GLOBALIZATION AND CONFLICT: THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Africa to date has remained a victim of all economic and political reform agenda of the European dominated world, but now consummated in what has come to be known as globalization. These have thrown up a lot of conflicts in African. The struggle for economic resources has led to conflicts, electoral violence and thuggery amongst the people and parties for political position which is an instrument and platform for primitive accumulation in Africa. The implications of these reforms have been analysed in this paper, reasons for the incessant conflicts elucidated and some suggestions made.

Introduction

The African peoples' first sad experience with global Europeans started in the era of European industrial revolution and the resulting Europe's trade and political expansion into Africa. The second sad experience with a devastating political effect on Africa was the European political balkanization of Africa near the end of the 19th century. The resulting long European colonial rule sowed seeds of ethnic and religious discord in all occupied territories with different European stamps in the continent, as well as looted the natural and mineral resources therein. Besides, when

political colonial rule went out of taste because the new European ideology of communism threatened the European traditional capitalist ideology under which Europe materially sulked Africa dry, the ensuing cold war era saw European colonial powers depart but not only leaving Africa sadly dependent on Europe politically and economically and equally torn-apart by the two European cold war ideologies, but most unfortunately fashion an instrument that in every facet of human life becomes capable of generating unending conflicts in the individual ethnic stocks and nation-spaces of Africa. That instrument is being packaged in different economic and political systems as panacea for all social ills and today has gained currency by the nomenclature globalization.

The situation of dependency albeit globalization with then small letter g, affected Africa seriously during the world economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s: a situation that left sub-Saharan Africa in a debt-trap under the tutelage of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the 1980s, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced in Africa also ushered in a spate of riots and conflicts within and across the continent. By the end of the cold war, precisely in 1990, a spate of conflicts, which were mainly ethnic land inter-state ravaged many African nations. This period was also marked by military inter-regnums in many of African countries. According to the United Nations Development Programme reports, one out of four countries in the sub-Saharan Africa was involved (UNDP: 2002:85). Most recently, Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe had military coups in 2003. The growing militarization of Africa assumed a more dangerous dimension in the use of small arms, light weapons, the involvement of child soldiers and the struggle for the control of mineral resources (Oche, 2003: 165).

Ethnic conflicts have taken tolls in Nigeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Sudan, Angela, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Somalia and Cote d' Ivoire. The conflicts in these countries undermined national solidarity, social cohesion and also affected economic growth which has been on the downward trend. Globalization has brought in dramatic deteriorating changes to most African sovereign states at the end of the cold war, some already rivenby ideological warfare.

According to Ali (2005:311),

> Structural adjustment and the logic of the market, debt crisis and marginalization have all been intensified by this globalization process and are also indicators of the process.

This has actually reduced the role of the State in the provision of social welfare and employment and hence jobs were cut, currency devalued and promoted inflation. That is to say that it "down-sized the role of the state in economic management"

(Nadubere, 2000:35). As a matter of fact, the SAP programme was therefore, met with social unrest, criticism, and political instability which resulted to the manifold conflicts which swept across the African states.

The political class collaborated in seeking to undo their opponents under the guise of the prevailing disgusting economic and political atmosphere. Thus, there was general displeasure and conflict between the citizen and the political class and between the opposition parties and the ruling party and each trying to hide under ethnic cleavages to canvass for legitimacy.

Oche (2003:165) argues that the numerous conflicts could be explained by K. J. Holsti's "weak state thesis". According to this thesis, weak states display a low level or absence of vertical legitimacy in that substantial position of the society fail to display loyalty to the rulers: the personification of the state demonstrated by the use of the apparatus of state for personal gain, and the absence of horizontal legitimacy .

The economic reforms or restructuring being recommended by the World Bank deepens poverty, economic and political marginalization among the people. This results to political struggles to gain access to political and economic resources of the state. There is no doubt that the economic changes which Elbadawi and Herger (2003) have called "economic shock" have fueled tension and greater concern for access to resources, hence the heightened identity crisis, struggles for political power and complaints about economic and political domination in most states of the sub-Saharan Africa.

According to Ake (1995), Rodrik (1997), and Toyo (2000), globalization would increase national and local inequalities and as long as distribution of resources would remain as it is, there cannot but be a decrease in equality among and within states. The U.N. on its part, had noted the "Sharp increase in social inequalities and unprecedented surges in poverty" UNDP,(1999:~01). This paper seeks to explore the role of globalization in fueling economic and political crisis in Africa which manifests in socio-political tensions in the intra state and inter state levels. How can the much needed cohesion in Africa, peace building and political stability be realized? Unsettled Political system will continue to retard economic prosperity and technological advancement.

Conflicts in Africa

In many circles, conflict is regarded as a characterizing feature of political process in Africa, however, political conflict constitute an aspect of conflict in Africa society. Conflict, according to Louis Coser, occurs when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power, and resources in which the aims of

the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Coser, 1956:12). He expatiated on this, noting that conflict emerges whenever one party perceives that one or more goals or purposes or means of achieving a goal or preferences is being threatened by the activities of one or more parties, The parties may be seeking to expand into the same field or physical sphere, or more abstractly, into the same field of influence or behaviours (1956:8).

Conflict is a term that has been given several interpretations over the years by scholars of diverse background based on their experiences. Some view conflict as "destructive, unwarranted' actions of groups (Igwe, 1997). Invariably Anyakoha (1998) sees conflict as a social event which though destructive but leads to positive changes at last. While McEnny (1985) sees conflict as the overt coercive interaction of contending collectivities, it has also been observed that conflict and contact among people, are unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions and an expression of the basic fact of human interdependence (Zartman, 1991:370).

Conflict may also be caused by frustration in a relationship or interaction. As Ross Stagner (1995:53) observed, the occurrences of aggressive behaviour always suggest the existence of frustration which always leads to some form of conflict. To this end conflict can be considered to be a social necessity arid of normal occurrence in every social relation.

Generally speaking, the source of conflict depends on the strain in any aspect of human relationship, whether ethnic relations, state relations or supra-state relations. Conflict has been considered an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic development and general socio-economic well being of any society as a result of its destructive nature.

The African experience in conflict has been attributed to the inadequacies of the government. The structures and institutions of the state have remained relatively undeveloped through the 1960, the focus being on building those institutions that allowed for the exploitation and management of resources (CDFID, 2001). The effort so far has been on the maximization and exploitation of resources that establish structures and institutions for national cohesion and human development.

The state apparatus has been used with a singular purpose of extraction of resources rather than investing on nation building, As a result the states have been therefore regarded as retier states largely because they depend on rents from natural resources, namely: petroleum products, Gold, Iron Ore, Copper, Tin and other solid mineral resources. The imperial nature of the extractive industries and the collaborative effort of the state operators leave much to be desired as they are repressive, and insensitive to the needs and plight of the bearing communities and people. The mono economy of

most of the state left the state in the business of providing consumables, employment and all necessary infrastructure which the income are unable to provide.

The political leaders who claims to have answers to the problems are part of the causes of conflict as they are greedy and biased in their approach in distributing of scarce resources and political offices. For instance, the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria caused by the government's insensitivity to the plight of the oil bearing communities and resources control which has led to communal and ethnic conflicts ravaging the nation Ibeanu (1998:56). The struggle for colonial penetration of Africa led to conflicts in many parts of Africa, resulting to the formation of anticolonial liberation movements. The conflicts were between the people and the colonial powers. The most glaring cases were the national liberation wars in Portuguese territories of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau.

Another significant conflict was the anti-apartheid wars in South Africa, Namibia and the wars against the racist regime in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). The wars were waged against foreign interests all through the 1970s and, in the case of Namibia, all through the 1980s till independent in 1990.

The roll call of conflicts in the 1970s includes those acerbated by the cold war situation in which the east European states confronted the West. Such conflicts like one between Ethiopia and Somalia (1970-1983), the Angola civil war (1975-1988) involving popular movement for the liberation of Angola (MPLA) movement backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba while the national Union for the total liberation of Angola (UNITA) was supported by apartheid South Africa and the USA. This became a symbol of the struggle against Neo-colonial and imperialist interests on the continent Ali, (2005).

After the cold war in 1960, the nature of conflicts in Africa changed. This alteration was aptly captured by Ibeanu (2005) as follows:

1. Conflicts that arise as a result of struggle for political participation or over political space.

2. Conflicts caused by the contest for access to resources, and

3. Conflicts caused by the struggle over identity.

We can also look at boundary disputes between ethnic groups as part of the post cold war conflicts in Africa. A litany of examples of such conflicts arising from one or combination or more than one mentioned above are the cases in Sudan, Somali, Rwanda and Chad. Most significant are, the conflicts in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, the democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Sierra Leone and Liberia over resources

control.

According to Jega (2004:9) the identify conflicts are as a results of the plural nature of most African states. A major aspect of this ethnic dynamics is the massive mobilization of identities, as a basis for contesting hegemonic power which is often used in igniting the embers of negative ethnicity with accompanying violent conflict. The case of Rwanda and Burundi, Dafur in Sudan have all assumed genocidal proportions. Ethnic identities can trigger off violent clashes amongst groups of communities. Most of the intra state communal conflicts in Africa results from this. According to Nnoli (2003:2):

> A communal group is one in which primary identity prevails. Membership of the group is not attained but ascribed. Within the communal group the individual self is defined holistically. The totality of the individuals' involvement in life defined by the groups includes family, ethnic religion or regional groups.

What is common among such groups is a collective sense of belonging as well as self realization and affirmation within the collectivity.

Nnoli (2003) further posits that such groups have a shared history of achievement and suffering which engenders a feeling of exclusiveness, uniqueness and therefore tile solidarity of the group.

We should recall that Africa's economic woes depend in the 1980s, since then there was a proliferation of ethno-regional and religious organizations and movements with pronounced political agendas all over the place. There are associations formed mainly to promote the interests of ' ethnic or religious groups, such movements as the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and the National Democratic Alliance in Eastern Sudan, the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast (MPCI) Movements for Peace and Justice (MPJ) and Popular Ivorian Movement for the Great West (MPIGO) in Ivory Coast (Cote d' Ivoire); Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw National Congress (INC) in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. These are a few of the ethnic militia which create more complications in the political landscape of Africa. The emergence of each group was a response to some economic and socio-political development within their territory.

These associations have their claims or demands for more equitable distribution of resources such as political power, economic resources or even sovereignty as in the case of MASSOB in Nigeria and the MPJ in Ivory Coast. Ethnic conflicts though are widespread all over the world, but the African situation is alarming because the Economic Reform Programme with its excruciating effect as dictated by the IMF and

WorId Bank have created socio-economic hardship for the African Sub-region leaving the people more impoverished and desperate.

The global demand for restructuring both in the economic sphere and structural reforms after the cold war created dramatic changes in nature of conflicts in Africa and made way for the resurgence of ethnic, political and economic conflicts. As a result, conflicts are now analyzed in market-oriented terms (Yeoman, 2005) and conflicts in Africa are now characterized by bloodshed and destruction of lives and property. As Nnoli (2005) aptly stated, violence, provoked by conflicts has often turned the people's attention from creative production to creative destruction. We can therefore argue that the inability of the states in Africa to perform their statutory role of providing for their citizens results to conflicts. Consequently upon the diminishing capacity of these states to provide welfare as a result of economic programme of SAP, ethnic groups sought a new strategy for survival and in protecting class interest in the struggle for access to the scarce resources of political power and economic resources.

Conceptualizing Globalization

Globalization is a concept which became prevalent in the postmodernism of the 1980s and has become the concept from the 1990s. It is a key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millennium. Malcom (1995) defines globalization as "a social process in which the countries' social and cultural arrangement recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding".

The above author explains that globalization "appears to justify the spread of western culture and of capitalist society by suggesting that there are forces operating beyond human control that are transforming the world. It is a direct consequence of the expansion of European culture across i the planet. It involves de-territorialization of social and political arrangements. Perhaps, the most outstanding unique feature of the current globalization process is in the area of national policies and policy-making mechanism.

In Africa, military regimes were dismantled in line with global agenda for democratization, liberalization and socio-economic reforms. People within a state have increasingly come under the influence of international agencies and processes. This as a matter of fact led to the erosion of national sovereignty and narrowed the ability of governments and people to make choices, from options in economic, social and cultural policies.

This definition has narrow perception of globalization because the concept is more

than economic institutionalization but spans beyond technology, politics and sociology. That is to say that I technological globalization refers to the new communication technology and information revolution; political globalization refers to the withering away of the nation state (at least so far as economic sovereignty) is concerned. Cultural globalization refers to the "global village" which watches more or less the same TV serials and videos, consumes or aspires to consume the same products and so on, (Onu 2003:85). This means that globalization demands greater economic integration of the world, social, cultural and political unanimity. It is characterized by openness of most countries to international investment and international finance.

Further clarification offered by Nnoli (2000: 173) sees globalization as a complex phenomenon: globalization interfaces with various areas of social life and is suffused with ambiguities, variations, uncertainties and incompatibilities; its core is the inevitable expansion of capitalism world wide including the spread of its values. It is recognized that globalization intensifies the process of integration of peoples and nations. It has impacted on different countries and peoples in an unbalanced manner (UNDO, 2001: xii), marginalizing some and rewarding some, with unequal distribution of benefits and curses (Khor 2001: 10). African countries have been particularly marginalized, their option limited by institutionalized global regime for the allocation of globally valuable resources. This forced most African states to withdraw from their development roles and thereby delaying the recovery of many impoverished societies and creating further deterioration in the provision of social service.

The greatest area of the impact of globalization on African societies and peoples is in the areas where the state used to play significant roles in the life of the people through social welfare policies and programmes now the adoption of market reform programmes has significantly weakened socio-economic balance. The dynamites of these reform agenda sparked off turbulence, instability and in some cases disintegration.

The political arm of the globalization package was the adoption of liberal democracy, while liberalization of market and social reform which seek to cut down public utilities, the withdrawal of subsidies and cut in employment resulted to labour unrest and violent conflicts among members of the public and organized labour.

While the democratic ideals may be attractive, there is no doubt that it has been a source of some conflicts on the continent in places where minority groups exist like in the Sudan, Nigeria, and in Burundi. Jega (2004:3) has noted that the democratic space may have been opened and far widened but, in many cases, the usage of this

space has also widened and deepened the pre-existing ethnic and religious divides and is now accompanied by a proliferation of violent eruptions. Still other issues brought out more forcefully by globalization include the gender relations of domination and exploitation, human rights and citizenship rights, (AlIi, 2005:321)

Globalization as Source of Conflict

We have noted that conflict is endemic and an inevitable aspect of the functioning of any given society. Conflict exists in every facet of human existence. This is true of the world and as such in Africa. We have also explained that globalization which seemed to be a new concept has been there for decades an integral part of European expansionism which has a long history. There has been conflict in Africa and in the world before the anti-colonial struggles, structural adjustment and globalization but in a small scale.

The nature of conflict before now is boarder clashes which were mainly inter state while the national liberation wars were against foreign rules. Currently conflicts are inter-state and communal. These conflicts are aggravated by economic, political, social or cultural factors which are the major targets of the globalization process. According to Nnoli (2000: 182), the major source of conflict in Africa, in the past two decades or so, has been the globalization process which disarticulated the fragile governmental systems in Africa and significantly undermined the development of the sovereign states. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, globalization has become a sinister framework for reorganizing African societies in that, on the one hand, inspired restructuring destroyed the fabric of the fragile African economy and marginalized the continent.

The imperatives of the global openness and the dynamics and ideological context manifested in the competition between and among identities, the changing landscape of information flow, the new platform created by civil society and social movements. One notable feature of globalization is the very fact that social change is expressed in a multiplicity of transitions occurring simultaneously at contradictory levels. The nature of African economy has been further marginalized by the new global economic environment where export commodities, mostly agricultural products are under priced in the world market. The result of the ensuing austerity measures which have distributional consequences noted by Elbadawi and Hegrc, (2003:2), are poverty, deprivation and social and political tension. The struggle for economic resources has led to conflicts, electoral violence and thuggery amongst the people and parties for political position which is an instrument and platform for primitive accumulation in Africa.

Globalization has polarized the world and the gap between the poor and the rich has

widened further. In a study by Elbadawi et al, it was discovered that there is direct relationship between low or creative growth and a high risk of civil war or armed conflict because of unemployment and the decrease in the opportunity cost for rebels, Smith (1992), also observed that there is a close relationship between economic crisis and conflict, noting that fifty percent of the twenty-five most indebted third world countries were at war in 1990 or early 1991. This argument has been further buttressed by Brown (1995) who submitted that only Tanzania of Africa's thirty three most indebted and economically distressed countries have so far not been engulfed by conflicts and wars.

The many conflict which have devastated the African states from Somalia to Liberia, the genocidal conflicts of Rwanda and Burundi, the democratic Republic of Congo and a host of others including the most recent conflicts in Dafur, Sudan, are traceable to serious economic dislocations caused by the impact of globalization and made worse by unemployment and widespread poverty, which result from staff rationalization, privatilization and massive retrenchment of workers. All these added impetus to distributional conflicts occasioned by stringent economic regimes.

Most globalization induced conflicts result from one reform policy or another when the governments are responding to the global fever of catching up with the agenda of the development international capitals.

Conclusion

The direct impact of globalization to the conflict situation in Africa has become very clear judging from the foregoing analysis. It is our belief that structural adjustment progrmmes and the democratization process of the 1990s are the private upon which the globalization process revolves. These economic, socio-cultural and political reforms of openness and collectivity or interconnectivity undermine and limit the capacity of African sovereign states to provide social welfare support for their people.

The way out of this predicament is for the African states to 'watch the events and choose not to globalize areas that run counter to African culture and social wellbeing. African communalism should be encouraged. The reduction in unemployment and poverty must be pursued as a matter of urgency.

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