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

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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.

Keywords: *globalization, conflicts, the state, legitimacy, integration.*

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NEOLIBERALGLOBALIZATIONTHESTATEANDCONFLICTSSOMEREMARKSONSUBSAHARAAFRICA

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The article recommended two action areas for reversing the trends. First, at the national level, the state, the epicentre of the socio-economic space, needs to be reconstituted. It is expected that a genuinuely democratic nation-states could serve as building blocks for continental integration. Second, sub-Sahara African states must move the integration process beyond rhetoric.

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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).

The above statement by one of Nigeria's foremost Historian, captures the realities of the post-cold war sub-Sahara Africa: the prevalence of intra-state conflicts. To some observers and commentators, the state in sub-Sahara Africa is at the centre of these crises (read Williams, 2004; Stedman, 1996). To be more specific, the state in this turbulent region seem to have failed in creating national community from the different groups that composed it.

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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), Rodrick (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 thistask; the paper is organized as follows: The first section sets the background to the study. Section two lays the conceptual frameworks for the paper.The third section examines the post-cold war global politico-economic architecture and its bearing on Africa. Section four, in an analytical cum discursive manner, connects globalization, the stateand conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa. The fifth sectionconcludes the paper with a number of recommendations.

II. Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Concepts are of fundamental importance in seeking knowledge, in guiding inquiry and in expressing knowledge. Indeed, our perceptions provide a basis for conceptions and once conceptions have been developed, we are more likely to see what they name

(Van Dyke, 1960:64) Therefore, when a knowledge seeker,like this writer, perceives a new pattern or a new phenomenon and gives it a name, or creating a new concept, many other become aware of its existence.

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

The dependency theory, like all other structural frameworks in international economic relations, seeks to explore the process of integration of the periphery into the world capitalist system and to assess the developmental implications of this integration. In the views of dependency theorists, the relationship between the northern core and the southern periphery far from being a relationship of mutual interest and co-operation connotes both the subordination of the latter to the former and the exploitation of the latter by the former (Caporaso, 1978:2; Frank, 1972)

Thus in the eyes of *dependentistas*, the poor countries do not lack capital and lag behind the rich because they lie outside or on the edge of the capitalist world, as claimed by the modernization theorists but rather because they have been integrated into the international class structure of the capitalist system (Dougherty and Pfalgraftz Jr, 1996:241; Rostow, 1960; Valenzuela, 1978; Frank, 1981).

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

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

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

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

III. The Post-Cold War Politico-Economic Architecture and Sub – Sahara Africa

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

As the subsequent "third wave" of democratic movement spread throughout the globe, so too did the talk of democratization (Huntington,1991) These unfolding global events in all ramifications marked a major paradigm shift in scholarly thinking about international political economy because through out the cold war, the international economic system retained a seemingly recognizable shape, despite occasional deep freezes between the west and the east.

Infact, during this period, international political economists developed coherent theories and engaged sometimes in esoteric debates that centered on liberalism versus communism. Although, there were often disagreements in terms of ideas but they fitted into

38

comprehensive framework based on the bipolar international system. As the polar structure of the international system changed from bipolarity into unipolarity courtesy of the global armageddon, the international politico-economic architecture changed dramatically too. The reality of this transition forced many scholars, policymakers and governments to rethink global economic ideas.

Prior to this period, Washington and Moscow had been the headquarters for promoting liberal and socialist ideas respectively but the realities of the 1990sshifted the 'ideological compasses 'toward Washington. Onimode (2000:20) put the then reality thus: '*Unfortunately, the achievement of the détente between the erstwhile super powers in 1989 has left the world with one dominant super power in the USA'.* By this time, neo-liberalismsm, now masquaradingas globalization, became forcefully entrenched into the world economy under the watchful eyes of the global hegemon (see Amin, 2006) It is however recognized that though the process intensifies the integration of people and nations, it impacted on countries and people in an unbalanced manner, marginalizing many and rewarding few (Khor,2001)

In other words, distribution of benefits and losses of globalization. In another vein,it is contended that globalization expands the North and weakens the South,erodes global and national solidarity, and brings about the impoverishment and exclusion of the third world (UNDP,1999; Indeed, Joseph Stiglitz (2003:42) once remarks '*there is an increased economic and social gap within countries and between countries,the richers are becoming richer and poorer becoming poorer*'

Critically, globalization argues Aina (1997:37) manifests itself in the area of neo-liberal economic reforms. As a matter of fact, these market-oriented reforms are promoted by the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) mostly in the developing countries and by embracing these policies, most sub- Sahara African states have had to withdraw from the developmental roles ascribed to them at independennce and thereby heightening poverty and human insecurity. According to Chossudovsky (1998) '*the globalization of poverty in the 20th century is unprecedented in world history*'. As politics reinforces the economy in international relations, political democracy based on neo-liberal assumption ought to support economic globalization but the experiences of the states in sub-Sahara Africa have shown that, globalization and liberal democracy are dialectical in their relationship. For example,by using sub-Sahara Africa as their analytical backdrop, Mkadawire and Olukoshi (1995) have drawn our attentions to the contradictions between globalization and liberal democracy.

Indeed, this position is arrived at and defended at different levels by scholars working within the broad radical political economy school[42].It is argued by these radicals that contrary to the position expressed by the neo-liberal Africanists[43] about democracy-enhancing power of neo-liberal package,the policy given its unpopularity in many African countries and its failure to deliver tangible benefits, hasrather than spurring democratization,intensifies authoritarianism that has been the proclivity of the state in colonial and post-colonial Africa (Bangura,1986). Thus, neo-liberal globalization does not spur democratization the argument goes. According to Olukoshi (2003:243-4)

It is the process of organization of resistance to the authoritaianism and repression associated with structural adjustment that begins to open up (new) democratic possibilities based on self organization of groups oposed to the programme and in spite of state repressiveness. If, therefore, the period of implementation of structural adjustment has witnessed the growth of democratic pressure inmany African countriesas evidenced by public demostrations for political change in all four corners of the continent,it is not because of structural adjustment qua structural adjustment but in spite of it

While liberal democracy may be attractive, there is no doubt that its values have been denigradedby the prevailing neo-liberal agenda, marauding as globalization.In sub- Sahara Africa, attempts by the people to seek greater access to economic resources and power, under the regime of globalization, have led to many social upheavals, including industrial disputes strikes and violent protests in different African countries and inseveral cases, conflicts between the people and the governments and sometimes between the different ethnic groups.

IV. Neo-Liberalglobalization, State Incapacity and Conflicts in Sub-Sahara Africa

Since the emergence of the modern state via warmaking, it has been accorded the central role in economic management.However,effective management of the economy requires a capable state but in the anarchic international system,this critical function is performed differentially by the units. For example,while some societies due to immense state capacity, have prospered economically,many capacity-deficient states have gone into stagnation and chaos (Tilly,1975; Joseph, 1999 ; O Edigbeji, 2006)

In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the reality of state incapacity has manifested in poor human conditions as well as insecurity. Although, a combination of internal and external factors been documented in literature to account for the seeming weakness of the African state but as argued earlier the external forces seem to have wreaked much havoc on its integrity(see Chapham,1996). To be more specific,the state in the

39

region, whether in colonial or post-colonial situations, has been harrased by the forces of imperialism. However, the new globalization, underwritten by neo-liberal epistemology, aside from from deterritorializing the post-colonial state further eroded its sanctity.

Functionally,the state is expected to provide the socio-political and security goods but when it flounders, it gets connected fom the society and the people.Through this prism,the post-cold war nation-statesin sub-Sahara Africa, in terms of functionality, never lived up to expectation.

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

However, the post- colonial nations in Africa did not feel the impact of this global policy sommersault until the early 1980s following the ascendancy of right wing regimes in Washington and London. Incidentally,this era coincided with that when African countries were engulfed with chronic debt crisis . Once incurred, these debts tended to grow quickly resulting in huge stock of external debts that Africa owed. (Olukoshi, 2003). The World BanK (1992) noted that *'the total debt stocks for the continent amounted to alittle over U S $109.1 bn in 1980; by 1990 this figure had increased to a massive U S $272.7 bn*'.Thus, during this era, these countries under the excruciating burden of external debts coupled with pressure from the donor financial agencies, had no choice than to embrace the the adjustment regime.

In its prototype, the. Adjustment programme, as briefly outlined earlier,enjoins the governing elites of the indebted states in Africa to pursue economic policies which include: the liberation of foreign trade; currency devaluation; cutbacks in social expenditures, particularly education, health, housing e.t.c; subsidy removal; privatization of state-owned enterprises. In short, allowing the market forces to regulate not just supply but demand.

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

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

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

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

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

The above passaage has been quoted *in extenso* in order to present the post-cold war African reality. Poverty inadvertently represents human insecurity at the highest level.To be more specific, poverty and inequality especially when differentially distributed within the country, constitute the greatest threat to the nation-state(see Omeje 2010). In fact, literature on grivance-conflicts nexus gives the two variables high explanatory prominence (Sambanis, 2004) In other words, income disparity among groups within a state often trigger conflicts (Adekanye, 2007). *As Stewart (*2002) *argues:*

unequal acceess to political, economic and social resources by diffeeent groups can reduce individual welfare and where such inequalities in resource access and outcomes coincide with cultural

40

differences,culture can become a powerful mobilizing agent

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

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

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

V. Conclusion

The main thrust of this paper was to examine the nature of the linkage between neo- liberal globalization, the state and conflicts in sub-Sahara Africa.Working within the theoretical purview of the dependency theory, it explicated how the external forces of globalization, driven by the market logic, has implicitly and explicitly weakened the capacity of the sub-Saharan

African State to perform the roles expected of it. Given this reality, turning things around must entaail actions at two levels, First, at the national level, the state, the epicentre of the socio-economic space, needs to be reconstituted. It is expected that a genuinuely democratic nation-states could serve as building blocks for continental integration.Second, sub-Sahara African states must move the integration process beyond rhetoric.

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