

Neo-Liberal Globalization, The State and Conflicts: Some Remarks on Sub-Sahara Africa

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Received: 16 December 2013 Accepted: 5 January 2014 Published: 15 January 2014

Abstract

This article interrogated, in theoretical cum descriptive fashion, the linkage(s) between neo-liberal globalization, the state, the arena of politics and conflicts, using sub-Sahara Africa as a research backdrop. Drawing from secondary data sourced mainly from textbooks and journals; and leaning on dependency theoretical platform, it found out that neo-liberal globalization has affected states in the global system differentially. While the developed states of the north had developed various strategies to deal with the enigma and had even made huge success of it, the dependent, post-colonial states in Africa have been at the mercies of this technologically driven post-cold war phenomenon. Merciless, it argues that globalization has dented the integrity of these states in manner that made them to lose legitimacy in the eyes of citizens under their confines. The outcome of such state of affairs was the relocation of legitimacy from them to the sub-state movements, which, in most cases, have now become the new sites of conflicts in the region.

Index terms— globalization, conflicts, the state, legitimacy, integration.

1 I. Introduction

The end of the cold war has witnessed an upsurge in intra-state conflicts in Africa with very low incidence of inter-state conflicts. Most of these conflicts assumed peculiar characteristics by nature of their localization. They challenge regional security and stability more than they pose a threat to global security as would have seen the case during the cold war era (Tamuno, 1991, p.2).

As Rotberg (2004:8) opines 'the inability to build national commonwealth of like minds has tended to generate inter-group animosities and by extension primordial tensions and conflicts which has grown in intensity since after the Second World War'.

One question logically flows from Rotberg's opinion, namely: can the prevalence of internal conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa be solely explained from the perspectives of the internal structures of states? Obviously, the reality of the post-cold war neoliberal globalization seems to have relegated the internal structure thesis to the background, this writer is of the view that given the post-cold war reality, the thesis cannot adequately describe and explain the dynamics and the prevalence of intra-state conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa in the cold war era.

As Nabudere (2000) and Ninsin (2001) argue, the post-cold war global politico-economic architecture and the forces of transnationalization it unleashes have continued to downsize the duties of the Westphalia state in economic management. In fact, Ake (1995), Odrick (1997) and Toyo (2002) concur with Nabudere when they aver that globalization has increased national and local inequalities within states but has also dented the integrity of the state mainly in the south.

At this juncture, a question is apt: if neo-liberal globalization has downsized the strength of the state, does that predisposes it to conflicts? or put differently, is there a theoretical linkage between globalization, the state and conflicts? This paper intends to answer these questions in the light of sub-Saharan Africa's experience and in order to set about achieving this task; the paper is organized as follows: The first section sets the background

44 to the study. Section two lays the conceptual frameworks for the paper. The third section examines the post-cold
 45 war global politico-economic architecture and its bearing on Africa. Section four, in an analytical cum discursive
 46 manner, connects globalization, the state and conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa. The fifth section concludes the paper
 47 with a number of recommendations. The above statement by one of Nigeria's foremost Historian, captures the
 48 realities of the post-cold war sub-Sahara Africa: the prevalence of intra-state conflicts. To some observers and
 49 commentators, the state in sub-Sahara Africa is at the centre of these crises (read Williams, 2004; Stedman,
 50 1996). To be more specific, the state in this turbulent region seem to have failed in creating national community
 51 from the different groups that composed it. T (Van Dyke, 1960:64) Therefore, when a knowledge seeker, like this
 52 writer, perceives a new pattern or a new phenomenon and gives it a name, or creating a new concept, many other
 53 become aware of its existence.

54 2 II. Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

55 Concepts must of course be defined in order to give clarity to them. As Rubin and Babbie (1989) notes: 'we specify
 56 what we mean when we use particular terms for the purposes of facilitating their contextual operationalization
 57 and comprehension'. Hence, in this paper, the concepts of globalization, the state and conflict are identified
 58 as conceptual frames of reference but because they are essentially contested concepts (see Wallie, 1962). Thus,
 59 rather than dissipating much energies on conceptualizing these concepts, this paper adopts a framework that
 60 links the three concepts analytically. In terms of analysis, the conceptual linkage between globalization, the state
 61 and conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa would be better explained within the dependency paradigm in international
 62 economic relations.

63 The dependency theory, like all other structural frameworks in international economic relations, seeks to
 64 explore the process of integration of the periphery into the world capitalist system and to assess the developmental
 65 implications of this integration. In the views of dependency theorists, the relationship between the northern core
 66 and the southern periphery far from being a relationship of mutual interest and co-operation connotes both the
 67 subordination of the latter to the former and the exploitation of the latter by the former (Caporaso, 1978:2;
 68 Frank, 1972) Thus in the eyes of dependentistas, the poor countries do not lack capital and lag behind the rich
 69 because they lie outside or on the edge of the capitalist world, as claimed by the modernization theorists but rather
 70 because they have been integrated into the international class structure of the capitalist system (Dougherty
 71 and Pfalgratz Jr, 1996:241; Rostow, 1960; Valenzuela, 1978; Frank, 1981).

72 The dependency theorists further argue that neocolonialism which operates without colonies but is nevertheless
 73 imperialistic has created a hierarchical structure in which the rich states in the centre of the world economic
 74 system dominate the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) on the periphery of the system (Frank, 1976). In fact,
 75 Nimode (1981:79) sums up the nature of the dichotomization thus:

76 In the context of the history of the world during the age of imperialism, the relationship between it and
 77 development has been direct and symmetrical for the imperialist countries and perverse for the wretched of the
 78 earth. This is perhaps, the most eloquent testimony to the fundamentally materialist and exploitative character
 79 of imperialism. It has generated phenomenal development in Western Europe, North American and Japan during
 80 all its phases, while it has produced and sustained incredible underdevelopment in the third world.

81 The fact that imperialism has produced global inequality, whether in its current phase of globalization or
 82 mercantilism of old, is no longer in dispute. To be sure, imperialism under the guise of neoliberalism had
 83 continued unabashedly to reproduce the same pattern of unequal development (Amuwo, 2009). In real terms,
 84 globalization, in its present epoch, represents another round of unequal exchange between the North and the
 85 South. As it will soon be made clearer, the neo-liberal onslaught against African political economies in the past
 86 three decades has almost everywhere incapacitated the neo-colonial state, jeopardized its performance legitimacy
 87 and emptied it of its content.

88 To be more specific, the penetrating influence of contemporary neo-liberal globalization has not only
 89 delegitimized the state in Africa but has also exacerbated human insecurity which ultimately promote conflicts. In
 90 fact, this reality has been recognized by all the actors in the international system including some of the custodians
 91 of the lopsided arrangement (Clinton, 2007). It is in this paradigmatic context that this paper links globalization,
 92 the state and conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa.

93 3 III.

94 The Post-Cold War Politico-Economic Architecture and Sub-Sahara Africa

95 For decade prior to 1989, the overreaching concern of western governments and many theorists of IR had
 96 been to deter conventional conflicts that could escalate to the nuclear level (Dougherty and Pfalgratz Jr 1996
 97 :1). These developments though in the political-diplomatic and security spheres have had important impact on
 98 international power relations (Lairson, 1994). Indeed, for triumphalist like Francis Fukuyama, it was not just the
 99 end of an epoch but the "end of history suggesting victory for capitalist liberal democracy as well as the idea
 100 that liberal democracy could not be improved upon as a form of government (Fukuyama, 1992).

101 As the subsequent "third wave" of democratic movement spread throughout the globe, so too did the
 102 talk of democratization (Huntington, 1991) These unfolding global events in all ramifications marked a major
 103 paradigm shift in scholarly thinking about international political economy because through out the cold war, the

104 international economic system retained a seemingly recognizable shape, despite occasional deep freezes between
105 the west and the east.

106 Infact, during this period, international political economists developed coherent theories and engaged
107 sometimes in esoteric debates that centered on liberalism versus communism. Although, there were often
108 disagreements in terms of ideas but they fitted into comprehensive framework based on the bipolar international
109 system. As the polar structure of the international system changed from bipolarity into unipolarity courtesy of
110 the global armageddon, the international politico-economic architecture changed dramatically too. The reality
111 of this transition forced many scholars, policymakers and governments to rethink global economic ideas.

112 Prior to this period, Washington and Moscow had been the headquarters for promoting liberal and socialist
113 ideas respectively but the realities of the 1990s shifted the 'ideological compasses' toward Washington. ??nimode
114 (2000:20) put the then reality thus: 'Unfortunately, the achievement of the détente between the erstwhile super
115 powers in 1989 has left the world with one dominant super power in the USA'. By this time, neo-liberalism,
116 now masquerading as globalization, became forcefully entrenched into the world economy under the watchful
117 eyes of the global hegemon (see Amin, 2006) It is however recognized that though the process intensifies the
118 integration of people and nations, it impacted on countries and people in an unbalanced manner, marginalizing
119 many and rewarding few ??Khor,2001) In other words, distribution of benefits and losses of globalization. In
120 another vein, it is contended that globalization expands the North and weakens the South, erodes global and
121 national solidarity, and brings about the impoverishment and exclusion of the third world (UNDP,1999; Indeed,
122 Joseph ??tigitz (2003:42) once remarks 'there is an increased economic and social gap within countries and
123 between countries, the richers are becoming richer and poorer becoming poorer' Critically, globalization argues
124 Aina (1997:37) manifests itself in the area of neo-liberal economic reforms. As a matter of fact, these market-
125 oriented reforms are promoted by the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) mostly in the developing countries
126 and by embracing these policies, most sub-Saharan African states have had to withdraw from the developmental
127 roles ascribed to them at independence and thereby heightening poverty and human insecurity. According to
128 Chossudovsky (1998) 'the globalization of poverty in the 20 th century is unprecedented in world history'. As
129 politics reinforces the economy in international relations, political democracy based on neo-liberal assumption
130 ought to support economic globalization but the experiences of the states in sub-Saharan Africa have shown that,
131 globalization and liberal democracy are dialectical in their relationship. For example, by using sub-Saharan Africa
132 as their analytical backdrop, ??kadawire and Olukoshi (1995) have drawn our attentions to the contradictions
133 between globalization and liberal democracy.

134 Indeed, this position is arrived at and defended at different levels by scholars working within the broad radical
135 political economy school 42 .It is argued by these radicals that contrary to the position expressed by the neo-liberal
136 Africanists 43 about democracy-enhancing power of neo-liberal package, the policy given its unpopularity in many
137 African countries and its failure to deliver tangible benefits, has rather than spurring democratization, intensifies
138 authoritarianism that has been the proclivity of the state in colonial and postcolonial Africa ??Bangura,1986).
139 Thus, neo-liberal globalization does not spur democratization the argument goes. According to ??lukoshi
140 (2003:243-4) It is the process of organization of resistance to the authoritarianism and repression associated
141 with structural adjustment that begins to open up (new) democratic possibilities based on self organization of
142 groups opposed to the programme and in spite of state repressiveness. If, therefore, the period of implementation
143 of structural adjustment has witnessed the growth of democratic pressure in many African countries as evidenced
144 by public demonstrations for political change in all four corners of the continent, it is not because of structural
145 adjustment qua structural adjustment but in spite of it While liberal democracy may be attractive, there is no
146 doubt that its values have been denigrated by the prevailing neo-liberal agenda, marauding as globalization. In
147 sub-Saharan Africa, attempts by the people to seek greater access to economic resources and power, under the
148 regime of globalization, have led to many social upheavals, including industrial disputes strikes and violent
149 protests in different African countries and in several cases, conflicts between the people and the governments and
150 sometimes between the different ethnic groups.

151 IV.

152 4 Neo-Liberal globalization, State Incapacity and Conflicts in 153 Sub-Sahara Africa

154 Since the emergence of the modern state via warmaking, it has been accorded the central role in economic
155 management. However, effective management of the economy requires a capable state but in the anarchic
156 international system, this critical function is performed differentially by the units. For example, while some
157 societies due to immense state capacity, have prospered economically, many capacity-deficient states have gone
158 into stagnation and chaos ??Tilly,1975; Joseph, 1999 ; ?? Edigbeji, 2006) In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the
159 reality of state incapacity has manifested in poor human conditions as well as insecurity. Although, a combination
160 of internal and external factors been documented in literature to account for the seeming weakness of the African
161 state but as argued earlier the external forces region, whether in colonial or post-colonial situations, has been
162 harassed by the forces of imperialism. However, the new globalization, underwritten by neoliberal epistemology,
163 aside from deterritorializing the post-colonial state further eroded its sanctity.

164 Functionally, the state is expected to provide the socio-political and security goods but when it flounders, it

4 NEO-LIBERALGLOBALIZATION, STATE INCAPACITY AND CONFLICTS IN SUB-SAHARA AFRICA

165 gets connected from the society and the people. Through this prism, the post-cold war nation states in sub-Saharan
166 Africa, in terms of functionality, never lived up to expectation.

167 Although, many factors have been deployed in scholarly and policy circles to explain this state of affairs. Indeed,
168 to some, it results from prebendalism while to some others, it is a function of criminality but strong evidence from
169 extant literature establishes that the beginning of state delegitimation in Africa could be traced to early 1970s
170 following the collapse of the Keynesian development model (Joseph, 1987).

171 However, the post-colonial nations in Africa did not feel the impact of this global policy sommersault until
172 the early 1980s following the ascendancy of right wing regimes in Washington and London. Incidentally, this era
173 coincided with that when African countries were engulfed with chronic debt crisis. Once incurred, these debts
174 tended to grow quickly resulting in huge stock of external debts that Africa owed. (Olukoshi, 2003). The World
175 Bank (1992) noted that 'the total debt stocks for the continent amounted to a little over U S \$109.1 bn in 1980;
176 by 1990 this figure had increased to a massive U S \$272.7 bn'. Thus, during this era, these countries under the
177 excruciating burden of external debts coupled with pressure from the donor financial agencies, had no choice
178 than to embrace the adjustment regime. In its prototype, the Adjustment programme, as briefly outlined
179 earlier, enjoins the governing elites of the indebted states in Africa to pursue economic policies which include: the
180 liberation of foreign trade; currency devaluation; cutbacks in social expenditures, particularly education, health,
181 housing e.t.c; subsidy removal; privatization of state-owned enterprises. In short, allowing the market forces to
182 regulate not just supply but demand.

183 However, disappointingly, the reform that was meant to bail the continent out of its indebtedness turned out
184 to be a disaster (ECA, 1989). As at 1990, in spite of the resistance to the continued implementation of the
185 reforms in Africa coming from African intelligentsia, the World Bank continued to justify its *raison d'être* but it
186 was not too long when the reality of the global economy forced the Bank to rethink globalization-informed S A
187 P in Africa.

188 Precisely in 1997, the Bank, for the first time not only admitted the failure of the programme in the south
189 but also passed 'a vote of confidence' on the state. In a highly publicised Report in 1997 titled 'The State in
190 A Changing World', the Bank claimed that, contrary to all suggestions, it has never discounted the role of
191 the state in the economic process. Thus, African state that has been demonized in the early 1980s, was now
192 seen as the engine of growth under the second phase of neoliberal reform, that is, the post-adjustment phase
193 (Mkandawire,) Expectedly, the Bretton Wood Institutions and the donor community by this time, sought to
194 promote governance and democratic reforms in Africa.

195 Unfortunately, the neoliberal globalization marauding as liberalization and democratization launched a new
196 phase of assault on the already weakened neopatrimonial state. While liberalization further deepened the
197 economic crisis, democratization unleashed the centrifugal forces that have been tamed for decades under various
198 authoritarian regime (see Ntalaja, 1997; Nnoli, 1994). In many cases in Africa, the pressure for democratization
199 spurred by authoritarianism inherent in post-adjustment reforms, coincided with the era of the demand for ethnic
200 equity. For example, Lemarchand (1993) in his insightful study demonstrates how the push for democratization
201 spurred the ethnic conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda in 1994.

202 Thus, gingered by democratic impulse, the marginal groups in the four corners of the continent began to
203 question the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. In fact, ethnic mobilization may have accounted for the descent
204 of some countries into statelessness; Liberia (1990), Somalia (1991), Rwanda (1994), and Zaire (1997).

205 At this juncture, it is instructive to note that as democratization was opening up the political spaces in
206 Africa, for ethnic mobilization, the post-adjustment globalization policies embraced by African states not only
207 weakened their capacities but further heightened poverty and inequality. As remarked by Jeffrey (2005): 'While
208 substantial progress has been made in some regions of the world, Africa on the whole has not achieved progress
209 and has experienced significant regress in many areas. The continent is the epicentre of the global power'.

210 The above passage has been quoted in extenso in order to present the post-cold war African reality. Poverty
211 inadvertently represents human insecurity at the highest level. To be more specific, poverty and inequality
212 especially when differentially distributed within the country, constitute the greatest threat to the nation-state (see
213 Omeje 2010). In fact, literature on grievance-conflicts nexus gives the two variables high explanatory prominence
214 (Sambanis, 2004) In other words, income disparity among groups within a state often trigger conflicts (Adekanye,
215 2007).

216 As Stewart (2002) Thus given the reality of the post-cold war sub-Saharan Africa, neo-liberal globalization
217 has weakened the capacity of the state to perform its traditional distributive and mediatory roles leading to the
218 erosion of its legitimacy by groups attempting to 'exit' from it. For example, before Chad, Zaire and Rwanda
219 descended into anarchy and finally collapse, the remnant of the state could only be found in N'Djamena, Kinshasa
220 and Kigali respectively.

221 As the capacity of the state to perform its legitimate role wanes, state failure looms. As Van de Walle
222 (2004:169) observes 'nature abhors a vacuum and the weakness of the central state is as often the cause of civil
223 conflict as its consequence' Stephen Ellis (1999:112) supports Van de Walle empirically by putting the situation
224 thus:

225 In Sierra Leone and Liberia similarly, the failure of the central state and the emergence of civil war among
226 rival ethnic warlords led to the current situation; cause and effect may be impossible to disentangle.

227 5 V. Conclusion

228 The main thrust of this paper was to examine the nature of the linkage between neo-liberal globalization, the
229 state and conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa. Working within the theoretical purview of the dependency theory, it
230 explicated how the external forces of globalization, driven by the market logic, has implicitly and explicitly
231 weakened the capacity of the sub-Saharan African State to perform the roles expected of it. Given this reality,
232 turning things around must entail actions at two levels, First, at the national level, the state, the epicentre of the
233 socio-economic space, needs to be reconstituted. It is expected that a genuinely democratic nation-states could
234 serve as building blocks for continental integration. Second, sub-Sahara African states must move the integration
process beyond rhetoric. ^{1 2 3}



Figure 1:

Year 2014
37
Volume XIV Issue VI Version I
(F)
Global Journal of Human Social Science

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Figure 2:

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