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Africa Through the Lens of Chaos and Complexity

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ABSTRACT

Africa cannot be looked at as a big country. The Continent is politically organised into 54 states, which are very diverse entities with different histories within and without their borders. Almost all these states are multinational - multiethnic places with different regions, and when emergency or crisis situations arise, people's "sense of belonging" is usually in the family, in the tribe, in the language, or in the religious group, not in "the state". However, notwithstanding this reality, many analyses and positions are still based on neo-realist readings, assuming the existence of rationalities that do not exist or are not strong enough to understand the dominant realities. The article applies some of the tools of the Complexity theory to look at the current African situation and politics.

Introduction

Chaos theory, primarily analysed within the scope of physics and physical systems, has at its base the second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy, according to which all physical systems tend to lose energy, which leads to disorganisation and disintegration. This has been a subject under discussion for several decades within the social sciences domain, with particular emphasis on the area of the theory and practice of organisations (Nicolis and Prigogine, 1989).

The application of physics theories, in this case the law of entropy, has a corollary – when increasing, the dynamics of entropy become irreversible. This does not (obligatorily) happens in the social sciences because organisations are not closed systems.

Therefore, in the context of the debates about the application of entropy to organisations, the concept of complexity sometimes substitutes or is added to the concept of chaos, just because one must assume that chaos may also happen in non-closed systems - without necessarily leading to disorganisation and disintegration.

The same assumption applies to the broader case of international relations (Root, 2013), once when "organisations" are states or international organisations, entropy works in broader, non-closed, sometimes global contexts. Hence, the difficulties of analysing chaos and complexity increase – the

same as any social (political, sociological, psychological, economic) theory that pursues the aim of explaining what is and could happen in a broader and very open framework.

However, reflecting on the chaos and complexity of the international open system is relevant. More so when, for example, neorealist theories are proving unable to accurately explain an increasing number of events and phenomena that happen in international relations and even within states' borders (Dye, 2004).

To give an example, the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023 cannot be fully explained within the scope of neo-realism. It was not a consequence of outside interference, and the "country's deterioration of security" rationale presented by the military coup plotters did not cope with reality in the case of Niger, where the action of violent extremist groups was being contained. For sure, after the coup, regional and global players intervened to take advantage of or resist the new situation. However, by applying a complexity lens to the analysis of the situation and not a neo-realist lens, one can better understand what actors were pursuing: their own individual and group agenda. As a matter of fact, the coup was not inspired or commanded by any hidden or open third party – France, the US, or Russia just to name some of the powers with interests in the country and the region.

This article, "Africa through the Lens of Chaos and Complexity," will apply some of the tools of the complexity theory to look at current African geopolitics, economic, and security dynamics. The analysis will be driven by CAS, the acronym for "Complex Adaptive International System", as explained in Valle (2000) and in Tomé and Açıkalin (2019).

CAS postulates are summed up as follows:

- Numerous independent and interdependent actors

The international system is no longer a game of just classical actors (states and great powers) but one of several entities that transform the system in unexpected ways. In Africa, they range from 54 sovereign states, with a growing 1,5 billion population, to multinational corporations which, after some retraction, came back again not only to mine hydrocarbons and to export commodities but also to invest in a larger range of critical minerals, as well as in infrastructure – case of public and private China companies, global social movements and NGOs, that took over some usual state functions since the 1980's, transnational terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, Daesh affiliate groups as well as other violent extremist organisations, that continue spreading in several African geographies, organized crime networks, mostly cocaine in the West and heroin and methamphetamines in the East and the South, as well as other international or regional entities of diverse nature, such as charities or evangelical churches – these ones exerting growing public and political leverage.

- Infinite interactions-feedback system within actors

Complexity theory suggests two different roles for interaction between actors in the international system: one, it has no limit, can be spontaneous, and occurs in a nonlinear way, and this can be seen in the current African landscape; two, it is determinant for the patterns of the change-based system, as the emergent behaviour of actors strongly results from their interaction – for example, smugglers and drug traffickers, interacting with politicians at the central and local levels in several African countries.

- Emergence

There are constant actions and reactions to what other agents are doing, as is the case of the recent coup d'états in the Sahel. Thus, nothing in the environment is immutable. Emergence can happen at national, regional and systemic levels.

- Self-organization through coevolution and coadaptation

Facing the emergence of a new order, the system and the actors self-organize themselves to adapt to change - again, that is what France, the US and Russia are doing in the Sahel. Actors' self-organization aims at their own ideas of reforming, based on their interests - which challenges the realist perspective that rational actors make decisions for the state, which often they do not, as noted in the case of Niger. Two types of self-organization are dominant: coevolution and coadaptation. Evolution is a local process of maximization, not driven by future anticipation or previous experience. Adaptation is a strategic choice, as actors are driven by their experience and will - and their behaviour is anticipated by others. Actors and the system have self-organization capacity, which applies to the international domain - this century in Africa is an example of self-organisation through coevolution and coadaptation, not only from local African groups but also from foreign states and organisations.

1. Formation and shape of the African States

Africa is politically organised in 54 statesⁱ, mostly defined by the colonising powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884/85, some of their final borders being rearranged before decolonisation, after the 2nd World War. Since independence, only two border alterations occurred, resulting from agreed partitions (preceded by long wars): Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1991, and South Sudan from Sudan in 2011. However, fitting to the initial paragraph of the emergence postulate of CAS – "...constant actions and reactions to what other agents are doing", the forced annexation of parts of Ukraine by Russia since February 2022 and of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan in September 2023, raises the prospects for wars of annexation on the African soil by African countries or of secession, as a result of civil wars -, regardless of the postulates of the UN or of the African Union Chartersⁱⁱ.

Africa, with its 42 million km², ranging from the Mediterranean and the Red Sea to the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, is very diverse, geographically and socially.

A major continental divide results from the Sahara Desert, a natural barrier between the North and the Northeast and the Sub-Saharan regions. The Sahara, with an estimated 9,2 million square Km² in 2022, corresponding to around 8% of the earth's land area, is almost the same size as China. According to Hereher (2011)ⁱⁱⁱ, it has cycles of contraction and expansion, having attained 10.35 million km² in 1984, meaning that if it was a country, it would rank second to the USSR in that period, surpassing Canada; actually, for Hereher (2011), since 1994 the Sahara is experiencing a cycle of contraction. Relations between The North of Africa and the sub-Saharan regions always existed – through trans-Saharan routes^{iv}, some of which existed for millennia, being still used today as routes for all kinds of interactions, including drug trafficking and flows of (often mafia controlled) migration towards Europe.

Nonetheless, there are common historical traces, with a strong print from Arab and European expansion, occupation, and exploitation. With wider effects in the Sub-Saharan regions, foreign interference resulted in two huge societal disruptions, with deep and lasting overall impacts: slave trade and colonialism.

a) The first societal disruption was the slave trade.

The slave trade was responsible for the break-up of millions of families and barred the consolidation of emerging chiefdoms, kingdoms and empires. It was made up of two main flows of trade.

The Arab slave trade

Orientated towards the markets of Southwest Asia, the Arab-Islamic slave trade lasted from the 8th century to the beginning of the 20th century, mainly in the Sahelian and Eastern Sub-Saharan regions, having also reached some parts of Western and Central Africa, as illustrated by Segal (2001) or River (2017). The capture of slaves, practised by merchant soldiers through “razzias”, was meant mostly to feed domestic and construction labour. As there are no registries, historians, anthropologists and other experts estimate a range of between 12 to 20 million Africans captured (killed or deceased) in the process. As a matter of fact, the Arab-Islamic slave trade is much less studied than the Atlantic one, not only for lack of registry but also because research about it is much scarcer.

The European slave trade

Mostly orientated towards the Americas, it lasted around 300 years, from the 17th century to the end of the 19th century, and it has been extensively studied, e.g., Black (2015). Being concentrated in 3 centuries, it was much more socially disruptive than the Arab one. The European-Christian slave traders created trading posts alongside the Atlantic coast, the major one being Luanda and engaged in partnerships with local lords that captured and sold slaves – with the European merchants transporting them to the Americas. African slave labour was mostly employed in plantations – mainly sugar and cotton – and in mines. According to many historians, such as French (2021), the African slave trade was on the basis of European wealth accumulation that fed the Industrial Revolution and, on par with the formation of the proletariat, gave rise to capitalism. Although there was some abundance of registries, the numbers of African slave captures were contradictory, with estimations varying from 12 to 30 million people (traded, killed or deceased).

In any case, whichever the numbers, having in mind that the estimates of the Sub-Saharan population were less than 100 million inhabitants in the 17th century, one can guess the huge disruptive effect that the slave trade had in the sub-continent.

b) Second societal disruption: colonialism

By the end of the 19th century, following European explorations and occupation of some coastal areas, and as a follow-up of the Brussels Geographical Conference in 1876 (promoted by the Belgian King, Leopold II), a Partake of Africa among European powers took place at the Berlin Conference in 1884/85 – convened by the German Chancellor Bismarck that, in strong alliance with Leopold II, was very much eager to have a hand on large parts of Africa. This partakes, and the effective military and administrative occupation that followed were fought by Africans who resisted European subjugation – some of the resistance fights to go on until the beginning of the 1940s.

As a result of the Berlin Conference and later agreed or arbitrated land modifications, the first borders of African States were drawn by the colonial powers, often disregarding ongoing endogenous social and political constructions. One may follow through maps the evolution of African boundaries - from the Berlin Conference to modifications resulting from the 1st and the 2nd World Wars to the redesigning of some borders by the British and French before decolonisation, to African independent countries borders – modified twice, as already noted in the cases of Eritrea – Ethiopia and Sudan – South Sudan.^v

As a result of historical and geographical evolution, as thoroughly illustrated by Meredith (2014), contemporary independent African countries are diverse and complex entities, sometimes with striking differences within and beyond their current boundaries. In fact, almost all the states are multinational - multiethnic entities composed of diverse subregions within larger African regions. More so, the contemporary African independent states are historically young, with weak institutions, and their populations are very much bound to strong family, ethnic, linguistic, and religious ties. Notwithstanding this reality, several analyses and positions are still based on neo-realist readings, appealing to state-led rationalities which do not suffice to understand the real situation and dynamics on the ground, which can be better understood according to CAS, namely given the reality of “numerous independent and interdependent actors”, as well as the “infinite interactions-feedback system within actors.

2. African diversity and complexity

So, one first corollary is that Africa cannot be treated as a country (this might seem an odd sentence, but it is not, as the imaginary Africa of savages on the bush with illness and famine is very much propagated worldwide); it should be looked at as a very much diverse Continent, containing more than 25% of all the countries of the world – most of them having huge domestic differences of all sorts.

Despite similar past experiences of exploitation and the existence of shared interests, Africa is not one single or even homogeneous entity, and, therefore, there is no such thing as an “African strategy” or an “African geopolitics”. This should sound obvious, but it is not. Some experts’ analyses, as well as positions taken by African leaderships and third parties (including governments and international institutions), persist in making the same diagnosis for diverse realities, hence prescribing similar solutions.

African countries are not only diverse; they are also young states still under construction, with rather fragile institutions – and yes, this is a very common characteristic. Countries usually have incipient, often outdated industries and with the advent of neoliberal policies in the 1980s, states’ weaknesses were only accentuated. Given the absence of private sectors or the small size of private sectors, privatisations and concessions, which accelerated in the 1990s, have benefited political and commercial elites, who often base their power on family ties and fickle alliances, both internal and external. As already said, in plurinational countries, people identify more with their nation/ethnicity/ language/ religion, more so when the state is not capable of providing basic needs and employment opportunities, often with rulers focused on self-entrenched leadership and wealth accumulation, sometimes protected by praetorian guards – which tend to be a source of revolving coups d’état. This reality is better understood by employing the analytical tools of CAS, namely the rationale of “self-organization through coevolution and coadaptation”, as people adapt to evolving situations and diverse sources of power.

Therefore, the usual postulates for treating Africa “as one” should be looked at with caution.^{vi}

On the one hand, countries share similar colonial legacies, and “African unity” expresses the will of political, academic and business elites that look at unity as a path for building regional and continental institutions (e.g., the African Union and Regional Economic Communities), arguing that this is the way to solve potential border conflicts, modernise economies and strengthen influence in a global world. So, under this perspective, Africa can be looked at “as one”.

On the other hand, African economies, not to mention (many) states, are still very weak and disintegrated, and the historical and geopolitical contexts within regions and individual countries are rather diverse. Under this perspective, Africa cannot be looked at “as one”.

To develop this diversity argument a little further, let's have a brief look at some regions and subregions (or countries) that have specific, sometimes common characteristics that diverge from other regions. To illustrate this argument, the North and the North-East, the Greater Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, Central Africa, the Indian Ocean coastal countries and Southern Africa will be discussed^{vii}.

The history, economy and demography of North and Northeast Africa (including the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia) are heavily influenced by the Mediterranean and the Red Sea - meaning Southern Europe and the Arab Peninsula. Until today, these neighbourhoods are crucial to explaining the geopolitics and geoeconomics of countries that spread from Morocco to Somalia, including parts of the Sahara and the Sahel. It suffices to remember the long-term influence of the expansion and often occupation from great empires and civilisations, beginning with the Phoenicians, one thousand years before Christ, followed by the Romans, whose presence lasted for large centuries, by the Arab expansion and the spread of Islam to the Maghreb (continuing to expand to the Sahel and large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa), that occurred since the eight century, as well as by the domination of the Ottoman Empire on large chunks of North and Northern Africa, since the 16th and 17th century until the 1st World War. All this happened before the already discussed disruption caused by colonialism and only partially coincided with the Arab-Islam slave trade, practised since the Arab expansion and during the Ottoman Empire.

Up to a certain point, some of these influences have also spread through the Greater Sahel, namely those related to the Arabs' expansion (that eventually led to Arab settlement, occupation and integration of the Maghreb in the Arab world. Today, this region is the prime area of expansion of violent extremist organisations of radical Salafi inspiration, the so-called "jihadists", who spread within and beyond the Sahel mostly after the destruction of the Libyan regime (and the state) in 2012. The Sahelian region is also home to six of the seven coups d'état that took place between 2020 and 2023 – in Guinea, Mali, Chad, Burkina-Faso, Sudan and Niger (the seventh being Gabon).

The Gulf of Guinea is a region characterised by the resilience of piracy, drug, and human trafficking, and home to a very complex Nigeria Federation, the most populated country in Africa, deeply divided internally and suffering from banditry actions all over its states. Recently, after the coup d'état in Niger, Nigeria, followed by other CEDEAO - the Regional Economic Community of East Africa - countries, including Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, the other two more economically advanced countries in West Africa, could not impose its (their) position to give a military response, due to the opposition of some of the other members of the CEDEAO and of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. This was a very sharp example of the existence of diverse countries' interests and strategies in the same region. Interests not imposed by foreign powers, as a matter of fact, regardless of them - mostly France.

In Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the most important country in terms of size, population, and raw materials (as a matter of fact, it is probably home to the richer and larger mineral deposits of Africa). It has a high degree of political instability and statelessness - in that region, the same fragility applies to the Central African Republic and South Sudan. DRC is a country that has around half of the world's reserves of coltan (columbite + tantalite, crucial for electronic equipment) in the East, near the borders with Rwanda and Uganda and is also responsible for its south-eastern lands near Angola's border, for about 60% of the world production cobalt, a critical mineral essential for stabilizing the ion-lithium batteries. It is also home to high-grade deposits of copper, being one of the five biggest world producers. Its riches are part of the explanation for the "whys" of the persistent armed conflicts in the Eastern border, where Congolese and nationals of other border countries, among them Rwandese and Ugandans, are mining. This region of the country is also home to the so-called Daesh Central Province, also involved in mineral illicit trade.

The African coast of the Indian Ocean has been home to millenary trade routes, mostly dominated by Oman (Al Salimi and Verlag, 2016), until the beginning of the 20th century. It is a coast used to trading with greater India (Machado, 2016), and it is demographically and linguistically home to communities of people who speak Swahili (a Creole language made up of Bantu and Arab, mixed with some English and Portuguese words), who understand each other and are an integral part of the commerce networks all over the coastal countries, since Kenya until North Mozambique. Since the end of last century, it was home to piracy in the Horn of Africa, now reasonably controlled through international surveillance and military navy presence – the same cannot be said of the Bab-El-Mandeb entrance in the Red Sea. Besides residual acts of piracy in the northern part, the coast is now home to a growing trafficking of heroin and, more recently also by methamphetamines, coming from Afghanistan through Pakistan to Eastern African ports and then to European markets - in the last years also to Australia and New Zealand^{viii}. This is also an area of operation of Al-Shabab (that declared its affiliation to Al Qaeda) in South Somalia and Northern Kenya and of several violent extremist organisations affiliated to Daesh - in Northeast DRC, in parts of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and since 2019, also in Northeast Cabo Delgado Province in Mozambique – see Morier-Genoud (2023), Cardoso (2021). Finally, Southern Africa and its Regional Economic Community, SADC. Parts of this region, namely Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mozambique, Eswatini, Zambia, and Malawi, are under a strong economic influence of South Africa, the regional economic giant (Libby, 2014). It is interesting to note that South Africa, despite its relative economic strength, is poorly regarded by neighbours, who do not see a big difference between Apartheid and the new South Africa in what relates to economic transactions – as a matter of fact, South Africa is regarded in the region as an economic hegemon but as a political-military dwarf – and this feeling only accrued after the flawed 1998 intervention in Lesotho, as well as by the difficulties the South African army demonstrated to develop a two battalion strong to Cabo Delgado (2 years to deploy) – partly because of the inoperability of its navy. Besides, SADC is an institutional construction that followed the end of Apartheid and the Cold War and is usually disregarded by its members, who do not believe in it as a source of economic growth, despite the government rhetoric (as a matter of fact Angola, the DRC, Tanzania, Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles and Mauritius, the other SADC members, have almost no economic interchange amongst them - and with the other members -, exception made, in different degrees, to existent bilateral economic relations with South Africa). Countries in this region are much more involved in consolidating national sovereignties and economies, their relations being of a bilateral nature, mostly with South Africa and countries outside the area, with a special interest in those that buy raw materials and invest in minerals, agriculture, and infrastructure – meaning mostly China.

Summing up and resorting again to the numerous independent and interdependent actors of CAS postulates, in Africa, there is not “... a game of just classical actors (states and great powers) but one of the millions of entities that transform the system in unexpected ways. They range from sovereign states to individuals, multinational corporations..., transnational terrorist groups, and organized crime networks...”.

3. African Development and Security Trends

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the demand for raw materials and the supply of finance have skyrocketed, essentially due to China, after joining the WTO in 2002, becoming the engine of global growth - with the help of the relocation of parts of production by North American, European, Japanese and other countries multinational companies, which were already taking place since the end of the cold war.

In Africa, private investment and infrastructure financing grew, and domestic demand increased, a par with urbanisation and the growth of “nouveaux riches” and middle classes; since 2002, the

average annual growth of African countries has exceeded 5% (apart from Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Somalia).

In the first decade of this century, violent conflicts and coups d'état slowed down in direct relation to the upturn in economic growth. This proves, if proof was needed, that the interdependent link between security and development has always existed.

Moreover, in this century, China, Japan, Turkey, India, Malaysia and other “emerging economies” have and continue to invest in areas of European disinvestment since decolonisation (such as industry and infrastructure), as well as in mining, namely hydrocarbons, in timber and in agriculture. China is a case apart (Suisheng, 2017) for its huge involvement in financing infrastructures, investing in raw materials, and trading with almost all African countries, turning to be the first economic partner with the whole of African countries.^{ix}

Since the second half of the last decade, the abundance of raw materials critical to industry, energy, and digitalisation has led old and new economic groups to reinvest. Chief amongst investments are those in hydrocarbons (oil, natural gas and coal), as African leaders defend that they have the right to take advantage of their resources and were not responsible for the huge increase in CO₂ emissions. Moreover, the digitalization trend increased the search for new sources of critical minerals, which are crucial for industry (from the military to pharmaceuticals to energy), and there are plenty of them in several African geographies. This trend might allow us to better understand Africa's role in the current and future global geopolitical context - 135 years after the Berlin Conference, Africa is once again in a central position to fulfil expansion strategies (Padraig, 2016), this time not only European but much more global ones.

This potentially positive trend does not go along with other dynamics that signal harsher times.

First, new violent conflicts of an identity and religious nature expanded after the destruction of the Libyan state in 2011/12 - and led to a state crisis (Celso and Nalbandov, 2023). Thus, the increasing presence of external military forces, mainly French and North Americans, at the entrance of the Red Sea and in the Greater Sahel – until the recent coups d'état in the region that did not make jihadism decrease, but led to a forced retreat of Western military actors, followed by an increase of paramilitary groups (mercenaries) from third countries, as the growing presence of the Russian Wagner – Africa Corps demonstrate.

Second, the slowdown in world economic growth and China since the middle of the last decade, mostly due to confinements and disruption in supply and distribution chains, the rise in inflation (reflected in import prices), and in sovereign debts, the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the increased rivalry between the US and China (Gaillard, Gotoh and Michalek, 2023).

These two last trends caused a worsening economic environment for the poor, which was aggravated by the Pandemic and by unfulfilled promises of environmental-related aid. Therefore, migration among African countries and towards Europe expanded, fuelling xenophobic movements. The worsening in living conditions further weakened African economies – and states (Celso and Nalbandov, 2023), and created social discontent in the poor and the incipient middle classes, particularly among the youngsters, who stopped believing in development led by current African elites (who often “captured” the state for their own interests) and point their fingers to foreign powers – in West and Central Africa mostly “the West” and particularly France, the former colonizer in the Sahel, seen as the culprit of neocolonialism.^x

In such a scenario, the return of coups d'état in Africa would have to be expected.

Hence, at the start of the current decade, 7 coups d'état in the Greater Sahel and West Africa occurred. Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), Chad (April 2021), Guinea-Conakry (September 2021), Sudan (October 2021 - suspended from the AU since 2019, now living in a harsh civil war), Burkina Faso (January 2022), Niger (July 2023), Gabon (August 2023). Except for Sudan, all of them happened in former French colonies...

In general, they were the result of palace coups (not civil wars), carried out by military factions against the government of the day, with a show of popular support in the streets (except in Sudan and in Chad), usually with a tendency of rapprochement with Russia, which is seen as a substitute for France (except in Chad - and Gabon, at least for now). In the case of the Greater Sahel, in addition to increased economic and institutional fragility, the action of jihadist groups continues to unravel the region, confronting older and new leaderships.

4. From the unstable present into the unknown future

Institutional developments (creation of the African Union) and continental agreements - notably the African Continental Free Trade Area, AfCFTA, as well as a growing trend in some countries towards modernisation (which means adding value to basic products on African soil, developing national and regional infrastructures, benefiting from the digital revolution and energy transition) are positive notes compared to the post-independence neo-colonial and rentier growth model - which was (and still is) practised, particularly in countries where the ruling elites benefit from “perpetual” development aid and control the budget for personal purposes (Lopes and Kararach, 2021).

Regional integration, always presented as a panacea for development (by Africans and Europeans alike), needs infrastructure and tradable goods - not just trade in agricultural products, handicrafts, and imported goods. However, it continues to be cyclically voiced and (logically) delayed. Indeed, rather than economic integration, economic modernisation, effective public institutions and training (plus the rule of law) are more crucial for development (Cardoso, 2018). That does not imply that the European Union and “traditional donors” do not offer some important inputs - mainly supporting health and education, some sparse projects for reinforcing NGOs and civil society – plus the non-called-by-name political conditionalities. As a matter of fact, the way some East Asian countries have grown - production of global quality goods for exportation – and domestic use – (Hyungkee, 2023) could perhaps have been an adequate path to modernisation and development. However, the social fabric and the historical factors were rather divergent, and as that was not the case, this would be a rather speculative debate.

However, one cannot avoid interrogating the reasons for such a resilient and flawed development model.

Will it be due to the co-operation ecology (Hubbard and Duggan 2009), constituted by (some) politicians and civil servants, development consultants, NGOs, charities and some of the recurrent entrepreneurs – either of a donor or recipient countries?

Will it be because of a need to rely on the model of raw materials export, without or with minimal local incorporation of value, to not jeopardise companies and jobs in the destination countries – and of rentier ways of living on the side of some privileged elites in the “recipient” countries?

Should these hypotheses be correct, they would be understandable, whether being accepted or not.

In most donor countries, political interests follow electoral cycles, and pressure is exerted on governments by the voters and on companies by their own workers, not predisposed to supporting the relocation of production (and eventually their own jobs) to third countries. A parallelism can be

done with what is happening now in the West, where protectionist (now named reshoring) policies are growing as a result of the huge delocalisation of factories and production to China and some other Asian countries done by multinationals after the end of the Cold War.

In most “recipient” African countries, rulers and other members of the governing elites and even parts of the civil society rely upon rents from mineral and agricultural concessions, as well as from aid. Changing established ways of living and profiting is not an easy task sometimes, especially when that would imply a pull from one’s comfort zone. Of course, narratives and discourses do not have to follow reality - namely, when reality is not a convenient path for some. Proof of discourses that do not follow reality is given by the continuing fallacy of North-South (or Global North – Global South) divisions/alliances or by demonising the “West” - while continuing to accept aid, welcoming investment (with “recipient countries’ elites feeding “western” banks accounts...).

Anti-Western rhetoric has its *raison d'être* for historical reasons, some of them quite recent, but it is also used to avoid discussing why inequalities are increasing more within countries than between countries. After all, this is a part of capital movements and/or resource plundering carried out by internal elites allied with external interests.

Since the triumph of the neoliberal capitalist model (less state, more market) after the end of the Cold War, African countries were “convinced” to privatise public goods - accelerating wealth concentration. Therefore, it is in the interests of those who control power and wealth (and the mechanisms for distributing it), both in the South and the North, to speak out against the “dangers” of State intervention. As a matter of fact, states are now much more unable (and the elites in government are more unwilling) to prevent the capture of public goods by private interests.

It is impractical to create jobs and wealth without industrialisation, infrastructures, and adequate education; marginalising industry and using fallacies such as: “industry could jeopardise environment”, and “unemployment may be solved by investing in services and in digital technologies” - are nothing less than “lullabies”. Without infrastructures and industrial policies, African countries hardly will be able to forge common positions to negotiate better conditions with companies, banks, and governments from the “North”, from the “South” or whatever cardinal point is invented, aiming at the creation of local capacities and employment, e.g., by aiding local value to mine or commodity exports.

In conclusion, Africa and African countries’ realities are better understood through the lens of the theory of chaos and complexity rather than by traditional neo-realist postulates, which only capture parts of the whole – often leading to wrong analyses and conclusions.

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ⁱ Plus the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (Western Sahara), currently occupied by Morocco.

ⁱⁱ The stalemate positions in the CEDEAO and in the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on the military intervention to counter-act the coup d'état in Niger is an encouraging example for current or potential insurgents.

ⁱⁱⁱ A map showing the Sahara Desert (and the Sahelian area) might be seen here: https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcTcKxMh_KkzdUZnZORGSUTh5Q58hkeanICf1A&usqp=CAU; according to Hereher (2011), “results showed that the Sahara Desert witnessed two opposite episodes of expansion and contraction. The period 1984-1993 was a cycle of expansion and the period 1994-2003 was a cycle of contraction. Maximum desert area was observed during 1984 (10.35 million km²) and minimum area was during 1999 (9.15 million km²)”

^{iv} A map with trans-saharan routes may be seen here: www.researchgate.net/profile/Aliyu-Salisu-Barau/publication/277405390/figure/fig2/AS:667621691252745@1536184823565/Map-of-Trans-Saharan-Trade.png.

^v Berlin Conference Partake:

[https://www.thoughtco.com/thmb/P52Morm9T86oELfN5puEaiftQUY=/750x0/filters:no_upscale\(\):max_bytes\(150000\):strip_icc\(\):format\(webp\)/berlin-conference-1884-1885-divide-africa-14335563-97e30d55e305405d9276b081e1d3c17e.jpg](https://www.thoughtco.com/thmb/P52Morm9T86oELfN5puEaiftQUY=/750x0/filters:no_upscale():max_bytes(150000):strip_icc():format(webp)/berlin-conference-1884-1885-divide-africa-14335563-97e30d55e305405d9276b081e1d3c17e.jpg)

Redesign of borders resulting from the 2nd World War and before decolonisation:

upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0b/Mapa_del_%C3%81frica_colonial_%281947%29.svg/1525px-Mapa_del_%C3%81frica_colonial_%281947%29.svg.png;

Current countries' boundaries:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/50/Africa%2C_administrative_divisions_-_de_-_colored.svg/640px-Africa%2C_administrative_divisions_-_de_-_colored.svg.png

^{vi} The following paragraphs are mostly a result of the author classes of the Autonomous University 3rd form BA classes of the course “Sub-Saharan Africa”, which are based on a variety of sources.

^{vii} Maps representing some African regions can be seen in the following addresses:

North and Northern https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/86/North_Africa_%28definitions%29.png

Sahel https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/82/Saharan_Africa_regions_map.png

DRC <https://mondediplo.com/local/cache-vignettes/L756xH540/artoff4511-fa0e2-8b944.jpg?1583763672>

Indian Ocean <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Schermata-2018-07-02-alle-10.23.54-512x682.png>

Southern Africa <https://tanzaniainvest.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/southern-african-development-community.jpg>

^{viii} This illicit trade being very much illustrated on public information from Interpol and the Organised Crime Observatory.

^{ix} The Belt and Road Initiative is paying increased attention to Africa, through the renting and buying mines, ports and other critical hotspots. One can have an idea through the following map: https://static.dw.com/image/48461967_7.png

^x These two regions are the heart of the so called France-Afrique, as it can be seen in:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/80/Francafrigue_map.png/350px-Francafrigue_map.png

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