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Sub-Saharan Africa in the 21st Century: Back to Colonialism

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I NEGATIVE ATTRACTIONS

Sadly, Sub-Saharan Africa is distinguishing herself among the regions of the world by her high poverty rates, low expectation of life at birth, and devastating civil wars and cross-border clashes. As many as 40% of the sub-continent's population live under the poverty line of \$1 a day. Also, life expectation at birth for her males and females are 51 and 54 years, respectively, compared to 63 and 67 years in the developing countries and 74 and 81 in the developed world. Sub-Saharan Africa's civil wars plagued Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Chad, Central Africa, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Niger; and most of these civil wars led to clashes between neighbouring countries.

All these factors have helped to reduce Sub-Saharan Africa's population growth rate faster than those of all the other regions of the world. This rate fell from 3.2% in the period 1980-87 to 2.7% in the period 1990-98, compared to a fall from 2.0% to 1.6% in the developing countries as a whole. Yet, with a ratio of 25 persons per square kilometer, SSA has one of the lowest population densities in the developing world where average density is 48 persons per kilometer (1997).

In some industrial countries population densities range between 310 and 546 persons per km². The growth rate of population in industrial countries have stabilized since 1965 at 0.7% per annum; but in areas like SS. Africa, increasing poverty, malnutrition; and wars may reduce further her population growth rate considerably. This, plus expected climatic changes, seem likely to generate a wave of mass migration from densely populated developed countries to thinly populated ones, like those of SS. Africa, as happened in the colonial era which began in the 15th century and targeted (successively) West

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Africa, India, America, Australia, the rest of Africa, and the Muslim World.

II. FROM NATIONHOOD, TO ETHNICITY, TO TRIBALISM

Until the 1980s rising nationalism and doctrinal differences stemmed ethnic arismosities in SS Africa societies. Ethnic clashes were largely confined to areas to which European settlers came in the 19th century and ones in which Arabs arrived in the middle ages (7th to 15th centuries). However inequitable power-and wealth-sharing among regions and ethnic groups within SS. African states generated bitter regional and ethnic clashes. This was evident since the time of accession to independence in the 1950s and 1960, but sharpened in the last two decades in debtor countries implementing IMF – imposed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAPs). This regional and ethnic discontent which increasing concentration of power and wealth generated, undermined the very basis of the SSA national state, which was still in the embroymic stage. Separatist tendencies began to emerge in many multi-ethnic countries.

Until the late eighties, the major powers of the continent and communist powers sought to preserve the unity of their respective allies in Africa from disintegration. But the demise of communism as an international force paved the way for ethnic sentiments to resurface and grow. The world powers which dominated the New International (Uni-polar) Order seem to condone – if not encourage the emerging forces which sought to re-draw the map of SS. Africa. They rationalised this tendency by confessing that when many of them partitioned Africa in the late part of the 19th Century, the frontiers they drew for colonies often divided homogeneous African communities and lumped together heterogeneous ones which were frequently antagonistic to each other.

However, the process of disintegration of African nation-states on ethnic basis bred, as was expected, tribal sentiments which began to break up ethnic groups into warring factions. It is in fact, tribal conflict that afflict most parts of SS. Africa as ethnic differences are being relegated to a secondary place, especially where regional autonomy, federalism and confederalism (even separation) were

offered as solutions to this problem. This is evident from the inflammation of tribal wars in many African countries with no significant ethnic diversity, as is evident in the Great Lakes District, West Africa and East Africa. Their present national frontiers divided many African tribes in a manner which render their unification attainable only by fragmentation of states which have always been ethnically homogenous or acquired this characteristic by separation from a multi-ethnic state.

This problem is serious in states in which a dominant tribe monopolizes power and wealth, and is most explosive when a small tribe came to dominate larger ones by seizing power by military force. But a highly explosive situation appears when a fragment of a tribe in one country tries to unite itself with another part of the tribe in a neighbouring country. It is the high frequency of occurrence of such situations in SS. Africa that is embroiling many of its parts in the current turmoil in its central, eastern and western parts.

III. THE THREE AREAS OF CONFLICT

The oldest of conflicts in SS Africa that began as ethnic clashes and assumed ideological and strategic dimensions, setting two states against each and ending a tribal one, is the conflict in East Africa. It started in the 1950s when Sudan accused Ethiopia of supporting the Nagroid rebels of the South against a government dominated at the Arabic speaking Northerners. At the same time Ethiopia charged Sudan of encouraging Eritrean rebels against their Amharic rulers. The conflict assumed doctrinal and international proportions when the two countries experienced leftist rule at different times (Sudan in the 1970s and Ethiopia in the 1980s).

The separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1989 did not end the conflict with the Sudan in the 1990s. She was accused by both Ethiopia and Eritrea of encouraging sessionist moves by the Muslims in both lands. For her part, Sudan accused both of supporting Northerners as well as Southerners against the regime that came to power through a military coup in 1989. More recently, tribal conflict escalated in Wesern Sudan between tribes of Arab roots and other of Hametic origin, as well as among each of these two groups.

In West Africa, originally conflict had ethnic and religious roots, as was the case with indigenous tribes and repatriated American negroes in Liberia, and between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. More recently, conflict assumed a tribal nature as is the case in Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Chad. In Central Africa, the biggest centre of conflict, fighting is essentially of a tribal nature, even in Angola where it started as an insurrection against a communist regime, which has since then renounced that doctrine, thereby gaining Western support against the UNITA rebels. In Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Congo, (Zaire under Mobutu) tribal fighting is mainly between Hutu dominated Zaire and the Tutsi regimes in Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Tribal hostilities led minorities to take refuge in countries where they are majority or in neighbouring ones which have no citizens of either tribe. Tutsi-ruled countries accused Congo of encouraging refugees (who numbered around a million) to destabilize them, and frequently attacked camps of Rwandan and Burundian Tutsis in Eastern Zaire. The latter accused her Tutsi neighbours of seeking to annex her eastern territories where the refugees have settled. In fact, a Zairian Tutsi rebel movement (NCMDD) occupied in 1996 the town of Ousia on Lake Tanganyika, and others seized Kiro Province. The ejection of Mobutu by Kabila has hardly changed the situation. The death toll of the conflict in this part of Africa is high due to both fighting and malnutrition in refugee camps.

IV. POLITICAL DISENGAGEMENT FROM SS. AFRICA

Until the 1980s, the European Community maintained good relations with SS. Africa where most of its associates lie. But the old Euro-Africa vision has long subsided, especially after West Europe's attention turned to Eastern Europe after the demise of their communist regimes. Aid to SS. Africa subsided, particularly as an increasing number of EC associates from this region were penalized for infringing the community's new "governance rules". The alienation of SS. Africa from Europe is expected to reach its peak after the establishment of the WTO, which will virtually end preferences offered to the ACP countries by the Community.

What has been said about growing European apathy towards Africa can be said of the international community as a whole. Its stand vis-a-vis the deadly strife in SS. Africa has been pathetic. In November 1996, the Malaysian Chairman of the U.N. General Assembly, Mr. R. Ismail deplored openly what he described as a "frightening inference" which was failure of 185 member nations to stem a human tragedy of an immense scale threatening the lives of one million refugees" (6:p37).

Vatican and France called for the formation of a rapid international force to stop the massacres and establish secure zones. Germany proposed that only frontier monitoring troops should be sent to the Great Lakes region. The USA and the UK kept demanding further explanations on the French and the German proposals. Only humanitarian aid continued to be sent by the European countries, the UN, Relief Agencies, and NGOs; these were often blocked by intense fighting.

No more fruitful were the efforts of the African community. The OAU organised in September 1996 the Great Lakes summit which was attended by Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Cameroon, but boycotted by Zaire. The Zairian boycott has virtually aborted the summit, and blow a deadly storm from South Africa (whose president, Mandela, attended it) when it sold "defensive" weapons worth \$17 million to Rwanda.

V CHANGING MOTIVES BUT PERSISTING PLANS

For a long time, environmentalists predicted the coming of another ice-age which will submerge the nontropical parts of the globe under tens of feet of ice rendering life in such areas most difficult. The last known ice-age preceded the neolithic (late stone age) period, and extended for some three hundred thousand years. During that period seas were frozen and people could trail on feet between the British isles and China or Africa without ever need to use an oar or a sail. The needing recurrence of such conditions will be accompanied by considerable cooling the climate in Africa and other tropical regions.

Being the less populated and exploited part of Africa, the Sahelian zone of Africa likely to be the one of the most sought parts of the

world during the expected ice-age. This may explain why maps showing exploited minerals in Africa show oil, gold, uranium, copper, iron, chrome, bauxite, manganese, tin, platinum, diamonds and coal being mined in the southern part of the continent, and oil in its north and Nigeria, whereas the Sahel appears in the maps barren of any minerals or oil except iron in Mauritania and uranium in Niger. Sudan is one Sahelian country in which remote sensing has revealed the likely presence of vast oil reserves, which the major oil companies and other governments do not wish to see tapped yet.

Now that expectations of an imminent ice-age has receded a different view of climatic age seems to lead to the same attitude towards this part of the world as explained below.

VI AN OPPOSITE INCREASE IN ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

The growing disengagement of the major powers from SS. Africa conflicts has been accompanied by economic changes in this region initiated mainly by the IMF and the IBRD, as well as with the newly founded World Trade Organisation (WTO). All these institutions are controlled by the major powers, and they are forcing debtor countries in the SS. Africa and other regions to privatize their main public enterprises and to facilitate their acquisition by foreigners through either debt-equity swaps or foreign direct investment (FDI). At the same time, the banning under the WTO rules of the type of protectionism which the major powers granted to their agriculture and industry is widely expected to export the agricultural and industrial sectors of development countries in SS. Africa and other regions at the expense of those sectors in the developed countries where horizontal expansion has reached its limits and wages have risen to prohibitive levels. Hence, the expectation that FDI will target mainly the vast opportunities for agricultural and industrial expansion in the developing countries in general, but particularly in SS. Africa where unexploited land is greatest and wages lowest.

This tendency for greater economic involvement in SS. Africa by the major power seems to contradict their growing disengagement from the regions political conflicts. One possible explanation of this

paradox is the climatic changes, which the world is experiencing now-a days, and its drastic environmental results. Chief among the numerous climatic changes occurring today is the vast increase in green-house gases (GHs), particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂) emanating from industry, motoring and smoking in the industrial world. This phenomenon is warming up the world climate by decreasing the ozone layer which protects the earth from burning sun rays. The increase in dangerous gases is expected to peak around the year 2000 AD, and at least a decade is needed to reverse the process.

The warming up process is expected to raise substantially sea levels due to volume expansion of heated ocean water and the melting of ice-bergs. Rising water levels are expected to submerge substantial coastal areas in Australia, Asia, Europe, America and Africa. The greatest ozone impact is expected to be over Antarctica with lesser effect on middle and high latitudes in both hemispheres; tropical latitudes (where most S.S. Africa lie) are expected to be the least affected in the short run. The accompanying increase in solar ultraviolet (UV) radiation is expected to increase non-melanoma skin cancers, especially among fair skinned individuals.

VII CONCLUSION

Thus, the overall effect of the green-house warming is to reduce areas of densely populated industrial regions like Europe where population density reached 234 persons per km² in Germany, 243 person per km² in the United Kingdom, and 310 person per km² in Belgium. This, and increased heat and radiation-caused skin cancer, should naturally induce the population of such crowded countries to migrate to regions like S.S. African population density is only 25 per km², and the spreading violence in the region, together with recurring famine and plagues, should reduce the rise in population density, if not reverse it.

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