

# Globalised Images of Environmental Security in Africa

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Since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, there has been a pronounced concern in academic and policy circles, with global environmental change, and its implications for global security (Speth, 1990; Brock, 1991; Renner, 1996; Brown, 1994; Obi, 1997a, 1997b, 1998b; Leach & Mearns, 1996; Hyden, 1999). At the heart of this shift has been the expansion of the notion of security to include the containment of non-military, extra-state threats. Thus, issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, crisis, wars, drug-trafficking and even migration were included in the emerging perspective to security. Also, globalisation meant that threat-perception in the west began to take on board the linkages between environmental crisis in the third world, with its strategic needs for stability, markets, resources, and even, leisure. At the same time, there was the concern among some policy-makers and scholars of the implications of globalisation for the post-colonial African state, which was experiencing various forms and intensities of crisis. Such fears were based on the belief that a crisis-ridden Africa would pose a serious threat to global peace and security. This concern is most pronounced in the surviving Cold War superpowers, particularly the United States, which is the undisputed global hegemon in the post-Cold War order.

Increasingly, more interest is being paid to the implications of global interdependence, the revolution in communications and technology, conflicts, and the deepening entrenchment world-wide of market relations, for global, but in particular, western and American security (Klare & Thomas, 1994; Simmons, 1995; Porter, 1995; Homer-Dixon, 1996). In the absence of the pronounced military threat to the west following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, more attention has focused on non-military, especially environmental threats. Out of this approach, which has posed the problem within a sociology of science that is reflective of the 'broader historical, political and institutional context' (Leach & Meams, 1996:4) of the western capitalist knowledge production system, has emerged the 'globalised' image of Africa as the greatest source of environmental threat to global security. It has thus become commonplace to label Africa a site of overpopulation and violent ethnic or tribal wars, both of which lead to environmental degradation and conflict. This has unfairly shifted the blame for environmental insecurity to Africa, leaving out the external economic agents that deepen the contradictions within the continent. Such analysis almost usually seeks to generalise or draw conclusions for the whole of Africa based on one or two local cases, which are often distorted to 'fit the model' of the environmental-security nexus. Furthermore, they are based on second-hand accounts or at best casual observations by 'intellectual tourists' who then elevate their biased deductions to the level of treatises on Africa. Since these are more often than not based on faulty or slanted

assumptions, they invariably arrive at wrong conclusions, which when fed into the policy process invariably compound Africa's environmental problems.

Perhaps, the greatest source of the exaggeration of, or outright falsehood about the nature of Africa's environmental crisis, and conflict is the global mass media, supported by environmental security analysts and policy makers operating within the geopolitical and ideological frameworks of strategic think-tanks and right-wing foundations based in the advanced market-economy countries (Obi, 1998b: 15-16). The role of the media in constructing a negative, horrific image of the African environment, which is then flashed to all parts of the world simultaneously, is well captured by Binns (1995:1):

*The mass media so often portray Africa as a dismal, gloomy and unhappy place, plagued with civil war, drought, famine and poverty. Africa's people are frequently accused of degrading their own environment.*

The image of Africa as a source of environmental degradation, overpopulation and conflict has much wider implications, when we consider the trends in global environmental change, development and security studies. Africa is wrongly pictured as an undifferentiated whole, alongside an equally homogenous picture of environmental degradation across the continent in the construction of the global image of how environmental stresses generated within the continent threaten global security. In this calculus, there is hardly a unified African response to the debates on the implications of global environmental change for global security. Furthermore, the imperatives of addressing the specificities of Africa's environmental security are obscured by the emphasis on the national security of the United States masked as 'global security'.

It is to the interrogation of the construction and implications of distorted global images of the African threat to global security, at a mainly conceptual level, and other related considerations that this article is directed. Beyond this, it critiques the 'conventional wisdom' about the African environment (Leach & Mearns, 1996:1), and suggests how its fundamental shortcomings can be exposed and transcended.

In order to set about its task, this article is divided into four broad parts: the Introduction, which sets out the background and main issues in the article. The section that follows, is on Globalisation and Environmental Security: The Linkages. It examines the connections between globalisation and global environmental security, and its broad implications for Africa. The third and analytical fulcrum of the article is on the Main Themes in Environmental Security: a critique. This part, for convenience is broken down into three sub-themes: image, causality, and implications. It is then followed by the conclusion, which ties up the arguments, and proffers a way towards deconstructing the negative globalised image of how stresses generated from the African environment pose a potent threat to global security now, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Globalisation & Environmental Security: the Linkages**

In order to capture the linkages between globalisation and environmental security, it would be appropriate to analyse both concepts. This would enable us to grapple with how global forces fuel, and seek to benefit from the African environmental crisis, while at the same nursing fears that the fall-outs of this crisis may spill over into the industrial North.

## **Globalisation**

Globalisation is perhaps one of the most fashionable, but controversial terms in international relations discourse today. Like environmental security, it assumed an unprecedented profile at the end of the Cold War, and is part of the neo-liberal ideology of moulding the world in the image of market forces. As a concept, it is the historical outcome of a global capitalist project of an integrated world market, that is several centuries old, even if this 'market' is one in which the few powerful rich fleece the majority poor, in a world characterised by wide differences in development, wealth, resources, and power. In terms of political economy, globalisation is a complex and contested notion. The debate is broadly between those who see globalisation as a transformatory capitalist project that is 'dissolving international borders, and rendering the nation-state and traditional concepts of sovereignty irrelevant and obsolete' (Ohmae, 1995; Drenzer, 1998), and those who insist, that it is 'far from a linear, uniform or homogenising process' (Boyer & Drache, 1996; Zyman, 1996; Saurin, 1996). Perhaps, it is most rewarding to understand globalisation in terms of an ongoing project of global capital that 'points at expanding market interconnections in the form of investments, financial networks and trade' (Zyman, 1996:157). Tandon (1998:2) gives an excellent description of a central feature of globalisation, when he notes that:

*The contemporary globalisation's specific feature is financial liberalisation. It seeks to remove all national and cultural barriers to the free movement of international capital, and to secure for it privileged treatment within the economic domain of every country.*

It is very important to understand the nature of power relations and the role of hegemonic economic forces based in, and controlled by the west (the main beneficiaries) in the processes of globalisation. This means that for those who are the underdogs, or come late to the globalisation table, they are either left with nothing, or risk becoming the dinner of the club of global powers!

From the foregoing it is clear that globalisation is neither uniform in its reach or impact, nor addresses the inequities in the international political economy. What this implies is that there are winners and losers in globalisation. Its processes thrive on the deepening of global inequities, and the increased exploitation and marginalisation of the developing world, especially Africa. The lesson in all this is that any analysis of globalisation must be rooted in its political economy, and related to the specificity of a concrete setting.

The impact of globalisation on Africa, though not uniform has economically speaking, been a disaster, with wider adverse social ramifications. The continent's share of global trade has shrunk further. Foreign aid and foreign direct investments have reduced to a trickle, while the entrenchment of market forces through structural adjustment programmes and neo-liberal reforms have severely worsened the crises in which most African states have been immersed in the last two decades (Mkandawire & Olukoshi, 1995; Olukoshi, 1998). Apart from the fact that Africa has been more of an observer and victim, than a participant in the drawing up of the new global trading regime on which globalisation partly rests (the World Trade Organisation [WTO]), a lot of the rules of the game discriminate against the resource-rich, but poor members of the 'global village'. Emphasis on trade liberalisation, economic deregulation, and the retrenchment of the state simply lay open the resources and economies of third world countries for the picking by the powerful multinationals and financial speculators from the Industrial North, and their local allies. Thus, Tandon's (1998:6)

observation that globalisation has contributed to de-industrialisation, the further weakening of African states vis-à-vis foreign capital, ring true. Africa's position in the global division of labour as an exporter of primary commodities and resources also means that the continent is short-changed in the global drive toward financial liberalisation. Even worse, the contradictions unleashed by the global expansion of capital within the continent are sharply refracted into a range of state and domestic crises, with dire consequences for governance and environmental sustainability.

## **Environmental Security**

Environmental security deals with the containment of a range of 'threats', or contradictions emanating from the interaction between human beings and nature. This can either be in the form of the extraction of natural resources or their transformation into food, goods and services, for livelihood purposes, or for profit. Where rates of extraction exceed the rate of recovery of 'renewable' resources (natural capital), or non-renewable resources are depleted, it is perceived as a threat. The transformation of natural capital also has another consequence – the generation of waste which usually pollutes or degrades the ecosystem. The degradation of the ecosystem arising from extraction and transformation is also seen as a threat, as it may lead to a fall in quality, or a depletion of resources. Issues of extraction and transformation are hinged on access, control, ownership and power and are therefore linked to political economy, and security. At once we are able to glean two contradictory perspectives of security, one which privileges the interests of those who have power, access and control over the ecosystem, and marginalises those who do not.

The second strand of environmental security, which is directly relevant to this article, revolves around a global perspective. This is because the reality of global economic and environmental interdependence has ensured the expansion of the concept beyond narrow statist boundaries of military (external) threats (Obi, 1997a:1-3). Dabelko & Dabelko (1995) provide a basic definition of environmental security from a global perspective as a:

*... transnational idea, the core of which holds that environmental degradation and depletion, largely human-induced, pose fundamental threats to the physical security of individuals, groups, societies, states, ecosystems and the international system.*

This does not mean that the issue of environmental security is a settled matter as the debate continues to rage between those Hyden (1999:151-162) describes as 'the realists, the liberals, the moralists and the populists', – over the notion of the security-environment nexus. There is no doubt, and this can be gleaned from the literature coming out of Washington (and Toronto), that the realist and neo-realist perspectives are still the most fashionable. There is the tradition established by the pioneering works of Ullman (1983), Myers (1989) and Mathews (1989), in which they argued that environmental degradation and resource-wars in areas of strategic US interest could hurt American national interests. In spite of the effort of others, who are of the opinion that the claims of proponents of environmental security are spurious (Deudney, 1990, 1991; Levy, 1995; Deudney & Matthew, 1996), the notion of environmental security has continued to gain ground. A lot of its focus has been on the security of human beings within local, national, regional and global contexts. Of particular concern is the impact of rapidly growing populations on the environment. Threat perception in environmental terms, is either in the form of 'increasing stresses on the earth's life-

support system and renewable resources (that) have profound implications for human health and welfare' (Porter, 1995), or the 'new dimensions and driving forces behind stress and insecurity' (Hjort af Ornas and Lundqvist, 1999:5).

If it understood that global environmental change is largely the outcome of the impact of the globalisation of capital on the global environment, it will become clearer, that capitalism has been largely responsible for the 'production' of environmental degradation (and conflict) on a global scale (Saurin, 1996). As such, it is understandable that there is a concern for preventing the contradictions spawned by the depletion (and pollution) of resources on a global scale from coming home to roost in the industrial North, while further opening up other regions of the world to 'market forces'.

## **Linkages**

From the foregoing, it is not difficult to fathom the linkages between capital-led globalisation and environmental security. In the first place, globalisation has intensified the pressures on the global ecosystem in its expanding quest for raw materials, cheap energy (oil and gas), markets, and profits; and receptacles for its (non-bio-degradable and toxic) waste. As such these growing pressures are feeding into concerns in the industrialised world on the need to protect itself from repercussions from the violent explosion of contradictions spawned in the ecosystems of the developing world. In the second place, the further entrenchment of market relations in the third world has meant the further commodification of its renewable and non-renewable resources, as the countries are further integrated into global capitalism and grapple with export-led growth in a context of worsening economic and external debt crises. It among other things means that those with money and power can gain access to, and control more resources, while those without money and power are marginalised and dispossessed. In reality, it is the environmental security of the poor and marginalised that is at stake.

There should be a clear understanding that globalisation is feeding the relative scarcity of resources, and worsening inequities in relation to access and power over resources. It is also devaluing the resources of developing countries as they open up further to market forces. Third, is the concern in certain circles that struggles over shrinking resources will explode into violent conflict in the developing world which are capable of destabilising sources of supply for raw materials and markets for finished goods and services. There is also the fear that such conflicts generate eco-refugees, some of who cross international borders and provoke inter-state wars, or migrate to the west, where they can pose all kinds of threat to security.

What the preceding shows, is that globalisation is one of the greatest threats to global environmental security. This is largely due to the ways it produces resource-scarcities, degradation, and sharpens social contradictions in the environment. However, the distribution of threat is felt more in the poorer parts of the world and lesser in the more prosperous parts. The implication of the globalisation-environment nexus for Africa, one of the richest resource-wise, but economically impoverished parts of the world marks it out, among the most threatened by this linkage. Why then has orthodox environmental security discourse in protecting its 'privileges', turned logic on its head by blaming the victim, Africa, for generating environmental stresses that threaten the security of the west? Who gains from this distorted image of Africa's environmental security; how?

## Main Themes in Environmental Security: A Critique

In certain circles, the environment is seen as the main security issue in the post-Cold War world. The main themes of environmental security discourses can be identified as image, causality and the implications. Taken together, they pose a problematic of the African environmental crisis and its implications for global security. In order to convince the western audience – academics, strategists and policy-makers – a shocking image of Africa as a source of growing threat is constructed to press home the point on the need in the national interest, to ‘act now before it becomes too late’.

### Image

Perhaps the most hideous image of environmental stresses emanating from Africa is that constructed by Kaplan (1994, 1997). But he is by no means the only one concerned with how Africa threatens global security. However, the fact that Kaplan’s works have been taken seriously in policy circles in the United States, make it one case that must be addressed. According to Kaplan, in his extensively cited piece, ‘The Coming Anarchy’, Africa features prominently, in the world of ‘Hobbes’s First Man’. To him ‘the last man healthy, well fed and pampered by technology will be able to master environmental stress, but the first man cannot’. He goes on to describe the African ‘threat’:

*West Africa is becoming THE symbol of world-wide demographic, environmental, and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real ‘strategic’ danger. Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms, and international drug cartels are most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism. West Africa provides an appropriate introduction to the issues, often extremely unpleasant to discuss, that will soon confront our civilisation.*

The implication of the foregoing quote from Kaplan’s ‘treatise’ – copies of which were reportedly faxed to US embassies across the world – underscore the image of the African threat based in part on Kaplan’s ‘experiences’ during a tour through a couple of African countries, on which basis he first extrapolated for Africa, and then the rest of the world. This follows the trend in the works of Homer-Dixon, Percival, and others, who are of the opinion that resource-scarcity arising from the pressures of overpopulation on renewable resources are at the heart of (environmental degradation) violent conflict in the continent, and are consequently a threat to western security. Invariably such environmental conflicts according to this logic take the form of ethnic, religious or ‘tribal’ wars, which are ‘natural’ to Africa (Furley, 1995:1-18).

The same thread can be gleaned in the way policy towards Africa – either in terms of environmental or development ‘aid’ – has been influenced by this image of an Africa waiting to explode under the weight of overpopulation, ethnic wars and violent struggles over ‘scarce resources’ As Leach & Mearns (1996:1) are quick to point out:

*The driving force behind much environmental policy in Africa is a set of powerful, widely perceived images of environmental change. They include overgrazing, and the ‘desertification’ of drylands, the widespread existence of a ‘woodfuel’ crisis, the rapid and recent removal of once pristine forests, soil erosion, and the mining of resources caused by a rapidly growing population.*

The ease with which the image of the African stereotype is constructed – crisis-ridden, and threatening, is hardly surprising given the epistemological stakes in obscuring

the external roots of the African crises. What is relevant at this stage is that a critical part of the agenda of subordinating Africa further into the world of globalised capital is to give the impression that Africans left on their own cannot manage their environmental resources. This opens the door for global intervention in order to 'stop' Africa from threatening the 'Civilisation of the world of the Last Man'. Yet, it is important not to gloss over an extreme position that Africa on the basis of its 'natural habit of conflict', is not really worth it, and that globalisation should seek much safer and stable havens (Asia and the Pacific Rim). But the reality of global trade and financial flows has made this choice a most unattractive one, hence the move towards promoting western models of environmental management and conflict resolution in Africa as a way of protecting western interests on the continent, and preventing conflicts in Africa from threatening the world.

## **Causality**

At the heart of the global environmental security discourse is the issue of causality or those elements identified as the causes of environmental conflict. Basically, a neo-Malthusian perspective heavily influences mainstream discourse on environmental security. This is hinged upon the connections between overpopulation and resource-scarcity and that between resource scarcity and violent conflict. It is assumed that when the rate of population growth exceeds the 'carrying capacity' or threshold of a given ecosystem, it feeds into stresses that directly or indirectly provoke conflict (Brown & Jacobson, 1986; Homer-Dixon, 1994; Klare, 1996). Thus, the demographic trap becomes a principal culprit of environmental conflict (Obi, 1997b). A lot of premium is placed on environmental stress, or resource-scarcity as the trigger of conflict. This is linked to the ways in which scarcities arising from overuse, misuse or degradation feed into environmental stresses and lead to violent struggles or conflict over what is left. According to Homer-Dixon (1996:359):

*Scarcities of environmental resources – in particular cropland, freshwater, and forest – are contributing to mass violence in several areas of the world. While these environmental scarcities do not cause wars between countries, they do sometimes aggregate stresses within countries helping stimulate ethnic clashes, urban unrest, and insurgencies.*

Homer-Dixon also observes that there is an emphasis on 'resource-wars' within countries, and is concerned about the threats these pose to 'western national interests by destabilising trade and economic relations, provoking migration, and generating complex humanitarian disasters that divert militaries and absorb huge amounts of aid'. The same position re-echoes in the work of Swain (1993), and particularly that of Klare (1996), where it is noted that:

*High growth rates in crisis-ridden LDC's is likely to produce high rates of rural-urban migration, and from poor and low income ones to affluent countries.*

From the foregoing, several things are clear from the perspective of environmental security discourses on causality. There is a cause-effect relationship between overpopulation and environmental stresses, which lead to conflict. Secondly, environmental degradation can also worsen scarcities, which feed stresses and finally conflict. Third, environmental conflicts in the third world (including Africa) are a cause of threat to the prosperous, western world. In order to arrest these trends in Africa and elsewhere, the west has introduced a policy mix made up of market-based reforms, birth (population) control, technologically driven, top-heavy, western models. At the heart of all these is the desire by the west to place Africa's resources at

the easy disposal of extractive global forces, while attempting to insulate itself from the contradictions arising from extraction, expropriation and degradation in the continent. In order to convince western policy-makers of the urgency of dealing with the 'African threat' in the national interest, it would seem that the temptation of the worst-case scenario, riddled with deliberately distorted conclusions and terrifying images, have become too powerful to ignore.

## **The Implications**

The implications of the foregoing are varied, but revolve around the distorted image of the causes of environmental crises, and conflict in Africa, and how these threaten the industrial North. There is also a heavy dose of cultural prejudice in the way that non-western societies are stereotyped in the literature as overpopulated, prone to environmental degradation and stresses, resource wars, and the resurgence of violent primordial hatreds. At the end, there is always the hidden agenda of 'modernisation'. *That Africa will forever be condemned to overpopulation, natural disasters, wars, crime, disease, failed states, etc, if it refuses to modernise, or what is in real terms an unconditional African surrender to the forces of the global-market place.* Yet, the implications of the current 'global' onslaught against Africa cannot be fully grasped outside of a critique of the globalised image of environmental security which in its nudity is a caricature of the truth, denying any western responsibility for the African crisis, masking the ways it benefits from the crisis, and seeking to reinforce its hegemony over the resources of the so-called 'first man'.

Before going into the critique proper, several clarifications need to be made. This article is not a refutation of the fact of an environmental crisis in Africa. It does not deny that Africa has had more than its fair share of natural and man-made disasters over the years; neither is it an attempt to downplay the escalation of intra-state wars on the continent since the onset of the economic and debt crisis and the end of the Cold War. What it does object to, is the way, these occurrences have been selectively and subjectively distorted. It is an implicit rejection of bias and fright-mongering masquerading as scientific knowledge or informed analysis. And it is a call for the need for more responses to the African challenge in environmental security and conflict discourse, beyond the designs of neo-Malthusian orthodoxy which 'persists in academic, national policy-making, or international financial institution circles' (Bush, 1997:503). Clearly, there is a need for a more balanced approach to the study of international relations, without rubbing salt into the historical and current injuries and injustices being inflicted on Africa.

## **The Critique**

The image of a global Armageddon extrapolating from the anarchy in Africa has been challenged even within the United States as 'racist unculturalism' (Cockburn, 1994) and 'incorrect' (Lancaster, 1994). Just as Binns (1995), Leach & Mearns (1996) and many others have invested a lot of energy in deconstructing Kaplan's terrifying image of Africa, and its looming threat to the United States. The fact that Kaplan's work came out shortly before the Rwandan genocide did confer upon it, in the mood of that time with some credibility in official circles. But when put to closer scrutiny, Kaplan's image is about Africa as viewed from a 'uncultural' monocle, but it is definitely not of Africa. The basis on which he arrives at his conclusion is at best fleeting and at worst a grotesque distortion of both history and reality. It ignores the fact that the Africa he is dealing with, is both a historical construct, and a product of a global political



economy that is basically structured against it. Though Kaplan's piece has been criticised extensively, it cannot be separated from the image of Africa largely cast in the looming shadow of Afro-pessimism. As Olukoshi (1999: 452) has observed:

*But even in otherwise respectable intellectual and policy circles, including the World Bank, few were able to resist the prognosis that Africa had been 'hemmed in', with its societies sliding back to precolonial and early-colonial enclave arrangements, its states undergoing a 'freefall', and its people increasingly abandoned to a Hobbesian law of nature amid a growing disorder.*

What comes out of this is that the image of the African threat had been a paradigmatic preoccupation and had a captive policy audience and a global agenda and message: 'adapt (to the global market), or perish' (Olukoshi, 1999:453). In order to pursue this agenda on the environmental front, the image of an Africa hopelessly incapable of managing its environment, and eternally bogged down by environmental degradation or ravaging hordes fighting over scarce resources has become a critical part of environmental security discourse. Because of its clearly instrumentalist ends, it has had to rely more on distortions of the African reality, drawing on scientific methodologies that are selective, and are based on partial or very weak empirical evidence. Furthermore, the role of actors, and policies from the West in worsening scarcities, degradation and conflict in Africa as the cases of the Niger Delta (Rowell, 1996, Obi, 1997a) and the Sudan (Suliman, 1999), clearly show, are ignored.

The shortcomings of mainstream 'Afro-pessimist' environmental security discourse are further exposed when one revisits the issue of causality. As noted earlier, violent conflicts in Africa have been blamed on stresses placed on the environment by exploding populations who then trigger fights (ethnic, religious etc.) over 'scarce' renewable resources. Three inter-linked fundamental questions need to be raised: How are scarcities constructed? Is scarcity the inescapable outcome of 'overpopulation'? Who gains from scarcity?

While it is true that relative scarcity is one of the facts of nature – as natural endowments and resources are unevenly dispersed at all levels – there is a way that scarcity, in the socio-economic sense, can be 'constructed'. In the first place, the environment itself is socially constructed, underpinned by social relations of political and social power (Redclift & Benton, 1994), which then define issues of culture, access and control over the environment. Hence scarcity can equally be the product of the 'distribution of economic and political power within society' (Hildyard, 1999:12).

In all class societies, the few, who control power invariably can control access, and exclude the majority, thus creating scarcity for them in the midst of plenty! In a capitalist society or world, scarcity becomes the outcome of a socio-economic system that commodifies nature, and excludes the producer from the social surplus, placing such a group in a weak position from which they are structurally incapable of commanding resources which become 'scarce'. As Hildyard (1999:13), further explains, 'where common regimes give way to state or market-based regimes, the experience of scarcity is different. With the commodification or state appropriation of land, for example, control over subsistence is assigned to actors outside the community, almost always to the detriment of those whose bargaining power is weak'. Going further, the point is made that, 'the deliberate manufacture of scarcity now provides one of the principal means through which powerful state and private interests monopolise resources, control markets and suppress the demographic

majority' (Hildyard, 1999:13). This concretely represents the current paradox of Africa's poverty in the midst of plenty.

From the foregoing, it is clear that there is more than one form of scarcity, and it can be caused by other factors apart from the size of the population or environmental degradation. This is not to deny the obvious impact that a large population can have on finite natural resources, but to point out that contradictions over scarce resources equally reflect the inequitable relations of power in which the environment is immersed. This leads to the exclusion of the 'demographic majority' who are then forced to fight over the little that is left, or the little they can get in order to survive. Such exclusion can also sharpen existing contradictions along the lines of class, ethnic identity, and undermine the social basis of welfare and citizenship. In such conditions in which the state largely functions to repress mass opposition to expropriation and rising poverty, conflict becomes emblematic of protest, and the quest for survival, equity and liberation.

The foregoing has become more obvious in Africa under the conditions of economic crisis and structural adjustment, and the crisis of state legitimacy. Several studies have clearly documented the increase in resource wars across Africa as a result of the deepening of social contradictions over the environment, the increasing expropriation and degradation of peasant land (and waters) by the state, private foreign (multinationals) and local interests operating under industrial or 'green revolution' projects (Obi, 1998a). Specific examples of such 'manufactured' scarcities are replicated with varying degrees of intensity across the Sahelian belt of sub-Saharan Africa, the volatile Niger Delta where the people have been up in arms against oil multinationals (Ibeanu, 1999; Robinson, 1996; Obi, 1999a, 1999b) and the state, since the late 1980s. Other examples are the Great Lakes region (Uvin, 1996), and the Sudanese civil war-intensified by the expropriation and degradation of peasant land by large scale mechanised agriculture in some of the most populous and fertile parts of the country (Suliman, 1999:27-28).

The scarcities bred by adjustment, the alienation of people followed by repression and further pauperisation has fuelled conflict as the people seek to survive, and local and global interests continue to exercise monopoly over resources. The impact of IMF/World Bank policies towards the African environment is not lost to analysis. Such western policies clearly designed to advance the globalisation agenda have worsened scarcities and deepened contradictions. As Suliman (1999: 27) explains further:

*Their loan conditionalities have accelerated considerably the restructuring of resource utilisation from local needs and the local market towards the demands of the international market. Despite the rapid increase in the area of land in use and increased export capacity, the overall effect of the new export-oriented policies was negative. The value of primary commodities in the international market steadily declined and poverty worsened in the urban slums and in rural Africa.*

It is then obvious that while overpopulation may lead to scarcity, the relationship between high population rates and environmental conflict is more complex, and is mediated by the prevalent relations of power over the environment. Thus scarcities can be created, or worsened outside of the 'demographic trap'. as demonstrated with the impact of structural adjustment in deepening contradictions in the African environment. It therefore shows that the stereotyping of environmental conflict as ethnic, or tribal wars (in which global capital constricts access as it expands its control

over Africa's resources) is bound to end up with grossly distorted and diversionary analysis.

It also shows that a lot more needs to be done to demonstrate how the interaction between capital and the environment in Africa has bred a relations of power that disempowers the majority. This is the product of a system which alienates and marginalises them, in ways that lead to conflicts within the 'excluded' (intra-class, pastoralists versus farmers, ethnic minorities versus dominant majorities, intra- and inter-communal, sectarian), and between them and their expropriators - usually the state, and local elite in partnership with foreign capital. The phenomenon of 'dispossessed' ethnic groups is a particularly explosive issue as can be gleaned from the case of the Ogoni (Robinson, 1996; Naanen, 1995; Obi, 1999b), those of the Dinka, Ngoni, Hadedowa and Fulani (Salih, 1999:181-98) and the deployment of identity politics in the struggle for 'national liberation'. It will be wrong therefore to see all environmental conflicts in the light of a primordial or atavistic throw-back to an imagined state of nature, rather than focus on the conflictive relations: repression/resistance, exclusion/inclusion, all embedded in the African environment. Issues of access/non-access, lead to violent conflict over claims, entitlements and survival. This invariably opens up the issue of who benefits from these 'manufactured scarcities'. and how they seek to reproduce their gains within the context of globalisation.

Powerful extractive global and national interests benefit from the 'manufactured scarcities'. If it is well understood that in the context of adjustment the state in Africa has been weakened both by its own internal contradictions, and all forms of conditionalities being hurled at it by the Bretton Woods twins and the G-7 countries, then it becomes clear that the global has a lot of leverage in the continent. In order to adapt to globalisation, survive, and broadly serve the interests of both local and global factions of capital, the state in Africa has adopted the agenda of the global market, even if state mediation of global-local relations is done in such a way as not to compromise the class interests of the statist elite: military, bureaucratic and business factions.

The state through legislation, its policies, and at times naked force, has broadly moved in the direction of an environmental governance that pays less attention to local needs, and places more premium on the global market and the interests of those who have 'privatised' the state in Africa. They are the ones who get prime land with state subsidies, and win contracts to construct the gigantic dams and irrigation projects, dredge the rivers, and mine the forests of precious timber, the oceans for fish, and the land for non-renewable resources: oil and gas, gold, bauxite etc.

The wholesale adoption of the market principle in tackling the African economic crisis has had its most deleterious impact on the environment. For one thing, the opening up of economies has meant exporting more resources for less money (due to devaluation, and declining global prices for primary products). The degradation of *Africa's* fragile soils, increased pressures on its forests and waters by inappropriate technology especially in large-scale agriculture, and the urge to earn more foreign exchange to service debts have further altered the African political ecology.

More people are displaced from their land by the state and foreign big business, lose their livelihoods and are severely pauperised, leaving them with little choice than to migrate in search of jobs in the capitals, or to remain in the countryside and fight it out, either among themselves, against their neighbours, the state or big business. The

state in Africa – hamstrung by its own internal contradictions: instability or fragility as a result of elite rivalry, or the quest to consolidate democracy, crises of accumulation and legitimacy arising partly from the massive erosion of post-colonial welfare gains by adjustment – is often not placed in a position to equitably mediate the struggles for power over the environment. The artificial nature of Africa's borders, and the growing informalisation of cross-border transactions also implies that goods and services are exchanged with the global market in ways that could undermine the environment without the 'formal' notice of the state. At the end of the day, the state is as much a contestant in the environment as the other stakeholders, as it struggles to advance its own interests (not the people's) alongside that of global capital. Thus, just as Africa loses out economically in the process of globalisation, it is increasingly losing control over its natural wealth, with very serious implications for sustainability, and the future of the continent.

The analysis so far reinforces the position expressed earlier, that the imagery and causal linkages on which mainstream environmental security discourse is based is flawed, and amount to 'the lie of the land' (Leach & Mearns, 1996). Its attempt to make Africa a 'scapegoat' for the security fallouts of global environmental change, seek to seize upon the historical moment of Afro-pessimism, to shift attention from the ways globalisation is eroding the social glue binding the African environment and the people.

### **Conclusion: Reconstruction Through Deconstruction**

From the onset, it was fairly obvious that the same forces that today blame Africa for threatening global environmental security are the same ones that have historically through their economic power (capital) deepened environmental stresses and benefited from the transformation of the continents' resources into cheap commodities for the world market. How does the African populace threaten the global environment in a context where

*the United States with only 5% of the planets population consumes nearly 30% of the planets natural resources and where industrial countries generate 75% of the world's pollutants and waste (One Earth).*

If global scarcity is greater because a small proportion of the people on the planet control and consume most of its resources, and then generate most of the waste, how just is it then to tag one of the 'dispossessed' and marginalised regions of the world the main culprit without connecting the poverty of the latter to the prosperity of the former?

Thus, there is a clear case for the reconstruction of the globalised image of environmental security in Africa, away from the current distorted form. Fortunately this effort has been on for a while, and can be gleaned from the pioneering work of Hjort af Ornas and Salih (1989), both of whom are still very much in the struggle. Yet a lot more needs to be done to establish a space within African political science, social science and international relations for environmental conflict and security studies. If we must reconstruct a truly African perspective to global environmental security, our intellectuals must be the critics, moulders and shapers of the paradigmatic shift. From there, policy-makers, and the people who are the stakeholders must be joined in resisting the wholesale abandonment of our environmental heritage to global market forces.

At a conceptual level, it is important to deconstruct the neo-Malthusian and mono-causal scarcities' perspective to environmental security, and reject its criminalisation of Africa in orthodox global environmental change discourse. The limited analytical value of such approaches and their value-laden agenda of maximising western interest, promoting modernisation and market-led policies, should be exposed. Rather, focus should be re-directed at critically interrogating their assumptions, and demonstrating that the roots of violent conflict lie in the way the capitalist-led global system interacts with the African environment, and the contradictory social and power relations arising from that process. The challenge is to stand logic on its feet and reconstruct the notion of African environmental security. As noted elsewhere (Obi, 1998a).

*The path to transcendence lies in recognising the link between the dominant mode of production in Africa and the rapid depletion of resources, the role of the state as an actor in, and mediator of relations between the people, global capital and the environment, and the conflictual relations of inclusion and exclusion in terms of access and control over 'scarce' resources.*

Beyond the conceptual, Africa needs to get its global environmental politics right. There is no strong pan-African response to the inequities embedded in the ongoing processes of globalisation. More critical is the absence of a concerted regional or continental effort at reducing environmental conflict on the continent. In most cases, policy-makers and militaries in Africa are yet to come to terms with the social and politico-ecological roots of conflict. Thus, their approaches have broadly followed the ineffective managerial, top-down, capital-intensive, or repressive approach to environmental management and security. These have basically worsened the problem and filled the pockets of local bureaucrats, warlords. and elite, donor-countries, expatriate consultants and suppliers of military weapons to Africa.

It is important that a blueprint stating an African position on the environment, environmental conflict and security be drawn up and popularised within all member-states of the OAU as a matter of urgency. There should be a shift away from peace-enforcement from the top, to peace-building from the bottom upwards based on democratic participation, equitable access of the majority to resources, popular sovereignty, and the tenets of the sustainable management of environmental resources.

Finally, the security of the African environment can best be assured only within an equitable global economic and political system that is sensitive to the welfare and development of all Africans. True, some may see this as an El Dorado, given the sorry economic state of the continent, partly the 'gift' of the ravaging forces of the global market: adjustment, speculators and multinationals, and the outcome of the treachery of local gatekeepers of the state and global capital. Yet, others would be more correct to say that it is a more viable alternative on which to build a just and peaceful world. More fundamentally, it addresses the environmental security of the African rather than the caricature which globalised orthodox environmental security discourse seeks to force-feed us.

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