
Finding Order in a Disorderly Region of ECOWAS

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Abstract

The paper did set out to find order in a disorderly region of the economic community of West African States (ECOWAS). The region-west Africa is famously known to be politically unstable quagmire of underdevelopment by all intent and purposes had unleashed all kinds of political, social and economic conflicts or disorder that the region now houses states where human misery known no bounds. The region (ECOWAS) is linguistically heterogeneous, thus, socially disharmonious which had made penetration into the affairs of the region (socially, politically, and economically) by more sophisticated climes most easy. All the shades of intervention by these climes into the region had exacerbated the conditions of disorderliness in the region. The human misery and disorderliness in the region are indexed by several factors that include - poor performance of government, woeful economic performances, and geo – politics, social disharmony and much more. Nigeria, one of the core states in the region is now considered as the world poverty capital. The question then is - can order be found in such a disorderly region like the ECOWAS. The attempt at proffering answers to the question lead the paper to several conclusions thus, the recommendations canvass therein.

Keywords: Integration, Cooperation, Democracy, Totalitarianism, Geopolitics, Colonialism.

Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, the biggest problem confronting humankind was that of reconstruction of the global economy. The reconstruction commenced with the injection of the United State funds, technologies and energies into the economies of their allies in Western Europe. From the injection of the funds of the United States of America into Western Europe; Europe was visibly on the road to recovery leaving other regions, continents that partook in the war almost hopeless and envious. Africa was among such continent that was considered hopeless and as an afterthought, even though the mantra of the United States America – the right of colonial people to self-determination was to later give impetus and energy to the Africans to launch themselves into the period of liberation. Though, some African scholars have imputed that the mantra of the United State of America stemmed from the fact that the U.S.A came to realization that colonialism has no future in the post WWII world, therefore should be dismantle (Akindele, 1988, Olusanya, 1988, Olanyan, 1988, Eze, 1988). Be that as it may, the 1960s witnessed several African states gaining independence or overthrowing colonial yoke. The kernel of Africa struggle for independence again, stem from European discrimination, relegation of Africa to the backwaters of international politics and economics and the exploitation of African labors and minerals. Simply put, Africa's problem, during the 1960s was that of gaining independence and the problems of underdevelopment.

The struggle and gaining of independence left an unforgotten scar in the memories of African states. This scar is yet to be purge from the psychology of most African states, therefore, the continuous hunting by these scares of Africans even up till date. One of the scars is how to break away from the circle of violence that had come characterized the current global system, followed by realization of the need for growth and development. The desire of Africans states for growth and development was as old as their desire for independence. Again these desires of African states and Africans were deeply rooted in Pan African movement. The Pan - African movement was a movement that started out in Chicago in 1893 where the term was first used. Pan Africanism was fallout of the toxic international environment that denigrated everything Africa. From 1893 onwards the term had transverse across several historical and sociological vista leaving the indelible mark in the course of history of the African continent. The gaining of independence by African states in the 1960s meant their confronting the problems of growth and development in an international system that is structurally divided into developed and developed states. This is an international system that is

premised on “might” over “social justice”. This system leaves African and all her regions in a very precarious position. For Africa and all her affiliates region, the copying of the European Union model became appealing. Even at that, the idea of copying the European Union model for Africa was not without hiccups. To this end, Olusanya (1988) posited;

The founding fathers of the organization dreamt dreams and said visions. What were dreams? What were their hopes and aspirations? The founding fathers were heads of the newly independent nations of Africa, though the degree of the newness of their states may differ. They had before them a continent which had been partitioned by the European powers in the 19th and 20th centuries. They saw that a substantial portion of the continent still strained and groaned under the yoke of foreign rule crying for help to become free and thus begin to resume, once, again, their destiny. They saw a continent exploited and weighed down by poverty, ignorance, illiteracy and diseases.

The kernel of Olusanya (1988) analysis is that for the reasons of linguistic and geographical differences or partitioning especially, those initiated or instituted by the Europeans (colonialist) that divided countries along the lines of artificial boundaries left many Africans sprawling on the floor of poverty, unemployment, lack of educational opportunities etc. The bottom line is that these artificial boundaries “Balkanized” the newly independent states (African continent) into different blocks, while the agitations for collective efforts in combating the backward status of continent was on demand and in the front burners of Africans. These blocks were historically known as – Casablanca, Monrovia and Brazzaville groups. All of these blocks had an individual overview on how best to tackle and fast track African’s development and growth. The differences amongst the blocks took special skills of the leading statesmen in the continent to overcome, thus, the birth of organization of African unity on May 25, 1963.

At the birth of the O.A.U the continent had to contend with the new world order as put together by the leading states in the international system. The protagonist of the world order actually believed that the new world order would bring the much needed succor to the global system judging the experiences of humankind after the Second World War. The OAU in dealing with the need world order proved to be an onerous one, especially when one takes into cognizance of that the “new world order” proved to be a tacit approval by the leading states of “might” over “social justice”. The “new world order” by all intent and purposes, was an approval of every event that led to the Second World War. It was an approval of social, political, economic inequalities as orchestrated by the leading states. Simply put, it endorsed a chaotic global system that requires collective effort of humankind in finding order. The “new world order” did unleashed series of events in the global system that called into questioning the structure and management of social justice in the global system. For example, how does the global system deal with the problems of inequalities that had come to characterize the global system? Accentuating the logic of global inequality by Knor (1998) noted by asking how can 20% of the world population control 80% of the wealth of the world and how can 80% of the world population live on 20% of wealth of the world? Corroborating the logic of Knor (1998) in an explicit term and expanding the horizon of Knor’s logic Soludo (2003) noted thus:

Globally poverty and inequality seem to have worsened in the last decade. More than 80 countries still have per capita incomes that are lower than a decade or more ago. About 40 countries have sustained average per capital income growth rate of more than 3 percent a year since 1990, and 55 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and FGS term Europe and the common wealth of independent states (US) have had declining per capital incomes. Within countries, inequality has worsened greatly (especially in the (US) countries) and even within the rich countries since 1980, especially Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States... By late 1990s, the fifth of the world’s population living in the highest income countries had 86 percent of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) and the bottom fifth just 1 percent...

The analysis of Soludo (2023) does made him to zeroed in on a declaration from World Bank (2000) report that declared thus:

Some 300 million Africans, almost half the population, live on barely US 80.65 a day and this number is growing relentlessly. Moreover, a severe lack of capabilities education, health, and nutrition – among Africa’s poor threatens to make poverty “dynastic” with the descendant of the poor also remaining poor. Africa is the only region where primary enrollment rates were lower in 1980, and the

burden of disease is dramatically higher in Africa than elsewhere. Africa is not only poor, it also suffers from vast inequality in incomes, in assets, in control over public resources, and in access to essential services, as well pervasive in security. These dimensions of poverty and deprivation are worsening in many parts of region.

The bottom line of Soludo's (2023) analysis is that within the purview of the "new world order" "Africa's fragilities became visible for all to see. These fragilities that cuts across every facet of the continent's live.

Global Disorderliness and Africa

As already noted, by the custodians (leading states) of the current global system, the claim that the "new world order" has caught up with humankind is also very visible for all to see. At one end of the spectrum of these claims is the global disorderliness in which Africa is deeply enshrined in. For Africa, the entire question of global disorderliness stem from the simple desire of the European states in dominating the current global system. Through clandestine social, political, and economic engineering, almost all happening had been skewed to favor this singular desire of the Europeans. The question then is whether there is a new world order in the first place? Or the world order is about the elevation of social political and economic inequalities to a new threshold. Furthermore, if by any pinch of analysis the paper can conclude that there is indeed a new world order the question then would be how just can the new world order be? A new world order by all intent and purposes connotes the existence of an old order. But the snag here is that it is unclear whether there was an old order as opposed to an uneasy truce or an absence of disorder. To claim in affirmation to the existence of a "world order" is to assume that there exist a political arrangement that is able to minimize violent conflict(s) amongst states and prevent dangerous violations of rights within them; this assumption runs parallel to all historical traditions. In other world, there is no such political arrangement, rather, what is in existence is the repulsive and pretentious idea or notion of "collective security" that is premised on a "false analogy" between delinquent individuals and delinquent states. It is false because, there does not exist at the international level institutions for the effective imposition of sanctions. In extending the boundaries of the above logic further, Ake (1992) argued thus:

Prevailing Northern conceptions of a new world order are constructed around a relatively small range of issues: the changing nature and structure of power in the world system, the changing nature and magnitude of threat to international security and role of the United States in the world. These are by no means the only issues they deal with, but they occur so frequently that they have become important organizing concepts.

The salient point note concerning the kernel of Ake's (1992) analysis was that it was situated within the purview of the structural division of the global system –"North" and "South" (developed and developing states). It is within this division that Ake's (1992) raked up the logic of perceptions that follows the line of the division which had invariably translated to "Northern states" having their own definition and perception to a "new world order", while the "Southern states" are having their own perception and definition. The convex of these contradictory perceptions and definitions is that the current global system is left bewildered on the patterns and vents to be used in combating the disorderliness confronting the system and humankind. The conclusion of the "Southern states" is that the "new world order" has bequeathed to humankind a disorderliness that states in the global system must deliberately deal with either collectively or individually, thus, Ake (1992) declaring:

Both sides of the equation have to be balanced. Whatever happens in the South, collective security will still remain an elusive goal until values of democracy and equal development are rediscovered and entrenched in the North. For the security threat to the North including its constitution as an alienated and insecure Island of privilege in a ghetto seeking with frustration and anger emanated from its ambivalence towards these values...

The disorderliness fostered on the world by the new global order cut across political, economic and social dislocations especially in the Southern States. The Southern States are experiencing political instability and conflicts -Coups, Civil Wars, and terrorism, economic underdevelopment and inequality, social and cultural division. It is within these uncertainties or disorderliness that Africa has to navigate in order to engender growth and development. Thus the question what path will be desirable for Africans and the African continent?

The task before the African continent was to find political, social and economic unity amongst the various balkanized and fragmented states of Africa. These fragmented states of Africa were political, social and economic tie to the apron string of the colonialist. Simply put, the states of Africa were still being dominated by the colonialist even after independence, thus, making the task of finding unity among African states rather difficult. The task was not totally insurmountable, therefore, the founding father of the Organization of African Unity delicately navigated through the boundaries of political, economic and social hiccups to form the OAU in May 1963. Though, many commentators and watchers of affairs of the continent hold the opinion that the organization had not done too badly since its coming into being, while others hold the view that its performances are nothing to write home about. The premise of none performances arguments stems from what this school of thoughts consider as the OAU representing largely a negative agreement – not to move too much to the left nor too far to the right. The middle ground to these scholars represents none performance. But Ajala (1958) in adding his voice to the subject of performance of the OAU within the global space noted thus:

The OAU as a mechanism through which problems are resolved, a mechanism that among other functions aims at diffusing crises and liquidating conflicts between member states and has come to the conclusion that the history of the OAU is marked by achievements and activities in the field decolonization and the liberation struggle against apartheid in Southern Africa, resolution of conflicts and by activities in fields of economic, social, execution, health and scientific and cultural development.

In summation Ajala (1988) in his analysis concluded that before the change of name to the African union, the OAU remained the only recognizably institution that was shaped in the imagination of the founding fathers. The primary objective of the organization was to engender growth and development for the African continent especially in the mist of the global bias against Africa and the disorderliness that had come to characterized the global system. The change in name of the OAU to AU (African Union) in July 2002 did confirm the inherent weakness in the OAU, thus the need for the change in name and direction to be followed in the emancipation of the continent.

One salient fact that needs noting is the fact while the OAU before it was extinguished did set the tone for the development by encouraging the growth and development of regional organization in the continent. The vision and commitment of African leaders to the ideals and principles of economic cooperation and integration, as means of mitigating the development constraints faced by many small nation economies, led them to create economic groupings in all the African sub-regions. This strategy of cooperation and integration was given a new lease of life with the adoption in April 1980 of the celebrated Lagos plan of Action (LPA) and the final act of Lagos which is an historic document that constitutes the first comprehensive continent wide formulation and articulation of Africa's preferred long-term development objectives. It is in the Lagos plan, described as Africa's economic "Magna Carta" that Africa leaders committed themselves to the creation, at national, sub-regional and regional levels of a dynamic and independent economy and thereby pave the way for the essential establishment of the Africa common market leading to an Africa economic community (Asante; 1999). It is against this background that regional groupings were established across the length and breadth of the continent – the economic community of central African states (ECCAS) 1983; East Africa,- East Africa community (EAC) 1967 and the preferential trade area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA) 1981, which was to later transform in 1994 into the common market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Southern Africa development coordinating conference (SADOC) 1980 and in West Africa, the economic community of West Africa states (ECOWAS) in 1975.

Finding Order in a Disorderly Region of ECOWAS

The economic community of West Africa states (ECOWAS) was not insulated from the disorderliness that had come to characterize the current global system. The West African region is one of the turbulent regions in Africa. The region is characterized by high poverty Index, unemployment, lack of access to health, education and water, politically the region is struggling to understand democracy in practice and theory, thus the recent democratic reversal witnessed in the region. The region recorded about 15 coups de tat amongst member states between 2000 and 2020. There are 7 ongoing conflicts –Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria. Further statistic shows that 12 elections were

disputed or marred by violence since 2010. Economically, the region had not fared any better as the fang of underdevelopment is seen in the average GDP per capital. 1,300 dollars (compared to \$ 10,000 global average), 40% of the population lives below the poverty line thus, high levels of income inequality. Security challenges of the region include 5 million internally displaced persons (IDPS) across the region and an estimated 10,000 reported cases of human trafficking since 2015. The crux of the matter is that the resume of the region is disheartening to the extent some scholars are blaming the ugly resume on geopolitics (neo-colonialism). The region has recorded 10 foreign military interventions in ECOWAS member states since 2000; 5,000 French troops deployed in the Sahel region and \$1 billion annual US military aid to the region. Geo-politically proxy wars are going on Mali and Burkina Faso and five external powers involvement and funding for the different armed groups in the region are recorded – China, US, China Russia, France and Iran. The direct import of geo political involvement by these leading nations in the region is for economic exploitation.

Economically the region is trapped with debt to the Bretton wood institutions – international monetary fund and World Bank and to some leading states especially France. Socially, the principle that holds societies together are in shambles as the rule of law is relegated to the background. Asante (2000) in the mist of these chaotic atmosphere and environment, how can ECOWAS bring order to the disorderliness that come characterized the region.

The Economic community of West Africa gained impetus from the effort of the Africa Union to bringing sanity to managing and resolving conflicts in the continent. The first visible effort of the African union in this direction is the setting up of Africa peace and security architecture (APSA). The purpose of APSA is to promote peace and security in Africa (ECOWAS region). It was under the auspices of APSA that the AU-ECOWAS collaborations gained energy. The energy in question came to manifestation when crisis erupted in Liberia and Sierra Leone. To Vos (2021) there was the initial skepticism that these crises should not snow ball into humanitarian crisis thus the need to be proactive by both the AU and ECOWAS.

The proactive steps were taken when in the late 1990s, the African Union and ECOWAS started to reviewing the legal frameworks of collective security in their constitutive documents that focused on non-intervention. Both organizations adopted legal instruments that allowed them to authorize military interventions in their states in their region continent based on prior consent. Vos (2022) further noted that:

The most controversial issue in this regard is that the AU-ECOWAS intervention regimes allow the AU and ECOWAS to use force against another state without UN Security Council authorization even though the unilateral use of force is prohibited under the UN charter.

The crux of the matter was that the legality of humanitarian intervention was already a subject of intense debate even before the “coming into being” of the UN charter system. Be that as may, the intent of the collaboration between the AU-ECOWAS was the ultimate desire of preventing humanitarian crisis at both the continental and regional level thus the need to looking beyond the controversy of legality of intervention. The Liberian and Sierra-Leonean crisis presented to both organization the latitude to testing the two-tier system on the use of force: the upper being a structure for an ideal world in which no state would initiate conflict; and the lower allowing for individual or collective response by states in the event the UN is unable or unwilling to act (Jerkins, 2007).

The later scenario significantly affected the justification for humanitarian intervention when combined with the express authorization of regional organization to act consistently with the purpose of the charter. The synopsis of the Liberian crisis (1990) was that Samuel Doe an ethnic “Krahn”, won an election in 1985, and subsequently engaged in brutal repression of both political opposition and independent activities. The election was adjudged by the opposition to be stolen, thus, the inevitable civil war that broke out on December 24, 1989 when the National patriotic front led by Charles Taylor stormed Liberia from Cote d Ivoire. The armed forces of Liberia (AFL) responded by conducting a bloody counter insurgency campaign which included indiscriminate killing, raping, burning and looting. In the words of Jerkin (2007):

The violence both forced refugees, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, to flee to neighboring states and trapped hundreds of foreign state citizens in the Liberian capital of Monrovia. The mediation attempts by the Liberian council of churches failed and a second rebel faction broke away

from the NPFL to form the independent National patriotic front of Liberia (INPFR) headed by Prince Yomie Johnson.

The NPFL reached Monrovia by summer 1990 and the atrocities by both sides came to a head when Doe requested aid from both the United State and ECOWAS. Though the limitations or the instrumentalities of interactional laid and geo politics the onus feel on ECOWAS to finding a solution to the crisis. For the Sierra-Leonean crisis, the scenario is similar to those of Liberia, but had a different flavor from the intervention in Liberia. Sierra-Leone has had a history of totalitarian system/regimes and civil disputes prior to the 1990's until the democratically elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah emerged through the Abidjan accord. The accord provided for the end of a five years civil war instigated by the revolutionary United front (RUF) as well as the transformation of the RUF from a military operation to a political party in opposition to the Sierra-Leone people's party (SLPP). Again, Jerkins (2007) noted that:

The Abuja accord fell apart because the RUF rebels refused to disarm and sierra-Leones national army lacked the capacity to enforce compliance with the accord. Consequently, on May 25, 1997, rebel soldiers took over government buildings and prisons in the capital of free town and released Major Johnny Paul koromah, the leader of RUF who was imprisoned for prior attempted Coup. Koromah declared himself as the head of government and suspended the constitution. President Kabbah had only been in power for fourteen months before being forced into exile in neighboring guinea.

Again, ECOWAS led by Nigeria responded immediately. Nigeria already had peace keeping troops positioned within Sierra Leone during the civil war period. Kabbah was restored to power. The crux of the matter or lessons herein concerning the thrust of the paper is that in these two instances ECOWAS found the latitude under the auspices of AU to bring political order to bear in these two ECOWAS states. These two states of ECOWAS are still enjoying the period of peace ushered in by the efforts of ECOWAS. It is worthy of noting that recently some ECOWAS states suffered democratic reversals – Mali, Burkina-Faso and Niger. The effort of ECOWAS in these regard, especially, as it concerns restoring these states to democratic order is nothing but abysmal. The abysmal effort stem from Nigeria's initial call for the use of force or intervention in these states in order to restore political order. The threat is from ECOWAS was one reasons underpinning the formation of a parallel organization by these states. It is the conduct of ECOWAS led by Nigeria that prompted Ake (1998) to asking whether indeed Africans and Africa understands what democracy entails and why is democracy finding it difficult to take root in Africa. Ake (1998) espoused that with projection of democratic thesis by the leading nations in the current global system into continents, regions and states had caused great dislocations – social, political and economic, thus Ake (1998) declaring that the strand of liberal democracy foisted on Africa is anti-development, human rights, rule of law, and people, thus incapable of emancipating the people. The import of Ake's declaration on the thrust of the paper is that in the realm of government and governance there is glaring failure especially, when cognizance is given to the underpinning of geo-politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

A critical appraisal of the situations of states involved in the democratic reversal in the West African region poverty had become dynastic and hereditary, exploitation of these states by the colonial masters had not abated, rather it became more enshrined to be the point that these state have jettisoned ECOWAS and asked all foreign troops to depart their territories. The bottom line is that while AU- ECOWAS lack of total independence, the reality on ground is that most states in Africa are still tied to the apron string of the colonial states. In summation the biggest issue confronting Africa and the West Africa region today in finding order is the problem of underdevelopment and poverty due to the reason of the development mood foisted on Africa and the West Africa is anti-development. Other areas in which the African Union and the economic community of West Africa include (a) capacity building through training, workshops and technical assistance, enhancing their ability to managing conflicts and promoting stability (2) humanitarian assistance – the AU (African Union) has provided humanitarian assistance to ECOWAS countries imparted by conflicts natural disasters and pandemics (3) African governance, architecture (AGA) the AU had established AGA to promote good governance, democracy and human rights in Africa including the ECOWAS region (4) regional

economic communities (RECs) – the AU has encouraged PECS like ECOWAS to promote economic integration and cooperation, reducing tension and promoting stability (5) the security sector reform (SSR) – the collaboration in this area meant AU assisting ECOWAS countries in reforming security institutions to meet the challenges the 21st century (6) counter terrorism – The AU has supported ECOWAS countries in counter terrorism efforts, including capacity building and intelligence sharing.

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