

AFRICAN UNION, STATE-BUILDING AND THE CHALLENGES OF STATE FRAGILITY IN AFRICA

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Introduction

The trajectory of African development since its decade of independence tends to be a contradictory admixture of hope and despair. Undoubtedly, political independence came with great expectations which were hinged on the dialectical permutation that the collapse of colonialism would usher in an epoch of unhindered national development. But that hope was quickly transformed into despair as African states became embroiled in all manner of socio-economic and political contradictions, thus occupying the “bottom of global development and poverty scale, with human conditions largely moving backwards” (Odukoya 2018, 174). The early attempt at institutionalising African unity was under the auspices of the Organisation of African unity (OAU) (now African Union, AU). Scholars are of the opinion that OAU was successful in actualizing the dismantling of colonialism and apartheid but ineffective in motorising the integration of African states and steering them to sustainable development (Packer and Rukare 2002; Ibeike-Jonah 2001; Bekerie 2001).

African statehood has been at a crossroads, mainly as a result of centrifugal forces that tug at its cohesiveness. Majority of African countries are categorised as fragile or failed states. The general challenge of fragility is captured by OECD (2016, 24) thus, “over 1.6 billion people, or 22% of the global population, currently live in ... fragile contexts. Population in these fragile contexts is anticipated to increase to 3 billion people, or 32% of the global population, by 2050.” Of particular challenge is that African states dominate the list of fragile states. For instance, out of 47 countries identified as fragile

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states in 2012, 28 of them were African states, thus making over half of African states fragile (OECD 2012). Even more alarming are current data on state fragility as at 2016: out of 56 fragile contexts examined and measured under the OECD's fragility framework, 35 are in sub-Saharan Africa (OECD 2016).

Despite the divergences in the conceptualization state fragility in both donor and academic circles (Olowu and Chanie 2016), this paper adopts the OECD definition which recognises the universality and multidimensionality of fragility by its harmonization of the parameters in divergent definitions. The OECD definition identifies and measures five dimensions of fragility namely economic, environmental, political, security and societal. Thus, within the context of these dimensions, state fragility connotes "the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Fragility can lead to negative outcomes including violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, humanitarian crises or other emergencies." (OECD 2016, 22).

The fragility of African states is linked to the mismanagement of opportunities by the emergent post-independence leaders and sustained afterwards by piratic and roguish political class riding on the wings of authoritarianism (Ahluwalia 2001). These leaders failed to facilitate structural, institutional and governance reforms that could have set the stage for the proper take-off of African statehood. Instead of state-building, they embarked upon nation-building, thus turning the potential advantage of ethnic heterogeneity, which characterised almost all African states, into a curse (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1999; Green 2011).

The recourse of African leaders to primordial and neopatrimonial ties as basis for solidarity was part of their strategies to hold onto political power whose utilitarian value consisted of its guarantee of access to state resources (Otunnu 2018; Ake 1981). The parochialism of exclusionary politics as basis for solidarity not only resuscitated the psyche of resistance as marginalised ethnic groups fought for inclusion but also resulted in social fragmentation and the de-legitimization of the state.

This paper problematizes state fragility in Africa tracing its roots to the serial failures of successive African leaderships to transform the colonial state, massive exploitation of the state by opportunistic elite and connivance of local elites with external forces (Otunnu 2018; Sigman and Lindberg 2017) and the seeming inaction of the AU with reference to its constitutive act. The paper contends that the relevance of AU in the overall architecture of reversing the contemporary fragility of African states lies in the single-minded expansion of its institutional and structural capability to meet its objectives on the economic, political and security fronts as avowed in the vision and spirit

of its constitutive act.

Theorising Statehood in Africa: Going Back to the Basics

Contemporary statehood in Africa is a product of centuries of contact and formal political domination by European states. The foundation of statehood in Africa did not follow the patterns of state formation that underpinned the emergence of states in Europe (Herbst 2000). Rather, states emerged in Africa according to the imperial interests of the European states. The conference, which was convened in Berlin in 1884-5 laid the ground rules for the partition of Africa (Gbenenye 2016; Griffiths 1986). Even though the partitioning of Africa was the agenda of the conference, African representatives were not in attendance and the 'triumphant' imperial powers neglected to organise referenda across the artificially-banded states to determine their support or otherwise. Thus, the conference was a European platform to share, among competing European powers, the continent of Africa as if it were a chattel (Gbenenye 2016; Igwe 2002; Okafor 2000). The exclusionary nature of state creation in Africa marginalised its people and resulted in lack of motivation to preserve and nurture the inherited states even after independence.

The emergence of state system often coincides with voluntary agreement of the people to found a socio-political entity. Such "founding" often entails the dismantling of the old social order and the erection of a new one in its stead. As Nnoli (2003, 14) asserts, "by the emergence of a new state we mean the coming into position of control of state power by a new ruling class at the expense of the old ruling class." But such a state must derive its essence and legitimacy from the people. Although the scramble for Africa by the Europeans led to the dethronement of the indigenous social order, it essentially lacked the support of the people. This essential condition of state formation which was neither fulfilled by the imperial powers nor rectified by the emergent African leaders after independence is amongst the factors that tend to haunt Africa's state system (Okafor 2000).

The retention of the colonial states by the emergent African leaders was a manifestation of their failure to recognise the incongruity of the inherited colonial state system to the future of independent Africa. Apart from the motives that spawned the emergence of colonial states, which were narrow and detrimental to the indigenous African people, these states had attributes that decidedly narrowed their viability. As Griffiths (1986); Easterly & Levine (1997) point out, European colonialism lumped together people of diverse cultures and traditions, created arbitrary geographical boundaries that were

in grotesque shapes and varied sizes and evolved state entities that were either small and economically unviable or large and unwieldy and as such ungovernable.

At the root of the contemporary crisis associated with state-building in Africa is the reliance of African leaders on faulty foundation of state system to drive statehood. This faulty foundation underpins the illusionary character of African states (Jackson and Rosberg 1986). The illusions of African statehood consist of the disconnect between it and the prevailing notion of the state in modern political, legal, and social theory as well as the experiential difference in the trajectory of state development between Europe, which is seen as a model, and Africa (Jackson and Rosberg 1986; Rotberg 2004; Akude 2009). Although the concept of state is contested by scholars on account of lack of exclusive attributes that differentiate it from other socio-political organizations, it ordinarily incorporates such referents as independent political structure of sufficient authority and power to govern, a defined territory, population and external recognition (Jackson and Rosberg 1986; Clapham 2002). As a result of the deviation of African states from the European model, such terms as “monopoly state,” “shadow state,” “quasi state,” “juridical state,” and “developmental state” among others have been used to characterise them (Otunnu 2018; Akude 2009; Clapham 2002). All these descriptive concepts depict African states as lacking the capabilities of sovereignty necessary for effective exercise of power and authority.

The dilemma of postcolonial African statehood is that most states failed even before they were formed (Englebert and Tull 2007). The manifestation of this failure is encapsulated in the various dimensions of contradictions that beset African states immediately after political independence. A checklist of these contradictions spans the broad spectrum of development challenges and range from the distorted postcolonial dreams of inclusive development, violent conflicts, pervasive poverty, political instability and incapacity to implement policies to institutional weakness among others (Clapham 2002; Ahluwalia 2001; Jones, De Oliveira and Verhoeven 2013). There is tendency among scholars to view postcolonial African states as successor to, rather than continuation of, the colonial states. Such theoretical postulations discount the role of the erstwhile imperial powers in spawning and deepening the contradictions of African statehood or enthroning what scholars have variously termed the “African developmental crisis” or “African tragedy” (Smith 2006; Leys 1994). Rather, some anchor the crisis of statehood in Africa on predatory theory, which regards the state as an agent of particular groups, and situate leadership failure as a necessary manifestation of the predation (North 1981; Clapham 2002). And others conceptualise it within the ambit of actor-net-

work theory and thus approximate the crisis of statehood in Africa to material contradictions or “consequence of the absence of the physical infrastructure that is constitutive of modern government” (Schouten 2013). Olorunfoba & Falola (2018) and Omeje (2016) have pointed out these characterizations tend to obfuscate the role of external forces in shaping and contributing to the dysfunctionality of the state in Africa. A most obvious of these contributions was the manipulation by the colonial powers which raised the crop of leaders that took over leadership at independence and created links that consolidated post-independence relationships with them (Onimode 1983; Ake 1981).

The crisis that enveloped African states shortly after independence was an extension of popular opposition that had trailed colonialism. Because the post-independence African elite carried on with governance without any form of an overhaul of the inherited state system, and also proceeded to treat it in terms of business as usual, the resistance that characterised colonial rule was transferred to it. The bedrock of the crisis of statehood in Africa is the unresolved issue of social contract. The social contract theoretical perspective is concerned with political authority and legitimacy within state formations and is anchored on the principle of basic freedom, consent and equality (Neidleman 2012).

The central element in social contract is consensus, notwithstanding whether the consensus is built on explicit, tacit or hypothetical consent of the people (Van der Waldt 2013; Neidleman 2012; Abioye 2011). Essentially, consensus leading to social contract is achieved through bargaining with broad spectra of the polity. Thus, the essence of social contract is to legitimatise the basis for citizens within a state territory to “enjoy the rights and reap the benefits of the social order if s/he lives by its rules and fulfils the responsibilities of membership” (Flanagan 1999, 135). Igwe (2002) has argued that constitutional development represents a major approximation to social contract in contemporary state system as no state actually emerged from prior consultations akin to the classical social contract theorisation of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.

National constitutions have been represented by scholars as a symbolisation of social contract and concrete approximation to voluntary expression of consent by the people within the state system (Van der Waldt 2013; Abioye 2011; Diehl et al 2009). If this argument is taken further, it means that post-colonial African constitutions symbolise social contract. Constitution-making – both in the colonial and postcolonial era - could have served the purpose of social contract and, thus, state-building in Africa but it is undermined by certain systemic shortcomings. Constitution-making in Africa, which essentially adopted top-bottom strategies, only fulfilled the desires of the elite and

marginalised the people. Unlike the constitutions of western countries, which emanated from genuine pro-people platform, most African constitutions were parodies and lacked the credentials of representation. Thus, despite the insertion of phrases that pretended to confer authorship of constitutions on the people such as ‘we, the people...’, most African constitutions were not rooted in the people as most of the representatives that drafted them were imposed by both colonial and postcolonial governments (Abioye 2011). Postcolonial constitutions were not patently designed to tackle injustice and enthrone socio-political and economic justice but to entrench the ruling elite.

The disconnect between social contract and postcolonial African constitutions is domiciled in the conception of state power and its utilitarian value. State power was seen from economistic prism; that is, as a tool for accumulation. By extension, postcolonial constitutions were designed to preserve the colonial state with its legacy of state power for accumulation purposes (Ake 1996). This perception underpinned the personalisation and privatisation of the state and the attendant resistance that ultimately degenerated to various conflicts across Africa. But the personalisation of the social contract by the postcolonial African leaders created the neopatrimonial state that exists to serve the interest of the ruling class as well as their preservation. Such preservation precluded any form of regional or continental governance structure that could emasculate their exercise of power (Sigman and Lindberg 2017).

From State-building to Nation-building: Ethno-identity Pressures and the Crisis of Statehood

The nature of African statehood is both the root and component of the crisis that confronts the continent. This crisis is what has given rise to post-coloniality, which encapsulates the “post-colonial predicaments which African states have endured and continue to experience” as well as the “dilemmas of modernisation and the manner in which African states negotiate their way through complexities that have grown out of the colonial experience” (Ahluwalia 2001, 1). It is not as if the crisis of statehood is a post-independence phenomenon; it predated independence. The crisis of statehood had its origin in the colonial era when Africans challenged the legitimacy of the arbitrarily balkanised African territories. As Okafor (2000, 31-32) observes, “it was a crisis about the legitimacy of the form, organisational structure, and the behaviour of the state in the eyes of its component peoples.”

The attainment of independence in the 1960s by African states neither assuaged nor addressed the legitimacy question. Indeed, independence

redefined and exposed the bare contours of African statehood and intensified the contention of the centrifugal forces in them. Despite the seeming survival of African states, the domestic centrifugal forces have contributed to their near collapse and attendant development challenges. Thus, African states have been perennially enmeshed in the struggle for survival. The pre-occupation of African states with survival has led to their characterisation as juridical states. Clapham's (2002, 4) claim that "the evident weakness of African states did not reduce them to a state of inertia, in which their fate was determined by external powers" was not only analytically misleading but out of sync with the reality of the African situation. The inability of African states to enthrone development deepened domestic crises with continual threat to their sovereignty. As Ahluwalia (2001, 54) asserts, African states became entrapped as subjects of "new colonial administrators" made up of the World Bank, the IMF and a host of non-governmental organisations who determine and dictate their fundamental policies.

The weakness of African states made them pawns in the chessboard of ideological contestation in the cold war era. The artificiality and tenuousness of these states were made manifest when, at the end of cold war era, western states began to withdraw their support from the puppet-regimes across Africa. Underscoring the influence of external powers in propping up regimes and masking the weakness of African states, Gettleman (2010) asserts, "the cold war's end bred state collapse and chaos. Where meddling great powers once found dominoes that needed to be kept from falling, they suddenly saw no national interest at all". The effect was the proliferation of conflicts as so many rogue groups emerged with such rapidity that governments began to collapse. The devastating effects of these conflicts on African development have been enormous. Between 1990 and 2005, it was estimated that Africa squandered close to US\$284 billion (or US\$18 billion yearly) to prosecute conflicts (IANSA, Oxfam and Saferworld 2007, 9).

There appears to be retrogression in the nature of statehood in Africa. Going by Jackson and Rosberg's (1982) typology of empirical and juridical statehood, which also coincides with Jackson and Sørensen's (2007) classification of states into formal or legal institutions and substantial political-economic organisations, African states seem to have degenerated from empirical statehood which the erstwhile imperial powers left at independence to juridical statehood in the course of time, as independent states. The distinguishing characteristics of empirical and juridical statehood lie in their features: while empirical statehood depicts states that possess the capability to protect their sovereignty through the functionality of their administrative and governance structures as well as the wherewithal to project and protect their national in-

terest, juridical statehood signifies states that lack the basic sovereign authority and power to exclusively impose its will both on its territorial space and in the international arena (Akude 2009; Jackson and Sørensen 2007; Jackson and Rosberg 1982).

The degeneration of postcolonial African states to juridical statehood is a product of the inability of the emergent African leaders to fully understand the role of the state. This distortion in the role of the state manifested at three levels: at the first level, the elite converted the state into a means of accumulation and the state was unable to manage ethnic diversity. As Ake (1981, 126) affirms, “the massive intervention of the state in the economic sphere and the use of political power as the means of appropriation distorts (sic) the role of the capitalist state in Africa”. At the second level, the arbitrariness that characterised the composition of most African states and their multiethnic character provided the environment for the explosion of primeval sentiments. Although scholars hold divergent positions about the relationship between ethnic diversity and conflict (Bleaney and Dimico 2017), postcolonial African leaders have often exploited the diversity in ethnic composition to achieve parochial political and economic objectives including conflicts (Green 2011; Ukiwo 2005; Nzongola-Ntalaja 1999; Ake 1981). The primeval sentiments are normally mobilised to ensure victory in intra-and inter-elite rivalry for political ascendancy. At the third and last level was the increasing predilection toward the homogenisation of the intra-state differences. This consisted of attempts to paper over the diversity in the state by making one nation out of multiple nations that make most African states (Okafor 2000). This attempt spawned the ground for the pockets of conflicts across Africa.

After the supervised elections that produced the first crop of postcolonial African leaders, which Onimode (1983) insists coincided with the interest of the retreating imperial powers, the task of state-building changed to nation-building. Although concepts of “state-building” and “nation-building” are used interchangeably, they have different connotations. Nation-building is conceived in ethnic, cultural, historical or political sense and denotes actions undertaken to mobilise and forge a common sense of nationhood in a multi-national setting. Nation-building is often undertaken to counter alternate sources of identity and loyalty. State-building, on the other hand, comprises purpose-driven actions of the ruling elite or national actors directed at increasing and strengthening the capacity and capability of the state to carry out its statutory responsibilities (OECD 2008).

In the post-independence era, the emergent African leaders enacted their own form of “divide and rule” strategy as they relied on primordial ties as basis for solidarity and retention of political powers. In other words, in-

stead of diversity being managed and converted into a source of strength and opportunity for development, it became the Achilles heel of intra-state integration. It was not an accident, but part of the survival strategies of the elite to hold on to power, which was and still is, central in the matrix of accumulation. Across Africa, the ruling elite promoted ethnicity, religious affiliations and other group identifiers as basis of primary allegiance. In Nigeria, for example, not only did the emergent leaders root their political platforms in their ethnic regions, they professed the unworkability of the Nigerian state as the late Obafemi Awolowo described it as a mere geographical expression and Tafawa Balewa (Nigeria's first Prime Minister), as an intention of Britain and its colonial policy (Coleman 1986; Uzoigwe 1999). Even in states like Somalia with one ethnic group and religion, the forces of ethnicity, in the form of "clan factions," played detrimental roles that culminated in its "its complete political and economic failure as a state" (Loubser and Solomon 2014, 1).

The deployment of the ethnic card by Africa ruling elite led to the distortion and retreat of the state and its democratic credentials. In place of people-oriented government anchored on multi-partyism, the state moved towards one-party system, thus becoming a replica of the colonial state that had been overthrown (Kadima 2006). Berman (1998, 305) identifies the essential features of these states as "bureaucratic authoritarianism, pervasive patron-client relations and complex ethnic dialectics of assimilation, fragmentation and competition". The reaction to the personalisation of the state was the enthronement of the psychology of resistance by those who believed they had been marginalised. Ethnic politics across African states also created the crisis of citizenship. As Manby (2009, 1-2) asserts, "...questions of citizenship have been used to prevent specific individuals from challenging for political position or to silence those who criticize the government." For instance, such personalities as Kenneth Kaunda, former president of Zambia and Alassane Ouattara, former prime minister of Côte d'Ivoire, were among politicians who found themselves excluded from office or denied citizenship on account of seemingly absurd arguments about their ancestral origins.

Most of the intra-state conflicts originated from ethnic nationalism targeted at resisting domestic imperialism. The cost of conflicts has been enormous, ranging from the depletion of human resources necessary for development, the retardation of chances of development to fragile state system incapable of undertaking state functions. World-wide estimates of conflict-related deaths between 1960 and 2005 were put at 6.6 million. Out of this number, Africa accounted for 1.6 million or 24 percent (AfDB 2008). The preoccupation of African states with issues of state-survival underpins the lack of meaningful progress in the area of continent-wide integration.

African Union, State Fragility and the Contradictions of Statehood

The AU (formerly OAU) has been in existence for the past fifty-five years having emerged from the deep introspective recognition of African unity as basis for relevance in the global arena. In theorising about uniting African states to form a political leviathan, post-independence African leaders took it as given that the states created by the Europeans could be relied upon to build continental political edifice. Thus, the then OAU, (now AU) through a resolution of the Assembly of Heads of States and Government in 1964 adopted the existing colonial boundaries and did not push for their renegotiation as basis for the quest for continental unity (Okafor 2000; Manby 2009).

Although African states were decreed into existence to satisfy European interests, namely the quest for politico-economic ascendancy, advancement of their economic interest, the maintenance of the psychological make-belief of imperial relevance and quest for power, it was contended by African leaders that readjusting the inherited colonial boundaries would be counter-productive as it had the potentiality of leading to avoidable conflicts (Ahluwalia 2001). Some scholars rationalised the position of AU (then OAU) on colonial boundaries on three grounds, namely, pragmatic reasons; ideological reasons; and political rationality and contended that the justification for AU's line of action then lay in the near-absence of inter-state conflicts (Ahluwalia 2001; Okafor 2000).

The contemporary fragility associated with African states originated from the evolutionary crystallisation of the contradictions of colonial statehood and therefore, calls to question the historical decision of AU in 1964 to retain colonial boundaries. Indeed, that decision reflected a serious contradiction that is difficult to situate. The then OAU was a product of compromise that attempted to harmonise the extreme positions of the Brazzaville, Casablanca and Monrovia groups, which oscillated between immediate setting up of United States of Africa with African Central Government (ACG) and gradualism based on forging continental unity after state consolidation (Williams 2007; Igwe 2002; Ibeike-Jonah 2001). The emergence of OAU was a tacit renunciation of the proposition for ACG. Thus, the most natural path for OAU given its major objectives, especially the promotion of unity and solidarity among African states and eradication of all forms of colonialism on the continent, would have been to work towards re-examining statehood from the perspective of colonial boundaries as a means to removing the basis for future tensions (Laumann 2012).

Paradoxically, this policy failure led to the consequence which the then OAU leadership had intended to avoid, namely conflicts. As Ahluwalia (2001, 69) avers, “the [OAU], whilst recognising that inherited borders were problematic, feared endless conflicts over them and decided that these European-drawn borders were to remain uncontested”. But, having focused on fear of inter-state conflicts, its inaction on state territoriality inadvertently spawned a different sort of conflicts - internal conflicts - with devastating consequences on statehood (Gbenenye 2016; Manby 2009; Okafor 2000). Even some of the internal wars developed the character of inter-state war. For instance, the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was an offshoot of citizenship crisis that started at independence but crystallised in 1964 when the first constitution set parameters for citizenship, which potentially denationalised some segments of the country, especially the Banyarwanda populations. As Manby (2009, 8) has observed, “those excluded by these laws form the core of the rebel groups that have challenged central authority since the late 1990s”.

State fragility appears to be descriptively denotative of postcolonial African states although such countries as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Haiti, and Kosovo among others are situated within this categorisation (OECD 2012). There is no agreement among scholars about the impact of colonialism on fragility of African states, especially because of lack of homogeneity in colonial policies of erstwhile imperial powers, the nature of colonial settlement and the duration of colonial rule. Thus, while some studies found correlation between colonialism and contemporary fragility of African states (Ziltener and Kunzler 2013), others found no such relationship (Tusalem 2016; Bertocchi & Guerzon 2012).

There appears to be no real analytical demarcation between such concepts as “failed state”, “collapsed state” or “fragile state”. They all depict a state that is in various forms of distress, characterized by the breakdown of law and order as well as loss of political and administrative capacity to govern and oversee the efficient distribution of public goods and services (Tusalem 2016). Notwithstanding the problem of analytic impreciseness, these concepts yield certain regular meanings that fall within the capacity of a state to satisfy issues bordering on security, the provision of basic services, and the protection of essential civil freedoms (Eizenstat, Porter and Weinstein 2005). State fragility coincides with the loss of empirical statehood and descent to juridical statehood. OECD (2007) follows this trend when it defined state fragility in terms of “state structures lack[ing] political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations.” The onset of fragility in African states is traced to independence. As Okafor (2000, 34) puts it, “...

the post-colonial African state has been crisis-ridden virtually since the very moment of its independence. ... The moment of independence was for many African states also at once the moment of crisis.” During the 1960s, there were seven episodes of conflict involving Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan (first war), Rwanda, Ethiopia (in Eritrea), Burundi (1965), Nigeria (Biafra), and Equatorial Guinea (Strauss 2012). A common shortcoming in the various definitional boundaries of state fragility is their discountenance of the unequal global system as part of the identifying parameters of fragile states.

Prior to OAU’s transformation to AU in 2001, the conclusion of scholars and leaders was that even though it did commendable work in mobilising and championing the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid cause, it failed abysmally in consolidating Africa’s political and economic independence (Ibeike-Jonah 2001). The disconnect between OAU’s avowed objectives and actual performance prompted Julius Nyerere to describe it as a forum where African leaders convened once a year to pass ineffective resolutions (cited in Bekerie 2001). The seeming ineffectiveness of OAU was attributed to the “personalistic, materialistic and opportunistic character of African politics” (Berman 1998, 305). There were other reasons too: the first was the primacy of political power in the calculation of the elite. The fact that political power was a visa of sorts to economic wellbeing through accumulation made its relinquishment for continental unity difficult (Ake 1981). Second, most African leaders were not products of democratic process and thus couldn’t care less about African unity (Ibeike-Jonah 2001). Third, there were varying political and ideological pretensions and divisions that stoked distrust and, thus, undermined attempts at building a formidable continental organisation. Lastly, there was overbearing influence of the erstwhile imperial powers through the division of Africa into Anglophone and Francophone geo-economic and geopolitical zones (Bekerie 2001).

Reinventing the AU for the Exorcism of the Spectre of State Fragility and Failure

The transformation of OAU to AU in July 2001 was a direct response to the shortcomings of OAU and the need to strengthen it to meet the challenges of globalisation. The AU differs significantly from OAU in a number of ways: one, it professes respect for democratic principles and denounces non-democratic methods of changing governments; two, it reduces the bar on non-interference in the internal affairs of all member states; three, it accords itself the responsibility to protect by making provisions for collective action

in grave circumstances such as wars, genocide and crimes against humanity; four, legitimate governments could request for intervention if it is under threat of military coup d'état; and lastly, it sets up good governance institutions such as common parliament, Central Bank and a court of justice modelled after the European Union (Okhonmina 2009; Williams 2007; Packer and Rukare 2002; Ibeike-Jonah 2001).

As at the time AU came on board, almost every part of Africa was embroiled in varying degrees of political, economic and security challenges. The ensembles of state fragility do not just comprise the incapacity of the state to provide the conducive environment for development but extends to the nature of the global economic system, especially the peripheral status of African states. It could not be by accident that all states categorised as fragile states are countries of the periphery with colonial foundations (Tusalem 2016; OECD 2012). As has already been noted, the overbearing influence and meddlesomeness of the developed countries in African states had sustained dictatorial regimes before the “third wave of democratisation” and continues to dictate policy directions. All the questionable leaders and dictators in Africa from Idi Amin of Uganda, Jean-Bedel Bokassa of Central African Republic to Mobutu Sese Seko of DRC were originally the product of this support. The end of the Cold War with the withdrawal of western support exposed these governments as many of them, from Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR-C), became theatres of diverse forms of intra-state violence.

The greatest problem facing the AU is how to break the fragility trap in Africa. The Malian case has also provided a twist about how easily a country could switch from stability to fragility (OECD 2012). Before the military coup d'état that plunged Mali into crisis, the country was showcased as an epitome of democratic consolidation having held repeated elections (Kim 2013). State fragility in Africa is a product of internal and external factors. Internal factors include ethno-religious crises, terrorism, poverty, corruption, political intolerance, inoperative or weak enforcement of the rule of law and political instability spawned by political desperation among others. At the external level are such factors as the unfavourable global capitalist system, small arms and light weapons proliferation, iron-tight hold of erstwhile imperial powers on their former colonies as exemplified by the pattern of economic regionalisation and proxy wars.

The continued relevance of AU is dependent on its capacity to dismantle the various impediments to efficient operations. Granted that, on paper, the AU possesses the institutional facilities to handle security challenges, the question is: does it have the capacity to pull it off? Based on the experience

of the Arab Spring, particularly the Libyan crisis and the Malian conflict, the answer might be in the negative. The various institutions set up by the AU, especially the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which entered into force on 26 December 2003, represent the broad security architecture to secure peace in Africa. The PSC and other institutions within the AU such as the African Standby Force (ASF), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and the Panel of the Wise (PW), “are meant to deliver comprehensive peace to the continent as they are ‘home grown initiatives that are meant to put the destiny of the continent into the hands of the African people’” (Kasaija 2013, 121).

The effectiveness of AU is dependent on certain critical factors, especially the full and proactive support of its membership. As appealing as the AU maxim of “African solution to African problems,” might appear, it would degenerate to mere sloganeering in the absence of requisite tools to effect the solution. As the Libyan and Malian conflicts demonstrated, the AU lacks the requisite tools to independently deal with crises on the continent. With respect to the Libyan crisis, AU’s indecisiveness created room for both the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to pay more attention to the position of the Arab League and other organisations. The AU, despite its avowed commitment to the notion of ‘non-indifference’, neither intervened, threatened to intervene nor imposed any form of sanction on Libya, no matter how symbolic, throughout the nine-month period of the Libyan conflict (Kasaija 2013). As a matter of fact, the AU was sharply divided with some countries either recognising the rebels or sitting on the fence.

Security challenges are not the only triggers and drivers of state fragility. Socio-economic issues, especially deprivation of access to means of livelihood, either through skewed and detrimental state policies or from such causes as climate change, are as potent drivers as armed conflicts in plunging a state into the ranks of fragile states. The pervasive poverty and hunger across Africa are not only major contributors to its fragility but also its outcome. In 2010, about 239 million people in Africa were categorized as being undernourished (FAO 2010). By 2016, there was further deterioration. According to FAO et al, (2016, 11), Africa had the “highest levels of severe food insecurity, reaching 27.4 percent of the population – almost four times that of any other region in 2016,” meaning that more than 243 million people in Africa did not have access to sufficient food energy. Similarly, the United Nations estimates put the number of people living in extreme poverty in 2008 at 386 million (United Nation 2012). Added to the foregoing are the data on internal and supranational displacements. In 2011, the proportion African people categorized as comprising “population of concern” to UNHCR was put at 13.5 million. By 2016, this number had increased to 19.6 million, mainly as a result of the exacerbation of conflicts and conflict zones in Africa. The

concept of “population of concern to UNHCR” is used to refer to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees (refugees and IDPs), stateless persons, and others of concern to UNHCR (UNHCR 2012; 2016). What all these statistics suggest is that there is serious task ahead of AU if it must be relevant in reversing the trend of state fragility in Africa.

The five-step strategy enunciated by Jim Yong Kim, the president of the World Bank Group, to help fragile states get back on the path of recovery is instructive. Kim (2013) enumerated the steps to include understanding the drivers of fragility and conflict; delivering faster, more flexible and timely assistance; quick wins, that is, the quest to achieve early results in order to win public trust in building institutions while also focusing on the long term goals; provision of jobs and more jobs to help break the cycle of poverty and violence; and setting in motion coordinated, rather than disjointed, development assistance. Kasaija (2013) has pointed out that the problems facing the AU consisted of division among AU members, financial constraints and institutional incapacity. Emphasizing the disconnect between proclamation and reality in terms of the capacity of AU to intervene militarily in disputes, Kasaija (2013, 122) observes that the thinking behind the African Standby Force (ASF) is to have a peacekeeping force capable of rapid deployment in pursuit of AU, UN mandate, but “since it was first mooted in July 2002, the ASF has been a work in progress”.

Conclusion

State fragility appears to be the most daunting challenge to Africa. Fragility is not the cause of Africa’s development crisis but rather the manifestation of the incapacity of African states to discharge their stately functions. The roots of fragility were firmly planted when the emergent post-independence African leaders declined to re-draw the boundaries of the colonial states they inherited. Added to this was the privatisation of the state through the instrumentality of ethnicity.

State-building and state fragility are opposite sides of the same coin. As a matter of fact, what is needed to reverse state fragility is a robust and result-oriented state-building. The relevance of AU in driving the reversal of state fragility lies in increasing its capability. As it is, there is a serious disconnect between the avowed objectives of AU and its capability to actualise them. The challenge which AU faces in facilitating state-building and thus end state fragility is the strengthening of its institutional capacity.

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ABSTRACT

This article evaluates the transformational role of the African Union (AU) in enhancing state-building and reversing the fragility of African states. Essentially, the AU was repackaged in July 2001 as a strategic platform to meet new aspirations for African unity and development. This article notes that after over half a century of collective African attempt at strengthening its state system, the picture is still one of fragile statehood, thus emphasizing the imperative of evolving new strategies to reverse the forces of state fragility in the continent. The article contends that in the face of concerns for African development within the context of sustainable development goals (SDGs), a healthy and functional state system is an irreducible minimum requirement. In order to repair the seemingly battered image of statehood in Africa, the AU must contend with, and overcome, the interplay of internal and external forces that conduce to and trigger fragility.

KEYWORDS

African Union; crisis of statehood; ethno-identity; fragile statehood; nation-building; state-building.

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