

[https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2025.8\(2\).15](https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2025.8(2).15)
UDC 32:342:340.128(6)



POST-INDEPENDENCE STATE FORMATION IN AFRICA: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

Dawit Mezgebe *, ORCID: 0009-0007-9395-2236

Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

* Corresponding author: Dawit Mezgebe, dawitmezgebe@gmail.com

Received: 04.02.2025

Accepted: 06.08.2025

Abstract. This article reviews key essential theories to understand the actors, nature, and characteristics of the post-independence African state that emerged since the early 1960s decolonization period. In conducting academic research, a theory has multiple scholarly valuable purposes, including the quest to understand how the social world works. Theorizing state formation is the quest to understand how state formation in post-independence Africa differs from other parts of the world. Scholars argue that theorizing state formation in post-independence Africa incorporates deeply analysing the challenges originating from the progress of global economic and political systems, identifying the key roles of prominent individuals, investigating major establishments of the state, and examining the power struggle between social groups and classes. Methodologically, qualitative approach is employed that is exploratory and descriptive by collecting qualitative data from respective sources. This study is aimed at emphasizing on examining the existing theories of state formation in postcolonial Africa. The findings of this study that post-independence African states are artificially crafted by the coercive European colonial rule based on these two key theories: - the Leadership/Nation-Building and the Marxist theories of state formation.

Key words: *theorizing, post-independence African states, Leadership/ Nation-Building & Marxist theories.*

Rezumat. Articolul trece în revistă teoriile esențiale pentru a înțelege actorii, natura și caracteristicile statului african post-independență, apărute încă din perioada de decolonizare de la începutul anilor 1960. Teoretizarea formării statului în Africa post-independență este căutarea de a înțelege ceea ce diferențiază formarea statului în Africa post-independență de alte părți ale lumii. Cercetătorii susțin că teoretizarea formării statului în Africa post-independență încorporează analiza aprofundată a provocărilor care decurg din progresul sistemelor economice și politice globale, identificarea rolurilor cheie ale unor persoane proeminente, investigarea principalelor instituții ale statului și examinarea luptei pentru putere dintre grupurile și clasele sociale. Metodologic, se folosește o abordare calitativă exploratorie și descriptivă prin colectarea de date calitative din sursele respective. Acest studiu își propune să pună accentul pe examinarea teoriilor existente privind formarea statului în Africa postcolonială. Constatările acestui studiu arată că statele africane post-

independență sunt create artificial prin dominația colonială europeană coercitivă, bazată pe aceste două teorii cheie: teoriile conducerii/construcției națiunii și teoriile marxiste ale formării statului.

Cuvinte cheie: *Teoretizare, state africane post-independență, conducere/construcție națiunii și teorii marxiste.*

1. Introduction

In conducting academic research, a theory has multiple scholarly valuable purposes, including "the quest to understand the way the social world works. It 'foregrounds' certain aspects of the world and provides a guide as to what to investigate, [and it is] a framework within which to place observations to reality, enabling patterns of ideas to develop" [1]. Therefore, the major logic of theorizing state formation in post-independence Africa is the quest to understand what post-independence African state is, and it 'foregrounds' the key political, economic and social elements and features of post-independence African state, and offers a guide in theoretically investigating on the emerging differences in its formation, nature, characteristics (political, economic and social), and actors which have mainly and crucially contributed in this process.

Theorizing state formation in post-independence Africa is related to the need to search for an all-inclusive way of examining and scholarly understanding how and why the post-independence state is formed in Africa through employing vital theoretical lenses enabling patterns of thoughts to develop in describing its overall growth and decline over time. According to Stark [2], this incorporates deeply analyzing the challenges originating from the progress of global economic and political systems, identifying the key roles prominent individuals played, investigating major establishments of the state, and examining the power struggle between social groups and classes. These are vital to have explicit knowledge about the origin, nature, and political, economic and social characteristics of the post-independence African state, including the actors who mainly played a crucial role in its formation.

According to Keller [3], some scholars of social science sturdily argue for the absence and lack of a precise model or theory in analyzing the origin and formation of the post-independence African state; hence, this study is aimed at disproving the above argument by emphasizing on examining the existing theories of state formation in postcolonial Africa. In this study context, understanding of the postcolonial state formation of Africa mainly relies "on the analysis of attempts made by Africans to build political institutions which suit their needs in an era when they have been faced with many constraints" [2].

Therefore, the theoretical reference of post-independence state formation in Africa can be analyzed from the Coercive theory of state formation perspective because, according to Carneiro [4], historically, it is the coercive theory that takes enormous credit for the emergence of the state through the use of force, and not rational self-interest of individuals/members of society. This is true in African colonial history since it constitutes the manifestation of the coercive imposition of European colonialism on Africa. Colonialism has made state formation and construction an ongoing political process after independence [5], which is mainly related to African states' artificial nature.

Post-independence African states are politically characterized as being artificial, externally imposed, and patrimonial. Because of this, they are susceptible to intra- and inter-state war [6], which has contributed to the rise of negative political consequences and spillover effects on the continent politically, economically, and socially.

2. Objectives

Since the topic of the article is "Post-Independence State Formation in Africa: Theoretical Review," it has the primary academic objective of reviewing key theories which are essential to clearly understand the actors, nature, and political, economic, and social characteristics of a post-independence African state that has emerged since the early 1960s decolonization period. Therefore, by conducting separate scholarly investigations and reviewing each of these two key theories: - the Leadership/ Nation-Building and the Marxist theories of state formation which are identified by their specific characteristics, features, and elements, this study scientifically attempts to analyze the fundamental actors and the significant features (political, economic and social) on the nature and characteristics of the post-independence African state. These theories are also essential in clarifying the key roles prominent individuals played in postcolonial state formation, exploring the major establishments of the state, and examining the power struggle between social groups and classes.

3. Methodology

Methodologically, this study employed and applied a qualitative research approach with the primary task of "exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon" [7]. By using the qualitative approach, this study generated "results either in non-quantitative form or in the form which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis"[8], and they are purely exploratory and explanatory. The following method of collecting qualitative data from various sources was used: peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and institutional publications.

Peer-reviewed articles were accessed through e-journals and online academic databases, ensuring up-to-date research and scholarly insights were used. Books, monographs, and edited volumes provided in-depth historical and theoretical perspectives, offering comprehensive background knowledge. These sources were carefully selected to ensure a well-rounded analysis, integrating perspectives from academic and policy-oriented literature being acknowledged and appropriately referenced. This paper has five significant parts: part one deals with the introduction, part two deals with the objectives of the study, part three mainly focuses on methodology, part four meticulously discusses each of the two key theories in the formation of the post-independence African state, namely: the Leadership/ Nation-Building and the Marxist theories separately, and then forwards its findings, and the conclusion with the references at the end.

4. Theories of post-independence state formation in African

According to Smith [9], politically, economically, and socially, sub-Saharan Africa has profound differences in state formation with Europe in particular and the collective West in general. In theorizing state formation in postcolonial Africa, it is imperative to explore, examine, and analyse the two dominant theories, namely: - Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) and the Marxist theories of state formation, because the demise of colonialism in African political science gave priority and emphasized on investigating post-independence state-formation, hence it credited "studies in state-formation as achievement" [10]. Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) and the Marxist theories of state formation are important in understanding how the African postcolonial state is formed, in identifying the fundamental actors, and the significant features of its nature, including its political, economic and social characteristics which are very vital in providing in-depth knowledge on the

historical link and continuity between the colonial and post-independent states, because according to Kanyinga [11], the postcolonial state is the continuity of the colonial state with the existence of marked political and economic similarities. Therefore, these theories are important in making scholarly investigation and forwarding significant insights into why and how the post-independent African state was formed, thereby analyzing its common nature and characteristics.

4.1 Leadership / Nation-Building Theory of State Formation

The leadership/nation-building (Weberian) theory is critical in this study context because it is usually concerned with the circumstances of statehood rather than the limitations on institutional development. The Leadership/Nation-Building (Weberian) theory is largely labelled as "the individualistic and idealistic approach in the philosophical sense of emphasizing the creative powers of men,"[2].

This theory mainly focuses on the contribution of independence-era individual political leaders of Africa who, according to Southall [12], effectively established the party that organized adequate backing in making the assertion of political independence. In understanding this theory of state formation in postcolonial Africa, it is essential to recognize the African experience of colonial domination at the global level and emphasize Africa as "a political idea as well as a geographical fact with a distinctive ideology: African nationalism" [13], that contributed for the emergence of individual political leaders and major political groups in the anti-colonial struggle. The prominent scholars of this theory include David Apter, Edward Shils, Aristide R. Zolberg, and John Cartwright. Specifically, Apter, Shils, and Zolberg, who quoted Max Weber as their theoretical referent, are very dominant.

Theoretically, David Apter and his scholastic contribution are predominantly governing and scholarly authoritative in the era of African independence during the early 1960s. Apter's position in this theory gave emphasis to personal popularity. He strongly argued that individual acceptance and support by the African mass "may give legitimacy to new state institutions, following Weber's notion of charisma, [and Apter] viewed Kwame Nkrumah as such a charismatic figure in pre-independence days of the Gold Coast, and bestowed upon him individual responsibility for the new state of Ghana" [2]. According to Stark [2], in the African context, structural-functionalists stress the created aspect of state formation with the effort of 'constitutive' individuals who have some control over their political life and the political institutions which are aiming at ensuring the order of the newly emerged post-independence African states.

This theory mainly relies on recognizing the individual's political effort, commitment, and influence of early independent African leaders because with the immediate independence, the leaders of the new African states took for granted the formation of the nation-state as the best strategy for consolidating their interest within the domestic politics [14]. This has been taken as a living testimony of how dominant political figures' intelligence and capacity were used to transform the colonial state in the newly emerged independent states in which they became presidents and opposition leaders [2]. According to Keller [3], post-independence African leaders had shared views on the priority and goal of the newly emerged state system, which was mainly attached with its new role and involvement in advancing, employing, and spearheading development efforts irrespective of ideological differences among themselves.

Therefore, state formation in postcolonial Africa became the individual responsibility of leaders of anti-colonial struggle. Immediately at independence, the new African leaders were forced to recognize and inherit the artificial states created by Europeans and forced to adopt, recognize, and fully accept the new state as the only entity of organization with its artificially drawn colonial boundaries [14], making post-independence African leaders both the icon of the state and "the embodiment of a social movement at its base" [2].

The significant theoretical outcome of the theorists of Leadership/Nation-Building can be deduced that the new post-independence African states are the political outcome of the leaders of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa who were designated with an individual 'function' of building their own states, which are explicitly designed by the European colonialists being the product of "arbitrary colonial administrative units designed as instruments of domination, oppression and exploitation" [15]. The theorists of Leadership and Nation-Building concluded that post-independence African states are the consequence of the rubrics implemented by colonialists and independent African leaders [14]. According to this theory, the political effort, responsibility, and commitment of the individual political leader in forming the new independent state depended not only on himself but also on the strength and influence of his ideas, and the men who held them during the decolonization struggle.

4.2 The Marxist Theory of State Formation

The classical Marxist theory is well identified on its key emphasis in "the class nature of the state" [16], and it credits the existence of structured/hierarchical relationship between those who control state power, i.e., exploiting /colonial /state class) Moreover, those who are colonized/ oppressed/exploited. In his prominent philosophical contribution, Marx identified two separate approaches to analyzing the state-class relationship in which he regarded the state as somewhat autonomous from the dominant class. He also described the state as an instrument that serves the interests of the dominant class [17].

The Marxist theory of state formation in post-independence Africa emphasizes how the state is being used to serve the interests of the dominant class. It is mainly concerned with the thorough examination and analysis of the concept of class that "denotes a grouping of individuals who share a common position in the process of production concerning the ownership of the means of production" [18], and its relationship to the state apparatus. The literature of Marxist theory analyses the political, economic, and social destructive legacy of colonialism and imperialism imposed on post-independence African states, and this can be understood in investigating the artificial colonial nature of the African states, which is characterized by core-periphery economic domination over the postcolonial period that has perpetuated in coercing and governing their institutional development [2].

Colonialism is important in examining post-independence state formation in Africa through the Marxist theoretical lens, because "the mode of production in African countries underwent fundamental change during the colonial period with the consequent implication for class formation" [18]. Class formation has its root in the distinct unstable and uncertain political nature/feature of colonialism, and it is "always caught between strategies of incorporating people more fully into an empire or marking the differentiation and subordination of conquered people" [19]. One of the major contributions of colonialism in African politics is its introduction of capitalism that had shifted/ replaced pre-colonial mode of production in Africa paving the way for the advent of new class structure [18], and apparently social stratification in Africa became more differentiated with the imposition of

selective Western education which contributed on the growth of state machinery both at the national and local level.

In understanding the Marxist theory of state formation in post-independence Africa, Hamza Alavi is a prominent scholar whose work is entrenched in the framework of imperialism and colonialism. Alavi intellectually stated his political view of the Marxist theory of state formation in the article "The State in Postcolonial Societies - Pakistan and Bangladesh." Alavi's views do not directly address the African issue in examining post-independence state formation through the Marxist theoretical lens of structured class relationships within the state. However, it is the most important theoretical pillar because it forced and interested 'Africanists' to retort in different ways to Alavi's ephemeral theoretical views [2]. According to Alavi, the colony is identified as "overdeveloped" state or political entity "because the basis of its superstructure lies in the metropole from which it is later separated at independence" [2].

After independence, the ex-colonial state or the "overdeveloped" state is handed over to the newly emerging local governing class, and this enabled it to unrelentingly exploit the local economy of the newly independent state, instrumentalizing the state apparatus for its own political and economic advantage [3]. According to Stark [2], Alavi defined a post-independence "overdeveloped" state as a class structure that is organized based on 'foreign imperialist bourgeoisie', and it fully duplicated not only the thoughts, values, and state apparatus but also the government institutions and organizations used as tools of controlling the local social groups and classes. According to Stark [2], other prominent scholars of the Marxist theory of state formation in Africa include John Saul, based on his Tanzanian experience. He described Alavi's theoretical formulations as the best example and very informative. However, Saul proposed that the ideological 'function' of the postcolonial state has been neglected, which is the basis of creating a hegemonic position arising from the artificiality of its boundaries and the requirement of 'peripheral capitalism' that is very important for the newly emerging territorial unity and legitimacy.

The Marxist views of Alavi and Saul provoked interesting debate by several Marxist Africanists, leading to several important reactions. One of them is Colin Leys, who counterattacked Saul's emphasis on ideology and attempted to confirm the emphasis on class as the basis of his analysis of the state. Leys supported an indirect instrumentalism of class in his book on *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neocolonialism* [20]. Another prominent scholar of the Marxist theory of state formation is Michaela von Freyhold, who argued in her work published in 1977, "The Postcolonial State and its Tanzanian Version," that the postcolonial state is not as much under the control of class within the society over which it rules as the bourgeoisie state, and can act more independently because it is the class of "petty bourgeoisie which views itself as a group best constituted to develop the societies after independence" [16].

Marxist theory places principal emphasis on the class nature of the state. In the African context, it demonstrates the structural determination of the postcolonial state in postcolonial society. Therefore, it is important to locate the origins of class and identify its types to clearly understand the Marxist theory of state formation in post-independence Africa. According to Tangari [18], the mode of production is the determinant factor in identifying social classes. Post-independence African states are the victims of their colonial legacy [3], which incorporated Africa into "the capitalist world system and the capitalist mode of production [which] has become dominant in the continent" [18]. It is at this historical juncture that not

only the origin of class in the modern African politics can be traced which is located "in the socio-economic structure of the colony and the relation between colonizer and colonized"[16], but also on the "bases of economic and political dependence [which] were laid, and the foundations of bureaucratic, aristocratic welfare states were established" [3] with distinct classes in African politics. Being in the early phase of formation, the class arrangement in the newly independent states is very intricate and fragile [16]. However, it is vital to identify and categorize classes in African politics that hugely contributed to its independence struggle and state formation process. According to Tangari [18], classes in modern African politics are categorized into three: peasantry, the proletariat/African working class, and the bourgeoisie/state class.

The African peasant class is the largest when compared with the other two social classes. Its political contribution in the struggle against colonialism is very immense, because "in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain" [21]. The peasants in post-independence Africa represent the largest section of the population [14]. They are the pillar of the agricultural sector and the national economy because agriculture is the source of subsistence with food production, the backbone of national economies generating huge foreign revenues from exports, and the largest employing sector [22]. In terms of its political role in post-independence Africa, "the peasantry is systematically disregarded for the most part by the propaganda put out by the nationalist parties" [21], making it a highly divided, demobilized, docile, and marginalized silent majority class, and in contemporary African politics it is distinctly very weak social base [18]. Therefore, as a political force and social class, the African peasantry has been marginalized because "rural interests are not likely to be courted by the ruling elite [in Africa]" [23].

The African peasantry has not posed significant political threats and challenges to post-independence regimes and its ruling state class since organized peasant rebellion is rare or does not exist in Africa [18]. According to Kanyinga [11], this is mainly related to the political marginalization of the African peasant class by the state after independence in which rural Africa is given little attention by the state with its loose link with vital state institutions, only taking part in elections which under no circumstance resolve and address its political, economic and social challenges of African peasants.

Relatively small, the African working class (the urban wage-earning force) is "an underdeveloped industrial proletariat" [16] that emerged with the advent of European colonialism and the establishment of new urban centers in the late 1930s subject to harsh oppression and exploitation of direct and indirect rule of European colonizing powers. The African working class was mainly engaged in the following economic activities:-"public work programs, in the extractive industries, on the railways and harbours, as well as being employed by the colonial administration and private sector in such positions as clerks, drivers and messengers" [18]. According to Cooper [19], during the colonial period in the 1940s and 1950s, the French and British acknowledged the emergence of the African working class, and it had played decisive political role in social and political organization of Africans paving the way of political struggle against the colonial rule targeting independence.

In contrast to the working class of the Capitalist West, which has played a crucial role in advancing democratic rights through organized political struggle, the African working class is small in size and a minority of the urban population that slowly expanded since independence. After independence, the African state actively and directly took part in the production and appropriation of surplus. The African proletariat indulged in political and class

struggles to attain power [16] with the ever-expanded political consciousness. This paved the way for the African proletariat to independently organize in competing for political power in challenging the state's power [18], which has been dominated and controlled by the African state class since independence.

The African working class and peasants played the principal role during the colonial period. They contributed hugely in the anti-colonial and national liberation struggles (Thomas, 1984). However, in post-independence Africa, both classes in urban areas are taken as a legitimate threat to the existing political status quo, and they "are being dispossessed and oppressed every day" [11] by the ruling class of the regimes. In post-independence Africa, the most important social class concerning state power control in African politics is the bourgeoisie (the propertied classes and state personnel). The bourgeoisie class is developed within the womb of colonial administration. Through time, the colonial masters politically groomed it to inherit state power at independence, and state power was shifted from colonial authority to the local petty bourgeoisie during decolonization. The principal justification of this includes the propertied status and class nature of the bourgeoisie associated with its education, which are its basic defining features [16].

The bourgeoisie in Africa has played an important political, economic, and social role in forming class and the administration of the post-independence African state. Politically, the rise, progression, and expansion in size of the local petty bourgeoisie and its transformation to the ruling class is a significant achievement of the post-independence state of Africa [18]. This has contributed to the emerging new political status quo after independence where, according to Kanyinga [11], state power politically and economically is controlled by a limited number of affluent people (the ruling elite). Political and civil rights have been guaranteed only to members of this group in a limited fashion. The bourgeoisie class in Africa comprises multiple entities from various economic sectors, including "small-scale farmers, petty traders, artisans, shopkeepers, [plus] the owners of large capital [local and foreign]" [18], who favored and assumed to be the leader of the anti-colonial struggle with its level of advanced political consciousness and close relation with the colonial administration. In due time, the indigenous bourgeoisie class has transformed itself politically, economically, and socially, entrenching itself in power politics (the state class). Hence, it has become highly influential and dominant in African politics [3].

The African bourgeoisie class expanded over time after independence, thanks to the economic resources and political power it inherited from the colonial masters. It recruited members from the "upper echelon of the party, civil service, and parastatals" [18]. The African state class is composed of: - "the reigning political authority, the central bureaucracy, and regional functionaries, the top echelons of the military, and member of, where it exists, the dominant political party" [3]. The African state class has mainly developed itself with the benefaction of the postcolonial state. Examining and analysing African politics through the Marxist theoretical lens of state formation is essential because this class entirely depends on the newly emerged state's political, economic, and social institutions in advancing its financial and other administrative and managerial interests [18]. This close relationship of the state class/ bourgeoisie to the state and its vital resources can be used as a political, economic and social mechanism of inclusion and exclusion of individuals, groups, society and others within the state where the state is practically used as an instrument serving the interests of the dominant class (state class).

5. Overview of Post-Independence African State

Since 1957, continental Africa has been composed of artificially formed new states with the weakest economy and frail institutions, and global recognition has emerged, gaining its independence through various means of political struggle [19]. In understanding politics in post-independence Africa, the state is the most indispensable political, economic, and social actor because it is the very influential political might and apparatus of governance that cannot be undermined and ignored [11]. Economically, post-independence African state is characterized by the following standard defining features where exclusive and extractive economic institutions with the weakest structures of statehood inherited from the colonizers have perpetuated with the ownership/ monopoly of the state and its resources by the new indigenous ruling class making individual leaders and the state class advantageous economically [24]. According to Mazuri [25], the modern European state is the product of a social contract between the rulers and the ruled, establishing a vital institution for ensuring and sustaining public order and stability by guaranteeing the duties and responsibilities of citizens within the state's political, economic and social jurisdiction [26]. However, in contrast, post-independence African leadership/nation-building (Weberian) and Marxist theories are the basis of state formation. Hence, these theories are essential in this study context in providing an in-depth knowledge which is important to understand, theorize and politicize common defining political, economic and social features derived from the post-independence African state's colonial legacy.

6. Major Findings of the Study

The overview of the major findings of this study emphasized theoretically reviewing post-independence African state formation through the separate scholarly investigation conducted separately in the previous section on each of the two theories of state formation, which are identified by their specific features and elements. The central epistemological rationale of theorizing about the post-independence state of Africa is to make "a clear specification of the basic concepts" [27], and one of these basic concepts is the post-independence African state itself that is identified and marked by: - the fundamental actors which contributed for its formation, and the distinctive political, economic and social features, and characteristics that define it. When theoretically reviewing post-independence African state formation through the Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) and Marxist theories, the key political factors that contributed to its formation are European colonialism, the individual responsibility of leaders of anti-colonial struggle, decolonization and the three political classes of the modern African politics which actively participated in the independence struggle include: the peasantry, the proletariat/African working class and the bourgeoisie class [18]. Hence, the next section of this study focuses on theoretically reviewing post-independence African state formation through the Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) and Marxist theories consecutively.

In theorizing post-independence African state formation through the Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) theory, the leaders of anti-colonial struggle who assumed power immediately after independence laid the basis for legalizing and institutionalizing nepotism, corruption, and patron-clientelism across Africa, which even nowadays are its cancerous and malign political features [3]. These features are employed to intensify the process and practice of exclusion of large segments of society politically, economically, and socially. The leaders of the anti-colonial struggle who later became heads of state and government after

independence played a crucial role in gradually prioritizing their interests politically and economically through nepotism, patrimonialism, and corruption which are deeply rooted and associated with ethnic affiliation since the early independence period creating subservient citizens in patron-client political systems in Africa, in which "by their ethnic affiliation some hold better positions on the citizenship ladder than others" [5].

The most important argument in theorizing post-independence African state formation through the Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) theory is that African independence has paved the way for its leaders not only to politically institute patron-client, neo-patrimonial and exclusive systems of rule but also to economically benefit from resource extraction which "independence created an opening for unscrupulous leaders to take over and intensify the extraction the European colonialists presided over" [24]. When scrutinized through the Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) theory, post-independence African state negatively affected the political, economic, and social aspirations of citizens sowing huge mistrust and suspicion towards their leaders and the entire state apparatus, and what characterizes commonly post-independence African state is after independence the newly formed African states mostly failed in achieving their duties to the public in all aspects of life politically, economically and socially. The subsequent leaders exacerbate this as a typical continuous political culture [11]. Independence-era leaders also had weaknesses with negative political repercussions where they rationalized the newly formed state to their own individual political and economic advantage the same way as their colonial masters [3], and this has politically made post-independence African states highly centralized, authoritarian and more unstable [12].

This political scenario hugely contributed and ushered in the politics of citizenship that is defined as a "contentious interactions over the institutionalization and realization of substantive membership, legal status, rights, and participation" [28] in the newly independent states of Africa since the early decolonization period. The personalization of political power by the immediate post-independence leaders has privatized the state, where corruption has become the discernible trademark of contemporary politics in Africa in which "politics has become more like business" [3]. This hugely deteriorated state-citizen relation in Africa sidelining the masses after independence with clear and open political, economic and social exclusion of the majority of citizens [11], and with this trend postcolonial African states "encouraged a passive vision of national unity-a celebration of state and ruler-instead of the citizen activism they had ridden to power" [19].

The next most important scholarly question that has to be raised in theoretically reviewing post-independence African state in this study context is: -What are the overall political, economic and social defining features and characteristics of post-independence African states when investigated through both the Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) and Marxist theoretical lenses? Politically, the artificial nature of state formation is one of the standards defining features of the post-independence African state. Hence, state formation in Africa is an ongoing process that has not yet been completed [5]. Moreover, this has made the newly formed African states externally imposed and alien on its relation with the locals [15]. Post-independence African state has been conceptualized politically in multiple ways. Claude Ake theorized that economically, based on the high degree of domestic political instability associated with its inherent political weakness (it is identified with juridical/abstract/ weak sovereignty), it is very underdeveloped. Socially, it has very feeble structures [12].

Other prominent scholars of African studies conceptualized post-independence African state, labelling it as a "shadow state (Reno), rhizome state (Bayart), bifurcated state (Mamdani), and disconnected state (Dia)" [15], and this is mainly attached with the deeply rooted mismanagement of the state institutions and resources after independence. The nature of sovereignty (statehood/ fundamental levels of state's existence/ power practices) is the core political defining feature of the state. The state is identified and characterized as "a presence, a structure, which delivers power, an action" [10], pinpointing the level and degree of sovereignty it exercises. According to Keller [3], state sovereignty has the abstract /legal/ juridical, and the concrete/ empirical/ sociological components of statehood.

Post-independence African states have juridical (abstract) sovereignty that is derived from the novel "model of international relations, epitomized by United Nations' General Assembly Resolution 2621" [14], which automatically granted state sovereignty with its immediate decolonization. Post-independence African state is theorized as a political entity that is identified with juridical/ abstract sovereignty (power practices or statehood), because it is very feeble in many cases composed of "semi-autonomous and complicated configurations of centers and their hinterlands" [29], unable to provide essential services such as security, and other functional public infrastructures to its population. The juridical/ abstract sovereignty has botched the post-independence African state economically and led to the emergence of a catastrophic governing structure with self-serving corrupt bureaucracy, and this openly marginalized Africans from actively participating in state affairs [18], and politically personal dictatorship and authoritarianism have become the hallmark of African states negatively affecting state-citizen relation.

Economically, Africa is characterized by the following standard defining features after independence where exclusive and extractive economic institutions with the weakest structures of statehood inherited from the colonizers have perpetuated with the ownership/ monopoly of the state and its resources by the new indigenous ruling class, making individual leaders and the state class advantageous economically [24]. The colonial exclusive and extractive economic institutions have led to the establishment of the new post-independence local extractive narrow ruling class that "was dependent on enclave economies for the bulk of their economies" [23]. Dependent on enclave economies, the extractive narrow ruling class has visible political, economic, and social control over state-wide resources, structures, and institutions in post-independence African states with the rapid expansion of various configurations of systemic corruption, which mainly relied on patron-client relations with the very deteriorating mismanagement of state resources and power for the self-interest of the narrow ruling class [15]. According to Kanyinga [11], the hierarchical patron-client system of relations adopted by the narrow ruling class has been used as a political instrument, opportunity, and path of facilitating the power relations locally between the citizens and state with the provision of political, economic and social benefits to its clients. Patron-client ties are political and economic instruments of the powerful ruling class's exclusion of rival individuals and groups. They are used to garner political support and loyalty from local/domestic clients [23]. Through time, the extractive narrow ruling class in postcolonial Africa advances its political interest by conducting public administration with the implementation of neopatrimonialism "at the expense of formal statehood" [15]; hence, post-independence African governments are labelled as neopatrimonial regimes of the narrow ruling class (Locust class) which are identified with and characterized as "hybrid, uncertain, unstable, and usually authoritarian systems of governance" [6]. The neopatrimonial regimes

of narrow ruling class in postcolonial African states have established exclusionary and extractive (political-economic) institutions which hugely advanced politics of citizenship through the rise of intense inequality among citizens leading to violence and war [24]. Hence, those excluded from this political-economic activity adversely contributed to making the structures, institutions, and the entire state apparatus the culprits of economic injustice and neopatrimonialism, which is the best catalyst in advancing political discontent in Africa.

Socially, the common defining features of post-independence African state include the following: - it is well identified with special social marks (weakness) inherited from its colonial legacy like the "fundamental changes in many social practices as foreign languages, religions, and ideologies were introduced" [14] which seriously deconstructed the indigenous pre-colonial organic social fiber, network, interaction and institutions with the formation of new states having borders irresponsibly drawn by colonial masters separating identical social and identity groups deliberately. Socially, compared with the modern state of the West, the post-independence African state is the victim of a legitimacy deficit because it is alien and isolated from its citizens [11]. This social reality has adversely contributed to postcolonial African state-citizen relation, which is the socio-political outcome associated with the lack of "embeddedness [within the society at large and], its divorce from underlying norms and networks of social organization" [15].

7. Conclusion

In theoretically reviewing the overall political, economic, and social defining features and characteristics of the post-independence African state through both the Leadership/Nation-Building (Weberian) and Marxist theories, it is possible to conclude that African independence is the change of ruling elites color/ race from white to black, or briefly it is "Africanization" of the newly ruling elite of the independent state with the confines between the citizen and the subject remain the same way as the colonial era. The Leadership/ Nation-Building (Weberian) theory confirms that independence-era leaders are the key political actors in institutionalizing the highest degree of neo-patrimonial rule and patron-client relations by forming the "Locust" ruling class, which transformed the postcolonial African state into a "Social Darwinist" state without significant political, economic and social changes for African masses. In wrapping up the theoretical review of state formation in post-independence Africa (Leadership/Nation Building and Marxist theories), both theories claimed that the post-independence African state is not organic/ indigenous. It is superficially imposed against the will of Africans by colonialists lacking deep-rootedness within the society. This makes both theories vital theoretical instruments because the state class is the dominant class in modern African politics, having an exogenous origin, where the post-independence African state is used as a vital political, economic, and social apparatus and instrument of achieving the needs of the dominant class, i.e., state class in classic Marxian sense. In support of the Marxist theory of state formation in post-independence Africa, Claude Ake concluded that the capitalist mode of production is the root of the postcolonial African state identified with its peculiar way of state class domination. It is this powerful class where African leaders belong, having huge influence and control over the state politically, economically and socially, playing an important role directly and indirectly in including and excluding rival groups in nation-building and citizenship construction. This has contributed to the emergence, advent, and expansion of massive political discontent in the form of intra-

state war, conflict, violence, and recurrent coups, which are being identified as hallmarks of African politics.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. Stokker, G. Introduction. In: *Theory and Method in Political Science*, 2nd ed.; Marsh, D.; Stokker, G., Eds. Macmillan Press Ltd., London, UK, 1995, pp. 3–20.
2. Stark, F.M. Theories of Contemporary State Formation in Africa: A Reassessment. *J. Mod. Afr. Stud.* 1986, 24(2), pp. 335–347. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/160696>.
3. Keller, E.J. The State in Contemporary Africa: A Critical Assessment of Theory and Practice. In *Comparative Political Dynamics*; Rustow, D.; Erickson, L., Eds.. Macmillan Press Ltd., London, UK, 1991, pp. 134–159.
4. Carneiro, A.R. A Theory of the Origin of the State. *Science* 1970, 169, 733–734. <http://industrydocuments.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/tghk0127>.
5. Bezabeh, S.A. Citizenship and the Logic of Sovereignty in Djibouti. *Afr. Aff.* 2011, 110(441), 587–606. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41240237>.
6. Williams, P.D. *War & Conflict in Africa*; Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 2012; pp. 306 p.
7. Creswell, J.W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approach*, 3rd ed. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2012, 260 p.
8. Kothari, C.R. *Research Methodology: Methods & Techniques*. New Age International, New Delhi, India, 2004, 320 p.
9. Smith, L. *Making Citizens in Africa: Ethnicity, Gender, and National Identity in Ethiopia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2013; pp. 19–43. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139547468.005.
10. Lonsdale, J. States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical Survey. *Afr. Stud. Rev.* 1981, 24(2/3), 139–225. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/523904>.
11. Kanyinga, K. Subjects of the State: Citizenship and Governance in Eastern and Southern Africa. In: *Proceedings of the IDRC's Consultative Meeting on Governance*, Ottawa, Canada, September 7–9, 2000, pp.1-27.
12. Southall, A. State Formation in Africa. Available online: www.annualreviews.org (accessed on 16/02/ 2022)
13. Jackson, R.H.; Rosberg, C.G. Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood. *World Politics* 1982, 35(1), 1–24.
14. Herbst, J. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, USA, 2004, 280 p.
15. Englebort, P. Feature Review: The Contemporary African State: Neither African nor State. *Third World Q.* 1997, 18(4), pp.767–775.
16. Thomas, C.Y. *The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies*. Monthly Review Press, NY, USA, 1984, 151 p.
17. Taylor, G. Marxism. In *Theory and Method in Political Science*, 2nd ed.. Marsh, D.; Stokker, G., Eds.; Macmillan Press Ltd., London, UK, 1995, pp. 248–267.
18. Tangari, R. *Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa*. James Currey: London, UK, 1985, 155 p.
19. Cooper, F. *The Politics of Citizenship in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*. THEMA New York, NY, USA, 2005, pp. 14-23.
20. Leys, C. *Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism*; Heinemann: London, UK, 1975; pp. 1-220.
21. Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*; Penguin Books: London, UK, 1965, 255 p.
22. Sikod, F. Conflicts & Implications for Poverty & Food Security Policies in Africa. In: *The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs*; Nhema, A.; Tiyambe, P., Eds. James Currey Ltd., London, UK, 2008, pp. 199-213.
23. Grabowski, R.; Self, S.; Shields, M. P. *Economic Development: A Regional, Institutional and Historical Approach*. Prentice-Hall of India, New Delhi, India, 2007, 1-320 p.
24. Acemoglu, D.; Robinson, J.A. *Why Nations Fail? The Origin of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. Manipal Technologies Limited, Manipal, India, 2013, 529 p.
25. Mazuri, A. Prologue: Conflict in Africa: An Overview. In: *The Roots of African Conflicts: The Causes and Costs*; Nhema, A.; Tiyambe, P., Eds. James Currey Ltd., London, UK, 2008; pp. 36–50.
26. Skinner, Q. Two Concepts of Citizenship. *Tijdschr. Filos.* 1993, 55(3), pp. 403–419.
27. Bill, J.A.; Hardgrave, R.L. *Comparative Politics: The Quest for Theory*. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, OH, USA, 1981, 272 p.

28. Stokke, K. Politics of Citizenship: Towards an Analytical Framework. *Norsk Geogr. Tidsskr.* 2017, 71(4), pp. 193–207.

29. Von Lieres, B. Review: New Perspectives on Citizenship in Africa. *J. South. Afr. Stud.* 1999, 25(1), pp. 139-148.

Citation: Mezgebe, D. Post-independence state formation in Africa: a theoretical review. *Journal of Social Sciences* 2025, 8 (2), pp. 203-216. [https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2025.8\(2\).15](https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2025.8(2).15).

Publisher's Note: JSS stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright:© 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Submission of manuscripts:

jes@meridian.utm.md