

CONTEXT AS THE PRINCIPAL DETERMINANT OF THE BEHAVIOUR OF STATES IN GLOBAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper seeks to offer an explanation of the behaviour of states in global politics. It argues that a key lesson we can learn from international history is that the behaviour of states in global politics is principally determined by the context in which they behave or act; context determines whether states behave in line with the tenets of realism, liberalism, constructivism, English School, critical theories, or a combination of two or more theories. In order to concretise the discussion, the paper does a historical analysis of the international history of Africa which proves that context is the principal determinant of the behaviour of states in global politics; this is not only true of African international history, but also true of world history. Then the paper concludes that the sooner we learn this lesson, the better we will be able to create contexts that will engender desirable state behaviour!*

KEYWORDS: Africa, Context, Global Politics, International History, State, Theory.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to offer an explanation of the behaviour of states in global politics. This paper argues that a key lesson we can learn from international history is that the behaviour of states in global politics is principally determined by the context in which they behave or act. In other words, context is the principal determinant of the behaviour of states in global politics. The sooner we learn this lesson, the better we will be able to create contexts that will engender desirable state behaviour!

The paper is in three parts. The first part, relying on Kenneth Waltz's distinction between law and theory (without relying on Waltz's own theory), uses that distinction as the standard to judge what a theory is. This is of two-fold importance: first, it is based on this standard that we are able to ascertain what a theory of International Relations (IR) is; second, it is based on this standard that we are able to ascertain whether our explanation of the behaviour of states in global politics – which we will refer to as contextualism - qualifies as a theory of IR.

The second part explains our conception of 'context' and then goes on to discuss how this conception explains the behaviour of states in global politics. In order to illustrate our explanation, the third part of the paper does a historical analysis of the international history of Africa. The analysis begins with colonial Africa and ends with postcolonial Africa. The hypothesis that context determines the behaviour of states in global politics is not only true of African international history, but also true of world history. Learning the lesson of the

hypothesis is not only helpful to Africa, but also the entire world. Nevertheless, in order to narrow down or concretise our discussion, our focus shall be on Africa.

THE EXPLANATORY FUNCTION OF THEORY

Let us start with a working definition of theories as “system[s] of ideas based on general principles designed to organise thought and to explain or justify something” (Rizzo and Whitmann, 2003: 549). In order to understand the general principles of theories, firstly let us turn to law to see what we can learn from it, and then return to theory. “Law tells us the relationship between different variables, namely independent variables and dependent variables. Laws tell us if *a* then *b*, that is, if certain or particular independent variable(s), then certain or particular dependent variable(s) (Waltz, 1979: 1). A law is said to be absolute when the relationship between *a* and *b* is invariant, but when the relationship between *a* and *b* is “highly constant, though not invariant” the law is said to be probabilistic (Waltz, 1979: 1).

Although laws tell us the relationship between independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s), laws are not merely based on relationships that have been established or that have been discovered to exist. Rather laws are based on relationships that have been repeatedly established or repeatedly discovered to exist. It is this repetitive character of the relationships between independent variable(s) and dependent variable(s) which makes us expect that having repeatedly found independent variable *a* and then dependent variable *b* in the past, in the future whenever and wherever we find independent variable *a*, then we will also find dependent variable *b* albeit “with specified probability” (Waltz, 1979: 1). On the contrary, theories are “not the occurrences seen and the associations recorded”, rather theories are the explanations of those occurrences and associations (Waltz, 1979: 9).

On the one hand, theory can be defined as a collection or set of laws concerning “a particular behaviour or phenomenon” (Waltz, 1979: 1). In this sense, although theory and law are of the same ‘kind’, theory is quantitatively more complex than law (Waltz, 1979: 2). In Popperian terms, a theory is a result of hypothesis which is falsifiable but has been corroborated by observation. But when the hypothesis is falsified, then it is an erroneous theory or it does not even qualify to be a theory at all in the first place. In other words, theories are products of conjectures, and are only viable if or when the conjectures are confirmed (Waltz, 1979: 2). On the other hand, theory can be defined as a statement that explains laws (Waltz, 1979: 5). In this sense, theory and law are not of the same ‘kind’; theory and law are qualitatively different (Waltz, 1979: 5). The qualitative difference is that “laws identify invariant or probable associations” while “theories show why those associations obtain” (Waltz, 1979: 5).

In laws, descriptive terms are “directly tied to observational or laboratory procedures, and laws are established only if they pass observational or experimental tests” (Waltz, 1979: 5). But theories contain more than descriptive terms, they also contain theoretical notions: therefore “theories cannot be constructed through induction alone, for theoretical notions can only be invented, not discovered” (Waltz, 1979: 5). In a nutshell, while laws mainly perform the function of prediction (predictive functions), theories in the first sense of our definition

mainly perform the function of description (descriptive functions), and theories in the second sense of our definition mainly perform the function of explanation (explanatory functions).

Theoretical notions can be concepts or assumptions. For this reason, theoretical notions neither predict nor explain anything: concepts, on the one hand, are not statements of facts; and assumptions, on the other hand, are not assertions of fact. Therefore, concepts and assertions can neither be said to be true nor can they be said to be false (Waltz, 1979: 5 – 6). “Theories are combinations of descriptive and theoretical elements. The theoretical elements are nonfactual elements of a theory....They are introduced only when they make explanation possible” (Waltz, 1979: 10). In other words, “theories create their assumptions”; therefore, “in addition to simplifications, or as forms of them, theories embody theoretical assumptions” (Waltz, 1979: 10).

Given that veracity and falsity do not apply to theoretical notions, to justify theoretical notions we do not search for their truth value, rather we justify them based on how successful “the theories that employ them” (Waltz, 1979: 6) are when those theories perform explanatory functions. So, while we ask whether laws are true or false when they perform predictive functions, we ask whether theories are helpful or unhelpful when they perform explanatory functions (Waltz, 1979: 6). In other words, of laws we ask are their predictions true or false, while of theories we ask how helpful they are in performing explanatory functions. Moreover, “laws are ‘facts of observation’; theories are ‘speculative processes introduced to explain them’” (Waltz, 1979: 6).

As mental pictures of delineated spheres of activity, theories portray the structures or arrangements of the spheres and show us the way(s) in which the links among the parts of the spheres are structured or arranged (Waltz, 1979: 8). Since the unlimited, or at least vast, materials of any sphere can be structured or arranged in infinitely diverse ways, theories help us distinguish the more significant factors from the less significant factors and then indicate the relationships that exist among them (Waltz, 1979: 8).

It is for the above reason that theories separate or segregate one sphere from all other spheres and then totally focus on the one sphere as if all the other spheres do not exist. Without separating or segregating one sphere from all other spheres, it becomes impossible to develop theories that can explain what happens inside the one sphere (Waltz, 1979: 8). Through a theory, the importance of the observed phenomenon is revealed. “A theory arranges phenomena so that they are seen as mutually dependent; it connects otherwise disparate facts; it shows how changes in some of the phenomena necessarily entail changes in others” (Waltz, 1979: 9 – 10).

Just as the right question to ask about a theory is not whether it is true or false, but whether it is helpful or unhelpful, the right question to ask about the separation or segregation of one sphere from all the other spheres is not whether the separation or segregation is realistic, but rather whether the separation or segregation is useful or not useful (Waltz, 1979: 8). This is not to say that theories do not construct a reality, but we cannot ascertain that *a* reality constructed by a theory is *the* reality (Waltz, 1979: 9). Consequently, we have to deal with not only infinite data, but also infinite possible explanations of the infinite data. Therefore,

“facts do not determine theories; more than one theory may fit any set of facts. Theories do not explain facts conclusively; we can never be sure that a good theory will not be replaced by a better one” (Waltz, 1979: 9).

Separation or segregation is useful to the extent a theory is successful in performing its explanatory functions, and separation or segregation is said not to be useful to the extent that a theory is unsuccessful in performing its explanatory functions (Waltz, 1979: 8). “To form a theory requires a pattern where none is visible to the naked eye....A theory must then be constructed through simplifying....Simplifications lay bare the essential elements in play and indicate the necessary relations of cause and interdependency – or suggest where to look for them” (Waltz, 1979: 10). This is because the aim of simplification, whatever way or however simplification is done “is to try to find the central tendency among a confusion of tendencies, to single out the propelling principle even though other principles operate, to seek the essential factors where innumerable factors are present” (Waltz, 1979: 10).

The major problem in the formulation of a theory is the problem of simplification, that is, “the difficulty of moving from causal speculations based on factual studies to theoretical formulations that lead one to view facts in particular ways” (Waltz, 1979: 10). To deal with the problem of simplification, we rely on the following solutions sequentially; isolation, abstraction, aggregation and idealization. In isolation, we view the “actions and interactions of a small number of factors and forces as though in the meantime other things remain equal” (Waltz, 1979: 10). In abstraction, we leave “some things aside in order to concentrate on others” (Waltz, 1979: 10). In aggregation, we lump “disparate elements together according to criteria derived from a theoretical purpose” (Waltz, 1979: 10). In idealization, we proceed “as though perfection were attained or a limit reached even though neither can be” (Waltz, 1979: 10).

In this paper, our understanding of theory is not that of theory as descriptive apparatus but that of theory as explanatory apparatus. We are committed to the Waltzian position that the performance of explanatory functions is the essence of theories. Finally, just as we are not committed to the understanding of theory as descriptive apparatus, so also we are not committed to law and its predictive function. Our focus is not on law but on theory because we are not interested in prediction but in explanation. Moreover, “the study of politics is not, and cannot be, like physics, because what we study and what we are interested in explaining are not inanimate objects to which absolute, invariant and fixed laws apply” (Steinmo, 2008: 134).

CONTEXT, CONTEXTUALISM AND CONTEXTUAL THEORY OF GLOBAL POLITICS

I agree with realists (neo-realists) and liberals (neo-liberals) that states are the dominant actors in *international* politics, I also agree with liberals that states are not the only relevant actors in *global* politics. Other actors such as supranational organisations, multinational corporations, etc are relevant too. So, rather than talking about international relations theory

or theory of international politics as a theory that explains the behaviour of states at the *international* arena, we should be talking about theory of global politics as a theory that explains the behaviour of the relevant global actors, be they states, supranational organizations, multinational corporations, etc at the *global* arena.

Consequently, rather than the term international relations or international politics, the term global politics is more appropriate for how we understand the relevant actors of our subject-matter. Hence, we shall be using the term contextual theory of global politics rather than contextual theory of international relations or contextual theory of international politics. Nevertheless, in this paper, we are only concerned with the behaviour of states rather than with the behaviour of other global actors.

Contextual theory of global politics, or contextualism, is the sort of analysis which gives pre-eminence to the place of context in global politics. By context we mean: (i) the era, period, or time; (ii) the place or space, and; (iii) the conditions or circumstances; which make up the milieu in which a relevant global actor (for instance a state) acts or behaves or in which relevant global actors (for instance states) act or behave.

In contextualism, context is the principal element that shapes, structures or determines behaviour. In contextualism we place emphasis on the importance of context because the relevant actors in global politics act within a context, global political decisions are made or global political events occur within a “context, which has a direct consequence for the decisions or events” (Steinmo, 2008: 127). Moreover, “behaviour, attitudes and strategic choices take place inside particular social, political, economic and even cultural contexts” (Steinmo, 2008: 127).

Analogously, context is to contextualism what institutions are to institutionalism. Institutions may be understood as former rules and organizations or as informal rules and norms (Steinmo, 2008: 123 – 124). Just as institutionalism stresses “the role institutions play in structuring behaviour” (Steinmo, 2008: 123), so also contextualism stresses the role context plays in determining, structuring or shaping the behaviour of states in global politics. A further explication of institutionalism will help our comprehension of contextualism. So let us devote a few paragraphs to teasing out institutionalism.

In institutionalism, a helpful distinction is that among rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism and historical institutionalism. Institutions, according to rational choice institutionalism, configure the pattern of inducements and penalties which are obtainable by individuals when they make decisions. But for sociological institutionalism, individuals are socialized by institutions; hence individuals’ behaviour is formed by what they consider to be appropriate due to their socialization. While historical institutionalism can agree with the positions of rational choice institutionalists and sociological institutionalists, it accentuates the significance “of context and of the historical order of events” (Della Porta and Keating, 2008: 9 – 10).

Rational choice institutionalism sees human beings as “rational individuals who calculate the costs and benefits in the choices they face” (Steinmo, 2008: 126). It sees institutions to be

important only “because they frame the individual’s strategic behaviour” (Steinmo, 2008: 126). In other words, rational choice institutionalists consider humans to be strategic actors whose aim is the maximisation of personal benefits, and it is due to this reason that we follow rules. We co-operate because we get more with co-operation than without it. We follow rules because we individually do better when we do so” (Steinmo, 2008: 126).

Unlike rational choice institutionalists, sociological institutionalists argue that human beings are not as selfish, self-interested or ‘rational’ as rational choice institutionalists portray them to be (Steinmo, 2008: 126). Rather, human beings are:

fundamentally social beings ‘satisficers’ who act habitually institutions frame the very way in which people see their world and are not just rules within which they try to work. Rather than following rules to maximise their self-interest, humans ... follow a ‘logic of appropriateness’the important institutions (rules) are social norms that govern everyday life and social interaction (Steinmo, 2008: 126).

Middle-of-the-road between rational choice institutionalists and sociological institutionalists are historical institutionalists who argue that “human beings are *both* norm abiding rule followers *and* self-interested rational actors. How one behaves depends on the individual, on the context and on the rules” (emphasis is original) (Steinmo, 2008: 126). But to know which is more important between human beings as portrayed by rational choice institutionalists and human beings as portrayed by sociological institutionalists, historical institutionalists say we will have to look at history (Steinmo, 2008: 126), that is, the particular history in which particular human beings acted.

In our analysis of global politics, we are neither seeing states through the lens of rational choice institutionalists alone, nor through the lens of sociological institutionalists alone, nor even through the lens of historical institutionalists alone. We are seeing states through a combination of the lenses of rational choice institutionalists, sociological institutionalists and historical institutionalists. Contextualism should be taken as a Weberian ideal type. According to Max Weber (1949), “an ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasised viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct” (emphasis is original) (90).

Ideal type is essentially, wholly and only a depiction of a model-phenomenon that is not only imaginable but also adequately representative of the realities it depicts. It is to it that the realities it represents or real cases are to be approximated. But it neither stands for ‘perfection’ nor is it the ‘average’ of what it represents (Weber, 1949: 90 – 92). As a Weberian ideal type, contextualism neither stands for perfection nor is it the average of the behaviour of states in global politics. But it is to it that the realities of the behaviour of states in global politics are to be approximated.

In summary, contextualism says that although there are various factors that determine the behaviour of states in global politics, the most important factor is context. This sort of

analysis is analogous to the sort of analysis Kenneth Waltz did in *Man, the State and War*. In Waltz's analysis, there are three images in international politics namely the first image (man), the second image (the state) and the third image (the international system). Waltz (2001) argued that while the first and second images play some roles in international politics, the most important image is the third image because it is the international system that determines, more than man and the state do, the behaviour of states in international politics. Analogously contextualism argues that although there are other factors that determine the behaviour of states in global politics, the most important determining-factor is the context in which states behave or act.

States may behave according to the tenets of realism, liberalism, constructivism, English School or even the different forms of critical theory. In their behaviour, states may mix elements of one theory with elements of another theory or other theories. But whether states are realists, liberals or constructivists, or whether states behave in line with English School or tend to behave in line with critical theories depends on the context in which states behave or act. Furthermore, whether states mix elements of one theory with elements of another theory or other theories depend on the context in which states behave or act.

INTERNATIONAL HISTORY OF AFRICA

To check for how context is the principal determinant of the behaviour of states in African international history, we will not discuss how pre-colonial African empires, kingdoms, emirates and sultanates behaved internationally in pre-colonial times. This is not because context did not determine the behaviour of ancient African empires, kingdoms, emirates and sultanates; although these African entities have a lot to teach us, they are no longer in existence. We are interested in the behaviour of existing states and the characteristics of the existing international system rather than the behaviour of non-existent or defunct quasi-states and pseudo states, and the characteristics of a non-existent or defunct 'international system.'

Moreover, in pre-colonial Africa, since there were no states as we understand states now, it will be more appropriate that we skip pre-colonial Africa since what we are really interested in is the behaviour of modern and contemporary states rather than the behaviour of quasi-states or pseudo states. Our concern is with the existing states - the contemporary states; how they have behaved, how they are behaving and how they may behave. So let us skip pre-colonial Africa to colonial and postcolonial Africa

We cannot, and we do not need to, cover in any detailed manner the whole of colonial Africa and postcolonial Africa. We do not even have to do general historical study; what we are interested in is international history. The length of this article does not allow us to do detailed analysis, and the extensity, intensity and longevity of colonialism in Africa, and the multifaceted and complex nature of postcolonial Africa do not allow us the time to do detailed analysis in this article. So, when we talk about the behaviour of the colonised, the colonisers, and contemporary states we are talking about the norm rather than the exception. Of course there are exceptions, but what matters to us is the norm rather than the exception.

It is not conventional to divide colonial Africa into three historical periods. It is conventional to deal with colonial Africa as one historical period, or as two historical periods namely early and late periods. It is even more conventional to deal with colonial Africa in terms of dividing it in geopolitical-linguistic terms such as Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, etc than to deal with it in terms of dividing it into three historical periods. But this division into three historical periods is helpful in understanding the evolution in the behaviour of both the colonised and the colonisers. From early colonial Africa, through mid-colonial Africa, to late colonial Africa we find the behaviour of the colonisers (colonising-states) and the colonised (the colonised-states). Note that by the terms 'colonisers' and 'colonised' we do not mean individuals or persons or group of persons; rather we mean states.

In early colonial Africa, the general behaviour of the colonised was characterised by resistance while the general behaviour of the colonisers was characterised by conquest, domination and exploitation. Here, it is helpful to distinguish between two types of behaviour; vertical behaviour and horizontal behaviour. Vertical behaviour, on the one hand, is the behaviour of the coloniser in relation to the colonised, and on the other hand, it is the behaviour of the colonised in relation to the coloniser.

Horizontal behaviour, on the one hand, is the relation of the coloniser in relation to another coloniser or other colonisers, and on the other hand, it is the relation of the colonised in relation to another colonised or other colonised. In terms of their vertical behaviour, the colonisers were conquering, domineering and exploitative. But in terms of their horizontal behaviour, they were: balancing with some state(s) against other state(s); containing some state(s); having rapprochement with some state(s); and having detente with other state(s). The colonised, in their vertical behaviour, were resisting the colonisers. But the conquering, domineering and exploitative behaviour of the colonisers shaped the horizontal behaviour of the colonised. The colonised could relate to other colonised only to the extent and only in the manner the coloniser's conquering, domineering and exploitative behaviour allowed.

In the mid colonial period, the colonisers had already conquered and the colonisers were already conquered. So, on the one hand, conquest was no longer the defining behaviour of the colonisers toward the colonised, and on the other hand, to a large extent, active resistance was no longer the defining behaviour of the colonised toward the colonisers. While the colonisers retained their domineering and exploitative behaviour, the colonised developed or acquired the behaviour of passive resistance. During this period, there was some sort of negative peace, or *faux paix*, or perhaps *Pax Europeana*.

During the late colonial period, the colonised resumed their active resistance. At this time, the entire colonial period had taken the form of an inverse bell curve, or U-shape or V-shape. The two high points were both periods of active resistance namely the early and late periods, while the low point was the period of low resistance namely the mid period. The colonisers had defeated the colonised during the first resistance or early period, but the colonised won the struggle during the second resistance or late period.

What we can discover from the early period, through the middle period, to the late period is that the behaviours of both the colonised and the colonisers were determined by the 'context'

of the global politics of those periods. In other words, context determines the nature of global politics that will be the order of the day. In the context of colonialism, both the colonisers and the colonised were realists. The context of colonialism necessitates empires, imperialists and great powers to be realists. This was the most plausible and practicable way they could maximise their utility or promote their imperial or national interest in the era of colonialism. Also, the context of colonialism necessitates that the colonised are realists. If the colonised had to fight off the imperial conquest at the early period, if they had to survive at the mid period, and if they had to win the struggle for self-determination, and indeed if they had to be free, they had to be realists in their behaviour toward their colonisers.

But in the late period, realism was no longer the only global political behaviour that was at play, other global political behaviours joined the fray. Here, context matters, and it matters a lot! While material power (military and economic) was still very much relevant to the colonisers in keeping their colonies and to the colonised in fighting for freedom, after the Second World War an institution such as the United Nations (UN) and ideas such as the principle of self-determination, freedom, negritude, afrocentrism, pan-africanism and nationalism played a vital role at this period.

It was not due to lack of material power alone that the colonisers lost their colonies, and it was not due to their material power alone that the colonised gained independence. After all, if the struggle for independence were to be determined by material power alone, many colonised would have lost it, and colonisers would have won many of the struggles. On the one hand, despite their superior material power, the colonisers lost the struggle. On the other hand, despite their inferior material power, the colonised won the struggle. This is because “power always depends on context” (Nye, 2011: xiv).

The pressure from the UN contributed to the colonisers relinquishing their colonies and the colonised gaining independence. Here, we see liberalism, rather than realism, at work. Here, the context is no longer a context without the UN; it is now a context with the UN. In the context devoid of the UN, the behaviours of the colonisers and colonised were different. But in this context which included the UN, their behaviours were reasonably altered.

As we have already noted, material power alone did not characterise global political behaviour in the post-Second World War late period; ideas too played a vital role. During this period, to a large extent there was a general internalisation of the idea of self-determination. On the one hand, the colonised internalised the idea that they ought to be free. On the other hand, the colonisers came, although slowly, to internalise the idea that the colonised will be free. Here, what we see at work is constructivism. Here, the context is no longer a context before the Second World War; it is now a context after the Second World War.

In the context before the Second World War, both the behaviour of the colonisers and that of the colonised were remarkably different from how they behaved after the Second World War. In the post-Second World War period, their behaviours were reasonably altered. Ante-Second World War, the relevant ideas, especially self-determination and nationalism, did not have the potency which they acquired post-Second World War. The colonised, having been influenced by these ideas, and the colonisers having been affected by these ideas, started to

behave differently than they behaved before the Second World War when the ideas were not as influential and effective.

In postcolonial Africa what we can find is that African states now behave differently and the former colonisers now behave differently. Given the current context in which the former colonisers are no longer colonisers and in which the colonised are no longer colonised, it was inevitable that their behaviour would change. So, their current context determined their current behaviour.

Even non-alignment, which quintessentially guided the relationship of African states to the United States of America (USA) and its allies and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its allies during the Cold War, was only relevant because of the context of bipolarity which the Cold War created. Moreover, these non-aligned states were not only acting within their context as members of the Non-Aligned Movement, they were also acting within the context of the 'developing world' on which ground the movement was formed. If the members belonged to either the Western Bloc or Eastern Bloc, non-alignment would not have been possible because the members would have been acting in another context in which non-alignment would be redundant.

In the above description of the behaviour of states during the Cold War, we see that context matters, and matters a lot. It is for this reason that the dominant theories of international relations do not, individually, fully capture the behaviour of states. Each theory assumes that regardless of context, states will always act in accordance with the tenets of that theory. The theories fail to realise that whether a state acts in accordance with the tenets of a particular theory depends on the context in which the state acts.

For instance, let us briefly look at the cases of the two most prominent theories of international relations, namely realism or neo-realism and liberalism or neo-liberalism. If we use the lens of realism to look at the behaviour of African states in the global arena, there is no doubt that realism has something to tell us about how they behave. They engage in military alliances and balancing, they engage in rapprochement and detente, and they engage in containment and all other realist behaviour. But this is not what they do all the time, at all places, in all circumstances, and towards every state. These states are also members of supranational organisations and other international organisations which go a long way to determine how these states behave in certain space and time. In other words, spatio-temporal circumstances cannot be discounted when we talk about the behaviour of states. Hence context matters, and matters a lot!

Considering the behaviour of states in supranational organisations and other international organisations, liberalism or neo-liberalism - rather than realism or neo-realism - has a lot to tell us. For instance, given that African states are now members (I do not necessarily mean all African states, but this applies to almost all of them) of the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO), African Union (AU), International Criminal Court (ICC), etc and some are members of Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary

Union (UEMOA), Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), their behaviour is to a reasonable extent affected by their membership of these different organisations.

So, in view of the preceding three paragraphs, whether states act in accordance with the tenets of realism/neo-realism or liberalism/neo-liberalism, or other international relations theories, depends on the context in which states act. The behaviours of, for instance South Africa and Nigeria – the most influential and powerful countries in Africa both politically and economically – as members of the UN, IMF, World Bank and WTO are different from their behaviours as members of AU. Furthermore, South Africa's behaviour as a member of AU is different from its behaviour as a member of SADC. So also Nigeria's behaviour as a member of AU is different from its behaviour as a member of ECOWAS.

While South Africa and Nigeria promote their separate national interests in the organisations they belong to, at the AU they also have to consider the interest of each other. But at SADC South Africa does not consider the interest of Nigeria just as at ECOWAS Nigeria does not consider the interest of South Africa. After all, both countries are sub-regional hegemony in their different sub-regions: South Africa in Southern Africa and Nigeria in West Africa because of their 'geographical contexts.'

From colonial Africa (from early period, through mid period to late period) to postcolonial and contemporary Africa, we can conclusively assert the following: what we have discovered is that the context in which states behave determines their behaviour. Again, let us reiterate that we are not asserting that the context in which states behave is the only determinant of their behaviour. But when we say 'context determines states behaviour' we mean context is the principal determinant of the behaviour of states. This does not mean that other factors do not matter, but what it means is that context is the most important factor.

A look outside Africa will corroborate our claim that context is the principal determinant of the behaviour of states in global politics. The USA, Canada and Mexico allow free trade among the three countries simply because of the context of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Furthermore, before the formation of the European Union (EU), the political and economic relationships of the countries that are now members of the EU were different from what they are now. For instance, France and Germany always saw each other as a great threat. But today, it is not only France and Germany, but all other members of the EU, that behave toward one another differently and favourably because of the political and economic context which is made possible by the EU. Outside this context or union, some of the members were the principal actors in both world wars. The context of the union has not only made war among the members redundant, but it has also made peaceful behaviour, economic and political integration and cooperation the order of the day.

Consider the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Because of the context of NATO, no one member of NATO sees another member as a security threat. In addition, when the security of one member is threatened, the other members collectively respond to the

threat. That Germany reacts or responds when France is threatened and France reacts or responds when Germany is threatened is only possible because of the context of NATO.

CONCLUSION

In the end, what we discover from the historical analysis of African international history is that although there are various factors that determine the behaviour of states in global politics, the most important factor is context. This lesson is not peculiar to the international history of Africa, it is universal; hence it is not only African states, but states in general, that their behaviours or actions are principally determined by the context in which they act or behave.

States may behave according to the tenets of realism (neo-realism), liberalism (neo-liberalism), constructivism, English School or even the different forms of critical theory. In their behaviour, states may mix elements of one theory with elements of another theory or other theories. But whether states are realists, liberals or constructivists, or whether states behave in line with English School or tend to behave in line with critical theories depends on the context in which states behave or act. Furthermore, whether states mix elements of one theory with elements of another theory or other theories depend on the context in which states behave or act.

Moreover, we defined contextualism or contextual theory of global politics as the sort of analysis which says context is the principal determinant of the behaviour of the relevant global actors, be they states, supranational organisations, multinational corporations, etc, in the global arena. The sooner we learn this lesson, the better we will be able to create contexts that will engender desirable state behaviour! There is no doubt that this lesson is being learned on the African continent. Testaments to this are the following political and/or economic communities and/or unions: African Union (AU); Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); East African Community (EAC); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD); and Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The sub-regionalisation and regionalisation of the risks, losses and benefits of dealing with international, transnational, sub-regional and regional matters is one of the key advantages of the above sub-regional and regional political and economic communities and unions. In this case, onerous task of dealing with the threats of transnational conflicts such as Joseph Kony's Lord Resistance Army – LRA (across Uganda, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad and Democratic Republic of Congo), Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (particularly across Algeria, Mali and Mauritania, and generally across the Maghreb and the Sahel), Boko Haram (across Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroun), Al-Shabaab (across Somalia and Kenya), and transnational crisis such as the Ebola pandemic (across Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Mali and Senegal) will become tractable.

Also, strengthening the existing sub-regional and regional political and economic communities and unions or making them more robust will reduce the occurrences of international conflicts and make the resolution and management of international conflicts less intractable and more tractable. Such international conflicts include: the “Eritrea-Ethiopian crisis between 1962 and 1979”; the “Algeria-Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountains area in October 1963”; the “Kenya-Somalia border war of 1963-1967 in which Somalia aimed at recovering its lost territories including the Northern frontier district of Kenya”; the “Somalia-Ethiopia” dispute of 1964 to 1978 over the Ugandan desert region”; the “Nigeria-Cameroon dispute over Bakassi Peninsular” from the 1970s to the 2000s; the “Tanzania-Uganda crisis in 1978-79”; and the Chad-Libya crisis of 1980-1982.” (Aremu, 2010: 550)

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