the holders of political power in Africa, used such to the disadvantage of the socio-

economic system of the State and the citizens. Now, the elites have hijacked the State power to the advantage of their own private pursues without paying attention to developmental ideologies.

In Nigeria, for instance, no democrat/civilian government has been able to hold on to power tenaciously as some African countries have witnessed. However, Nigeria has been a victim of cruel, despotic, and corrupt military dictators.

...The State of Nigeria is, in large part, a State of military dictatorship with a lengthy chain of decrees in its law book. Decreeism was born as soon as the first Nigerian military government emerged at the point of the crisis that rocked the first civilian government in 1966. The first military head of State, General Aguiyi-Ironsi, immediately after he came to power, surrounded himself and the State with protective decrees (Dukor, 1991).

The history of the Nigerian State has been the history of military dictatorship built around the Hegel's State as the supreme body whose laws must be obeyed.

### **RECONSTRUCTING THE STATE IN AFRICA**

The Hegel's political theory granted a supreme power to the State (government). The State as the universal will of the Absolute Spirit assumes an unquestionable posture because the Absolute cannot be wrong in its decisions taken through the political leaders who are mere stooges in its hands. The political leaders cannot be wrong because they act according to the wills of the Absolute Spirit.

The official position of this conception has been the basis of the exploitation and the dictatorship in the third world countries. The State should not have any goal than the provision of the platform that will aid the well being of the citizens. Even if the State cannot meet the needs of all its citizens, it must not destroy their means of meeting their own needs. It must provide the platform that will aid in the realizations of their own needs. The State must be development driven and sustainable development that entails the maintenance of holistic development.

Ninalowo (1999) argued that part of the social contract between the State and the citizenry is for the former to provide an enabling environment and instrumentality for a range of cultural expressions. These would include liberal provision of educational, recreational, and aesthetic facilities. The orientation of the State as well as the civil society in this direction would enhance the realization of basic cultural needs. His reflection on the main task of the State buttresses the

point that the State is a driver of development and that the State has a responsibility to its citizens.

Even if one would contest the reality of the social contract theory, the fact remains that the State exists for the welfare of its people. Contrary to Hegel's postulation of the State, the State has no supreme existence far above the people who give it meaning. The Hegel's State is a breeding ground for tyrants, and the African post-colonial State is an experiment of such. The only way to achieve this deconstruction is through demystifying the duo concepts of the State and of political leadership. The State exists for the people. The political leaders are expected to be at the service of the people as their representatives.

We must reconstruct the concept of the State as noted by Zaki Ergas as:

A dominating organization controlled with varying degrees of efficacy by a ruling group which competes for power and compliance, for sovereignty, with other political, economic and social organizations both internally and externally. It is a partly autonomous, partly dependent structure of control (cited in Amuwo, 1988).

The above definition portrays the Africans' conception of the State. The State in Africa has fallen into the hands of the ruling elites (the minority), who compete vigorously for State's power and use it for their personal financial advancement.

The State is to make laws and enforce them through the use of its agencies and its political actors; however, the State is not just about making laws and enforcing them. The State has as one of its primary goals; the well-being of its people. This should be one of the goals of the peoples' representatives (political leaders) and not just the initiations and the implementations of policies. All policies must have the peoples' well-being as their goal. It is true that the 'demos', also known as the people, cannot rule the State as the representatives of themselves; but their voices should not be ignored in governance.

Schumpeter's (1952) conception of democracy as 'an institutional arrangement in which individuals acquire the power by means of a competitive struggle for the people's votes' promotes the idea that politics remain as the domain of the elites (the minority). For him, the possibility of mass participation is unrealistic. Therefore, the elites (the minority) should be allowed to wedge the State power of governance, while the majority demonstrates their involvement only in electing the so-called political leaders.

Portis (1987) further shared Schumpeter's sentiment by arguing that ordinary citizens do not and perhaps cannot have a sophisticated grasp of public policy and political affairs. For them politics is a little more than a morality play, where cultural clichés are affirmed and private frustrations vented.

This is, indeed, a radical postulation about politics. If the people are conceived as nothing but mere irrational objects to be ruled and dominated by the few educated elites, then the majority stands the chance of been exploited, dominated, and impoverished by those who hold the political power. This is the African political experience. The elites have been able to sidetrack the people from governance such that the people have no relevance in the policies that affect them.

There is a need to deconstruct and reconstruct the concept of State in African politics. The State and its institutions, as operated by the political leaders and the bureaucrats, should not assume a magisterial position above the people for whom they are in power, whether elected, nominated, or selected. The people should not be totally cut away from the government whose policies should enhance their (people) welfare.

There is no difficulty in showing that ideally, best form of government is that in which the sovereignty or supreme controlling power in the last resort is rested in the entire aggregate of the community, every citizen not only having a voice in the exercise of that ultimate sovereignty, but being at least occasionally called to take an actual part in the government by personal discharge of some public function local or general (Mills, 2004: 188).

Even though Mills recognizes the fact that the whole community cannot be directly involved in governance, the point remains germane that the State (government) should not be ran without the inclusion of the people in the general decisions that affect them.

The African States should avoid the Hegel's patrimonial and absolutistic outlook and integrate the people into its holistic development project. In other words, the State, although under the direct control of the minority, should descend to the level of the majority by paying attention to them as the people whose collective existence gives room for the emerging of the State and its apparatuses. Nnoli (2006) underscored it thus:

...the essence of true democracy is to be found, not in voting or representation, but rather in deliberation, while this argument does not discount totally the value of liberal attachment to institutional reform of governance or the requirement for pluralist constitution, it regards these ideals as insufficient in themselves for the grounding of democracy. Instead, it argues that the deliberative ideal looks to the creation of a community whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members. This involves the cultivation of public spheres in which there is genuine dialogue between the agencies of public governance and those likely to be

affected by their decisions and actions....with popular democracy public authorities are expected to justify their actions, since governance is regarded as democratic only to the extent that the people individually and collectively enjoy a permanent possibility of contesting what government decides.

This reflection on democracy is by implications relevant to the contemporary African States, given that Africa is undergoing a wider acceptance and agitation for democracy as an ideal form of government. The State should involve itself in adequate dialoguing with the people. The State's actions through its leaders are to be justified; thus, this will enhance the possibility of accountability and transparency, which are the central missing factors in African politics.

The reconstruction of the State entails the elevation of the people to the positions of occupying the central point of considerations in the initiation and implementations of the State's policies. The leaders are not meant to lead without the consent of the people who will suffer the direct effects of their policies. The leaders are not to act as though the people are bundles of illiterates, apolitical, and unenlightened minds. This is the new ideal of the State that the post-colonial African societies need to evolve; a State that is primarily about the peoples' well-being; a State where the leaders are committed primarily to the peoples' welfare and not just theirs.

If the State is not committed to the peoples' welfare, the people will not be committed to the welfare and the continuity of the State. For instance, Dukor (1991) argued that the people of Nigeria neither understand the sanctified institution of the State nor do they have any commitment to it. The Modern Nigeria State and its socio-economic formation lack an organic relation with the traditions of the people. It has not vibrantly integrated individuals, groups and institutions in such a way as to create polity expressing the aspiration of the people.

The reconstructed State integrates and expresses the aspiration of the people. The African States should express the aspiration of the people in the societies.

## **CONCLUSION: THE STATE, GOOD GOVERNANCE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

From the discourse above, it is obviously clear that the Hegel's State produces the tyranny of the minority. This is because representative democracy, a widely accepted form of government, only gives room for the 'demos' to be represented by some few elites (minority) in the society. This further gives room for the elites to take advantage of the loopholes in the patrimonial and supremacy of the Hegel's State. Also, the nature of the modern State will indeed prevent the 'demos' from ruling themselves due to the population of the modern States.

Given all these, it is our general conclusion that the elites must fully integrate the people into the governmental processes in the State. Deconstructing and reconstructing the State in Africa will enhance the enthronements of the 'demos' as the central figure in the government. The State and its institution of governance must first and foremost give cognizance to the people. This exercise of reconstructing the State is urgent if the African States will ever earn the respect of the international community in terms of development, which entails human development.

According to Ade-Ajayi (1999), development is growth plus change. For him, change, in turn, is social and cultural as well as economic; the key concept must be improved quality of people's life.

The under development of the African continent can further be traced to the migration of its professionals whose wealth of knowledge could have led to the development of the continent. But since the State is exploitative and inhumane to the citizens, the African professionals seek greener pasture in foreign States that provide the platform for their self-realization and self-fulfillments.

The African States should depart from this Hegel's theory of the State and embrace good governance, which is defined as "the way in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (IrishAid, 2009).

European Commission (2006) conceives governance as:

...the State's ability to serve the citizens. It refers to the rules, processes and behavior by which interests are articulated, resources are managed, and power is exercised in society. The way public functions are carried out, public resources are managed and public regulatory powers are exercised is the major issue to be addressed in that context. Governance is a basic measure of the stability and performance of a society. As the concepts of human rights, democratization and democracy, the rule of law, civil society, decentralized power-sharing and sound public administration gain importance and relevance, a society develops into a more sophisticated political system and governance evolves into good governance.

The State is expected to serve its people through their representatives. Good governance is a product of non-violation of the peoples' fundamental rights, equitable distribution of social goods, decentralized power-sharing, enthronement of the rule of law, proper management of public treasury, and etc.

According to World Bank (2007), governance refers to the manner in which public officials and institutions acquire and exercise the authority to shape public policy and provide goods and services.

The ideals of sustainable development that Africa needs should not be made the responsibility of international institutions or organizations. This is because the State (government) is the main driver of governance; therefore, the burden of ensuring good governance, which will engender sustainable development, lies primarily on its shoulder.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2008) Sustainable Development Report in Africa captures the following:

Good governance is a sine qua non for development in Africa ...good governance matters for economic development. Scholars have discovered that high-quality institutions have the power, over the long run, to raise per capita incomes and promote growth in all parts of the world. And the “development dividend” paid by good governance is large. Researchers estimate that when governance is improved by one standard deviation, incomes raise about three-fold in the long run, and infant mortality declines by two-thirds. Donor agencies, too, have concluded that development assistance is more effective in countries with good institutional quality. Increasingly, international financial institutions and some bilateral donor agencies, subscribing to evidence-based policy and decision-making, explicitly tie aid transfers to governance outcomes. The growing recognition of the link between good governance and successful development has stimulated demand for monitoring the quality of governance across countries and within individual countries over time. In fact, the ability to measure and monitor progress on key dimensions of governance such as the rule of law, corruption, and voice and accountability already has enabled reformers in government and civil society to press for improvements in the quality of governance in many countries.

The African States should pursue good governance, which will invariably lead to sustainable development.

For Elliot (1999), sustainable development in the future will require a commitment to overcoming poverty through a focus on the welfare issues of the poorest sectors of society, particularly in the developing countries. Their environmental concerns and their development needs, in stark contrast to ‘wealthy’ or ‘Northern’ priorities, are associated with securing the most basic levels of economic and social well-being.

This gives us an insight into what sustainable development demands from the African States. The new proposal for the African States is not that of assuming a magisterial position over the citizens, but that of engaging in the pursuit of sustainable development, which entails total commitment to the welfare of the

masses by providing a conducive environment for the realization of the self-fulfillments and meeting the welfare needs of the people.

On a final note, the voice of reason compels us to join force with the critical submission of Laski (1967) that every government must submit itself to the judgment of those who feel the consequences of its acts. The reason for such submission is the simple historical fact that unconditional power has always proved, at least ultimate, disastrous to those over whom it is exercised.

This implies that the people should form the central point in governance. Government's activities should center on the people given that they are at the receiving end of all policies formulated and implemented in the society. Additionally, absolute power, in the hand of the leaders, could be a weapon of oppression and suppression of the people. Therefore, it should be discouraged.

## REFERENCES

1. ADE AJAYI, J., Development is about people, in *Viewpoint: A critical Review of Culture and Society*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1&2, 1999, pp. 9-17.
2. AKE, C., The Case for Democracy, in *African Governance in the 1990s: Objectives, Resources, and Constraints. Working Papers from the Second Annual Seminar of the African Governance Program*, The Carter Center of Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, (March 23-25), 1990, pp. 2-6.
3. AKE, C., *Democracies and Development in Africa*, Spectrum Books Ltd., Ibadan, 2001.
4. AMUWO, K., Politics in Africa, in *Ibadan External Studies Programmes Series*, Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, 1998.
5. APPADORAI, A., *The Substance of Politics*, (11<sup>th</sup> ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1975.
6. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, Penguin Books, London, 1962.
7. ARISTOTLE, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, London, 1996.
8. DADDIEH, C.K., *Beyond Governance and Democratization in Africa: Towards State Building for Sustainable Human Development*, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://www.kzoo.edu/africa/susfinal2.html>, on 18th January, 2011.
9. DUKOR, M., Resisting State Violence in Nigeria, in *Philosophy and Social Action*, 17(3-4), 1991, pp. 62-66.
10. ECHEZONA, N., The Democratic Imperative for Africa: Lessons for and from Nigeria, in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association*, held at Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, 1992, pp. 146-157.
11. ELLIOT, J.A., *An Introduction to Sustainable Development*, Rutledge, New York, 1999.

12. HEGEL, G.W.F., *Reason in History*, The Library of Liberal Arts, New York, 1953.
13. HEGEL, G.W.F., *Philosophy of Right*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967.
14. HOBBS, T., *Leviathan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1946.
15. IRELE, D., *Introduction to Political Philosophy*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, 1998.
16. KAYODE, F., *Refocusing Economic Development: The Holy Grail of Economics and Economists?*, University Lecture, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 2002.
17. LASKI, H.J., *A Grammar of Politics*, (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1967.
18. LOCKE, J., *Two Treatises of Government*, Bobbs-Merril Inc, Indianapolis, 1952.
19. MARKANDYA, P.B., *Sustainable Development*, Edward Elga, England, 1990.
20. MILL, J.S., *Considerations on Representative Governments*, The Pennsylvania State University, 2004, *Electronic Classics Series*. Retrieved from: <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/jsmill/considerations.pdf>, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2011.
21. NINALOWO, A., *Crisis of Legitimation: The State and Vested Interests*, Obaroh and First Academic Publishers, Lagos, 1999.
22. NNOLI, O., *National Security in Africa: A Radical Perspective*, PACREP, Enugu, 2006.
23. OYESHILE, O.A., Poverty Alleviation and Democratic Governance in Africa, in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 11(2), 2009, pp. 66-77.
24. PORTIS, E.B., Charismatic Leadership and Cultural Democracy, in *Review of Politics*, 49(2), 1987, pp. 231-249.
25. ROUSSEAU, J.J., *Social Contract*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1963.
26. SCHATZBERG, M.G., High jacking Change: Zaire's "Transition" in Comparative Perspective, in *Democracy in Africa: The Hard Road Ahead*, ed. M. Ottaway, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. Colorado, 1997, pp. 113-134.
27. SCHUMPETER, J., *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1952.
28. SMITH, A., *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, The Modern Library, New York, 1937.
29. WEBER, M., *Politics as a Vocation*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1972.
30. WILLIAMS, G., Class Relations in a Neo-Colony: The Case of Nigeria, in *African Social Studies, A Radical Reader*, eds. P. Gutkind & P. Waterman, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1977, pp. 284-294

31. Irish Aid, *Governance*, 2009. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.irisaid.gov.ie/development\\_governance.asp.htm](http://www.irisaid.gov.ie/development_governance.asp.htm), on April 21, 2011.
32. European Commission, Communication on Governance and Development, COM 2003 615, 2006. Retrieved from:  
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0651:FIN:PDF>, on 3rd December, 2010.
33. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *Sustainable Development Report on Africa: Five-Year Review of the Implementation of World Summit on Sustainable Development Outcomes in Africa (WSSD+5)*, Economic Commission for Africa, Addisa Ababa, 2008.
34. World Bank, *Strengthening the World Bank Group Engagement on Governance and Anticorruption?*, 2007 Retrieved from:  
<http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/comments/governancefeedback/gacepaper-on21stMarch,2007.pdf>.
35. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.