

A World in Flux: Options for Africa

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Abstract

This qualitative analysis aims to contribute options for the repositioning of Africa to end its marginalisation and underdevelopment against the backdrop of a changing world order. Africa is widely perceived as a stepchild of global diplomacy, always on the fringes of benefits, and marginalised at diplomacy's top table despite numerous efforts to reverse the trend. While the West-led unipolar liberal world order still dictates global policy, it is in decline. Recent headlines show a world in flux, with nations jostling for advantage in anticipation of a new world order taking shape. Many UN members who feel that the West-led order favours the West against the rest are pursuing different narratives towards a non-ideological multipolar world in which they can assert their autonomy and agendas. Among the existing country groupings, Africa is pivoting towards BRICS, which comprises Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. BRICS is offering an attractive economic order and an inclusive voice in a multicultural world. This paper follows the historical approach. By examining sources and extant literature, it emphasises that Africa, a continent rich in natural resources, labour, markets, and innovation, may miss out on the once-in-a-century opportunity presented by a shifting global order if it does not shed the stepchild image, reassert its autonomy and reframe its priorities based on its identity and values. The study focuses on proactive and strategic measures that Africa may take to review its long-standing integration frameworks that are lagging behind global developments and liberate itself from colonial constraints. The opportunities for Africa to profit from the rapidly shifting global dynamics are outlined in the paper's conclusion.

Introduction

For decades after independence, Africa has stayed weak, marginalised and behind other world regions in development, progress, connectedness, influence, and security (Chipaike, 2018). At independence, Africa inherited colonial government models and economies, and had to play by the rules of colonial systems, which meant perpetuating those systems and interests after physical colonialism ended. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 gave rise to the ideological unipolar moment, that is the West-led Liberal World Order (WLWO), creating a window for the spreading and enforcement, as necessary, of Western liberal democracy and values across the globe (Krauthammaer, 1990/91). President George HW Bush described the moment as the new world order which would create a peaceful and prosperous world (Bush, 1990 September 11). This paper asks three questions, first; how well Africa, only just emerging from the colonial value system, and having survived slavery before it, fared in the WLWO-imposed liberal value system, which was yet another form of Western domination. The second question arises from the argument that in the last few years, there are indications that the unipolar moment is coming to an end, the WLWO is in decline and a multipolar world is emerging (Campbell, 2016). The ongoing jostling of countries to reposition for advantage in the new world order presents an opportunity that Africa has not had for centuries. The paper questions in what ways Africa will use the opportunity, not only to reframe a new role for itself in world affairs, but also to re-evaluate its past decisions and actions in relation to the continent's development and progress? The third question relates to the long-held view of Africa as a weak and marginalised continent, always acted upon by others or viewed as an appendage on programs initiated by others (Akokpari, 2016). The question is, given this opportunity, in what ways will Africa transform its image from a weak and marginalised continent to a dominant player and partner in world affairs?

The paper presents the following: The Rise of the WLWO; Africa's State in the WLWO; The Decline of the WLWO; The Emerging World Order; Options for Africa and Conclusion.

The rise of the WLWO

International world orders are considered indispensable ‘global operating systems’ in an international space with no governing authority (Harris Jr, 2017). Leadership of an order by a power is earned when a superpower emerges ahead of other powers in a balance of power competition. The power that gets a diverse and influential following, demonstrates ability to build cooperation among all nations, and has capacity to lead economically and militarily as well as in other global themes such as the environment, climate change, immigration, terrorism and others, will assume the dominant position in the world order (Mearsheimer, 2019).

After the Second World War the world became bipolar. From 1945 the Cold War world order was dominated by the US and the USSR whose ideological systems were opposed, each supported by its allies. With the collapse of the USSR in 1989, the US became the pole power and ‘indispensable nation’ that would, supported by its Western allies, spread liberal democracy across the globe (Albright, 1998, February 19). The world order, which came to be known as the ‘Rules-based International Order’ was first dictated by the victorious allies after the second World War in 1945 and further developed over time into a framework of Western values and rules embodied in a network of neo-liberal international organizations, with the United Nations at the centre (Chatham-House, 2015). The defeated powers in the Cold War, namely Russia, China and their allies, would be co-opted into the order, invited to membership in the liberal institutions, and enticed to transform into liberal democracies, thereby creating one world at peace, on both the political and economic fronts (Albright, 1997, April 15).

Africa in the WLWO

In the 1990s, when the WLWO was just starting, most African states were young, having recently achieved independence from colonial powers.

The Cultural Impact of the WLWO on Africa

The WLWO mission to spread its values across the globe accentuated the colonially induced destruction of African cultures through acculturation and assimilation. Modernity and globalisation, both linked to the liberal value system, perpetuated the alienation of Africans from their cultures (Mbembe, 2021). Societal attitudes, corroded for decades by the colonial distinction between the ‘civilized whites’ and the ‘uncivilized and barbaric Blacks’, became

perverted, denigrating African knowledge systems and misleading Africans to mimic whiteness in appearance, manner, speech, thought, and ways. This inferiority and self-hate are found at all levels of national life and are reproduced in various types of media. Kagame (2021) castigates African leaders who look up to the West so much that important decisions about their countries must be made and announced in the presence of a Western leader. Olorunfoba (2015) argues that Africa will not come into its own unless it extricates its educational system, politics, economics, culture and languages from the clutches of the West.

The Political Impact of the WLWO on Africa

While the US prided itself on its anti-colonial identity, its hegemonic approach, which elaborates the view that Western liberal values are global values better than the rest, mimicked the European ‘Standard of Civilisation’ that made colonialism possible and justifiable (Linklater 2016). The rigid imposition on African societies of Western liberal values, which are based on individual rights, was in direct contrast to African traditions where individual rights are framed in the context of communal existence (Mbiti 1970). Imposed political structures and alien practices such as multi-party elections and competitions replaced traditional African consensual democracy (Ahere, 2020). The contrast created a dissonance in public life and governance which led to clashes between Africa and the West regarding concepts such as democracy, human and property rights, boundaries and responsible government (Adejumobi, 2000). The WLWO was quick to introduce tactics that it thought would improve the uptake of liberal values by African countries.

One such tactic is ‘regime change’, by which the West facilitates coups that remove, often through violent means, those African leaders considered unhelpful to its democratisation agenda (Paquette, 2020). In other cases, the West uses Western-aligned NGOs to mediate the desired change by giving the NGOs greater participation in national affairs (NewAfrican, 2018). Western governments and donor agencies achieve this by disbursing aid and implementing relief programs in targeted countries through such NGOs (NewAfrican, 2018). In a different move, the US and its allies invaded Libya in 2011 ostensibly in defence of human rights, and in the process triggered a decade-long conflict that destroyed an African nation and millions of lives (Lynch 2021). In some African countries, the US and its allies use Western currencies as weapons to

impose economic sanctions to bend the will of their governments, such as the sanctions imposed on the Central African Republic; the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Ethiopia; Libya; Mali; Somalia; Sudan; South Sudan; and Zimbabwe, even when such sanctions are opposed by UN member countries (VOA News 28 October 2021). The hegemony of the U.S. dollar has become the main source of instability and uncertainty in African economies (Munda, 2023).

The Economic Impact of the WLWO on Africa

At the centre of the WLWO liberalisation of African economies was the Bretton Woods international monetary system which the US and its allies set up soon after the Second World War with the U.S. dollar at the core. The system comprises the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), which in the 1980s and 1990s liberalised African economies through Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAPs). While the model worked for some in the West and in other parts of the world, it threw African countries into disarray. It destroyed domestic economies, inflated poverty, created political turmoil and social unrest, and left the countries in heavy debt and further marginalized (Kawewe, 2000). Apata (2018) blames the failure of ESAP in Africa on the capitalist approach which he says bases its profit drive on competition, elimination and monopoly, and thrives on exploitation that suffocates indigenous productive capacity.

While ESAPs were discarded, the liberal economic order remained in place and continued to marginalise African countries. The model opened Africa to free trade and competition with the metropolitan powers and former colonial states. The unequal competition skews trade in favour of metropolitan powers, necessitating some to call for the decolonisation of world trade which they say destroys Africa's own possibilities and plunders its resources while Africans remain poor (Omarjee, 2017). Despite numerous developmental partnerships that Africa entered into with Western countries, the estimated number of people living in poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased from 278 million in 1990 (at the beginning of the WLWO) to 413 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2018) While the trend is different in other world regions, it is forecast that by 2030 Sub Saharan Africa will collectively be home to 90% of the world's poorest people (Olatunji, 2018).

In Africa, the failures of the WLWO seem to outweigh the good it did in some countries, not only because the failures are great in number, but because they go to the heart of Africa's desire for identity, respect and self-affirmation (Ruto, 2023).

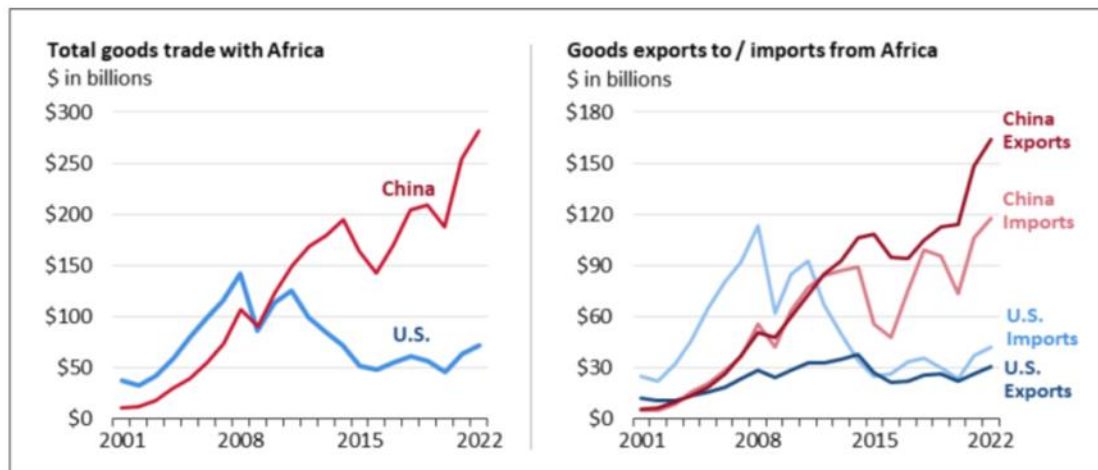
Where does Africa Stand Now in the RBO

Rodney (1973) compares the impact of colonialism on Africa to that of slavery and concludes that colonialism was more devastating. He says while slavery extracted Africans from their land as forced labour, colonialism was both the subjugation of a people on their land and the taking over, not of just their land and labour, but also of their vast resources of gold, diamonds, oil, cobalt, copper, bauxite and farms - their source of wealth (Apata, 1973). This killed not just the African economy and trade but also African productivity and innovation, leaving in Africa a culture of dependency on outsiders for things they used to produce.

In the 21st century, Africa is moving away from the WLWO ideological and globalised unipolar world led by the US and its allies, and pivoting to the emerging non-ideological, multicultural movement among nations. Africa's argument is that it wants to pursue African identity and development in its own way and at its own pace. African leaders have said the WLWO model has kept it at the bottom and unable to industrialise while its resources are extracted for the benefit of industrialised countries, and that will not continue (BBC News, 2023). Africa's biggest need to kick off industrialisation is infrastructure, and in the last decade China has funded numerous infrastructure projects across Africa through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through BRI, Africa today boasts industrialisation enablers in the form of highways, bridges, dams, harbours, parliament buildings and airports, all of which are not tied to Chinese political and economic ideology as WLWO assistance was tied to the conditionality of liberal values and ideology. BRI's emphasis on trade, not a remaking of the world, has seen Chinese trade with Africa rise to more than four times that of the US in the last decade.

Africa is pivoting towards BRICS, a group in which China has membership. BRICS is offering a multilateral and multicultural platform that competes favourably with both the political and economic order of the WLWO. The BRICS-Africa summit held in 2013 carried the theme 'BRICS and Africa - partnerships for integration and industrialization.' Cooperation and trade

between the two sides has grown phenomenally. BRICS, which is set to expand its membership in 2023, will be processing membership requests from African countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe among many others from across the globe (Rédaction-Africanews, 2023).



Source: CRS with data from U.S. Census Bureau and China Customs Statistics via Trade Data Monitor.

Figure 1 US and Chinese Trade in Goods with Africa (CRS, 2023)

The decline of the WLWO

In the last few years, the WLWO rules-based international order has lost its grip, and the US and Allies are frantic in efforts to preserve it (Campbell, 2016). The ‘Chatham House London Conference’ (2015) singled out several contributing factors to its decline. The conference highlighted loss of legitimacy of the RBO resulting from being undermined by its leaders. For instance, the US, which disregards the RBO when convenient, is not a member of some of the RBO’s critical institutions, such as the International Criminal Court. When it suited its interests, the US, supported by its Allies, invaded Iraq in 2003 contrary to the UN vote. In the last decade, the US inflicted unilateral sanctions on weaker states such as Zimbabwe without UN authorisation, destroying the economies of the sanctioned states. Former US president Donald Trump openly attacked the RBO’s free market principles which he said disadvantaged Americans at home and pursued instead the “America First” approach. He habitually berated

allies on similar basis, among them Germany, France, UK, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Japan, and Sweden prompting the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel to warn that Europe could no longer rely on its British and US allies (Ashford, 2021).

Several other factors led to the RBO's decline. Globalization, an important feature in the WLWO, led to loss of jobs, destruction of businesses, and rising inequality in both the liberal and developing worlds, creating super-rich, middle and poor nations. The Great Recession of 2008-2009 when markets imploded and almost collapsed the global economy exposed the weakness in the West-centric capitalist system (Reserve Bank of Australia, 2023). Countries that value sovereignty and self-actualisation resented the WLWO requiring them to cede decision making powers to international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank over which the Order has influence. In Europe, liberal democracies strongly aligned to the US could not stand the full liberal treatment in their geographical areas. For instance, Brexit happened partly because Britain wanted to be autonomous and separate from the EU grouping. The emergence of anti-liberal groups in France and Italy certainly undermined liberal tenets. These factors combined to create a backlash against the WLWO (Walt, M. 2018).

The order is fundamentally collapsing because the base is shifting from a unipolar to a multipolar position. The US blames Russia's war in Ukraine for undermining the RBO. It also blames China which it says has both the intent to reshape the international order and the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. China's rise, which is often described in the media as a tectonic shift, has destabilised the US and its allies from the Trump to the Biden Administrations, provoking conversations about trade, security, defence and foreign policy (Grano, 2023). While in the 1990s US foreign policy was to incorporate China into the international system, it now sees China as having used the international system to grow its economy and stature to great power status in order to challenge the Western system. Between 1990 and the present, China's trade with the world has surpassed that of the US by strides. Its GDP has surpassed all other regions and, while it is second to the US, it is forecast to supersede it by 2030. In its defence, China says it played by the rules and its entry brought stability and innovation to the world system. China's innovations include programs such as the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) which has been hailed globally as significant progress towards development, especially in the Global South (China-State-Council-Information-Office, 2018).

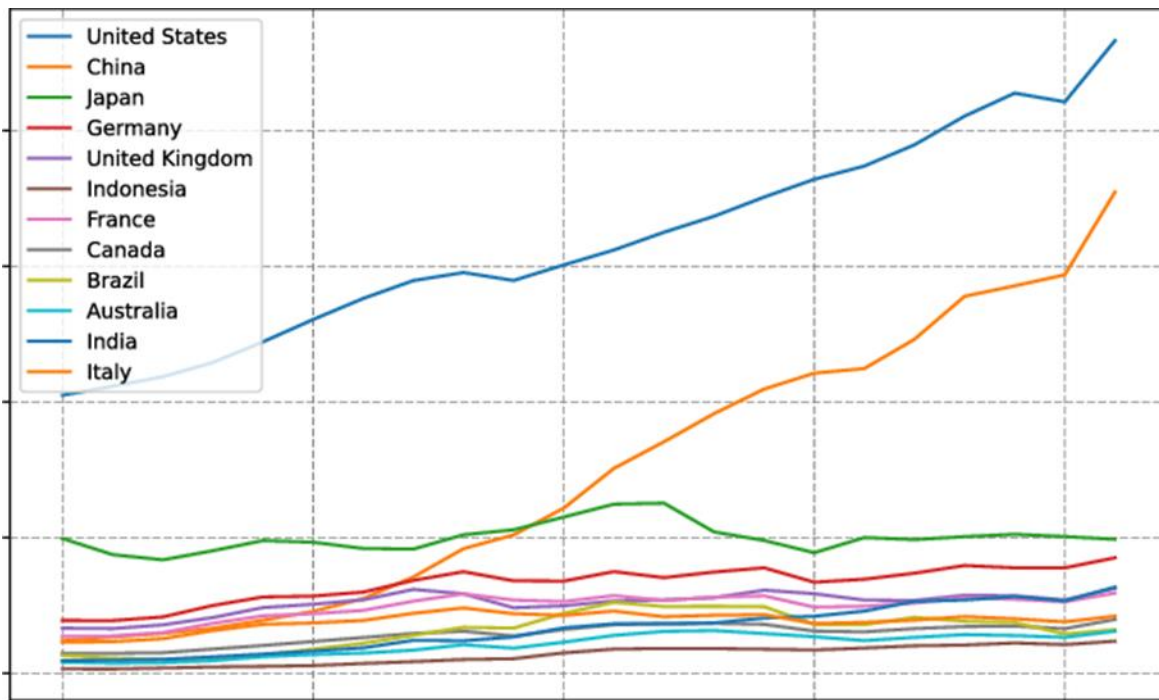


Figure 2. GDP growth rate between China and the USA from the year 2000 to 2021

Several countries are forming strategic alliances to overthrow the US dollar decades-long reign as the world's reserve currency and adopt more accessible and un-weaponised currencies (Holmes, 2023). US administration officials have acknowledged that the use of the dollar in inflicting sanctions on nations could have undermined it (Geopolitical-Economy, 2023). Some country groupings are agreeing to use their domestic currencies for trade among themselves while others have chosen the Chinese Yuan for trade. This phenomenon is undermining, not just the dollar, but also Western hegemony.

Trade Timelapse: USA vs. China Each Country's Biggest Trading Partner by Year (1980 vs. 2018)



Figure 3. Comparison: US vs China Trade in 1980 and in 2018 (Staff Writer, 2018)

Faced with the steady decline of the WLWO, the Trump administration shifted its foreign policy focus from counter terrorism to one of confrontation with China, which it framed in 2017 as the Great Power Competition. The new Biden Administration acknowledged the competition as stiff, and coined the strategy-related catchphrase, Invest, Align and Compete by which it would invest in its strength at home, align with allies and the RBO after the Trump disruptions, and compete with China. The US invoked measures against China in several areas - trade, ideology, technology, and politics (Ashford, 2021)

China, on its part, maintains that it is a developing country which does not seek hegemony but is offering the world a different kind of cooperation. Its strategy is to contrast its approach to that of the West (Wenbin, 19 May 2023). China says the WLWO is exporting Western liberal democracy and forcibly universalising it across the globe where China is forging non-ideological, unconditional partnerships and cooperation. It says the US is undermining world peace through coercive diplomacy such as the invasion of countries, unilateral sanctions, elitist minority groupings, and trade inequalities where China is pursuing peaceful development and stability. China says the West is choking developing countries with debt that leaves them the

poorer where China is giving loans for infrastructure that enables development. China says the US and its allies are emptying weaker countries of opportunities to industrialise by extracting their raw materials where China is promoting industrialization. China says its model has lifted millions out of poverty where the model of the West has increased inequalities. In highlighting these contrasts, China is offering an alternative path to world trade, peace, mutual development and cooperation. In the process, it has achieved great power status which the US and its allies recognised as competition.

Some people deny that the world has turned multipolar on the basis that China, whose economy is still the second largest in the world, cannot be a superpower and, therefore, does not qualify to be a hegemony. While China agrees that it is not a superpower but a developing country, it does not deny that it is offering the world a different kind of leadership. However, more writers and world order watchers are convinced the WLWO's run has come to an end (Alonso-Trabanco, 2023, 21 February).

The Emerging World Order

“The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters” - Antonio Gramsci (Martin, 2023)

The world is currently in a situation of open horizons where the old is dying and the new is fighting to be born, to borrow from the Italian Marxist philosopher Gramsci. Taking a lead from the Italian Marxist philosopher, Gramsci, we might say that we are living in an era of wide horizons, when the new is fighting to emerge and the old is dying. This paper advances what it sees as the most likely scenario to emerge - a multipolar world with no single hegemony in power. This scenario pans out as follows:

The Great Powers (GP)

Even as its dominance wanes, the US continues to be committed to universalising liberal values through the RBO (Biden, President (2022)). The implication is that the US will work to keep in its fold the liberal democracies already aligned with it. On the other hand, China, the leading opponent of the WLWO, maintains that its tradition is not to seek hegemony, and never to export

to any country its ideology or methods, but to focus on mutual cooperation, trade, development and progress with no strings attached (China Government, 2023). This implies that China will continue building regional economic alliances across the globe. The US and China, hereinafter referred to as the Great Powers (GP), will both lead, not as dominant hegemonies, but as opposing forces offering different and competing paths to development, prosperity and security. The interconnectedness of the GP in trade and world affairs is a factor in deterring their relationship from deteriorating into a cold war (Roland, G. 2021).

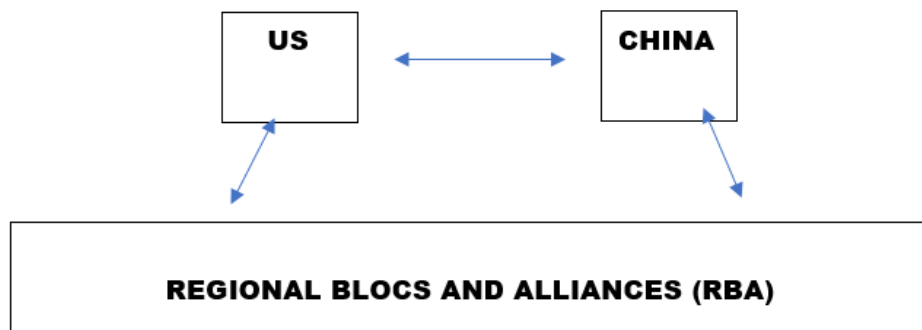


Figure 4. Emerging Multipolar World Order

While the GP compete in methods, trade and economy, significant power will shift to Regional Blocs and Alliances (RBA) which are forming across the globe based on multilateralism and multiculturalism, and focusing on cooperation, trade, development, security, technology, climate change, migration and other 21st century themes. The various RBA will keep their alignment to either of the GPs while others stay non-aligned. This keeps the world in multipolar mode while countries shift, reconfigure and rationalise over time to reflect new priorities and imperatives. Globalisation will fade into regionalisation. The Existing RBO institutions from the outgoing world order will remain in place but will gradually undergo a makeover which will be instituted by the RBAs to eventually create a level playing field.

Regional Blocs and Alliances (RBAs)

The RBAs to which power is transferring are made up of countries, some of which have membership in multiple RBAs. While multiple membership will be rationalised over time, they are not a disadvantage at the beginning as countries seek to build cooperation based on multilateralism and multiculturalism.

The world RBAs include, but are not limited to, the following:

Africa Union (AU)

And African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

The African Union (AU), a continental body made up of the 55 African countries, was launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity. Based on Pan Africanism and African socialism, it promotes continental unity, political and economic integration. The AU's flagship project, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), was established in 2018, and encompasses 54 African states. The World Bank estimates that it will increase Africa's income by \$450 billion by 2035 and increase intra-African exports by more than 81 per cent. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, this single market trade agreement will enable the African economy to reach the \$29 trillion mark by 2050. However, the report says the African bloc is highly fragmented and intra-Africa trade is still very low (The-Herald-Zimbabwe, 2023). While Africa can be considered to be an RBA, its functionality as an RBA needs to improve.

BRICS

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), represent more than 40 percent of the world's population. BRICS is being touted globally as an alternative platform that replaces the Western economic hegemony. The BRICS countries are mooting a currency that is more accessible to developing countries and their needs and is fairer than the usually weaponised US dollar. The BRICS bank, known as the New Development Bank, with nine members - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Uruguay, Bangladesh and Egypt- is attracting more investors. BRICS is set to expand this year with twenty

countries from the Global South, the Middle and North having applied for membership and pronouncing themselves ready for a BRICS currency (Lavrov, 2023).

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) a Eurasian political, economic and security forum founded in 2001, has nine members: China, India, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Iran while Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia have observer status; and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Türkiye are dialogue partners. This is an important bloc that links Eurasia to the rest of Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the Americas. SCO has a working relationship with BRICS.

Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is a free trade group with Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan as members. A report in May 2023 indicated that BRICS, EAEU and SCO Members are mooting a merger of the three economic blocs ahead of the BRICS June meeting (Russia-Brief, 2023). Should that happen, it would create a huge geographical economic bloc with a significant say in the functioning of the global marketplace.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

China is also a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (ASEAN, 2023) in the Asia Pacific region. RCEP is a 15-member free trade agreement between the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. This grouping has the Asian Tigers and Emerging Markets and is important to the global economy.

Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR – In Spanish)

Southern Common Market, known as Mercosur in Spanish, has some dominance in Latin America (Mercosur, 2023). Brazil, already in BRICS, is a member together with Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay; with Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname as associate members. China has established a footprint in the region and its trade with Latin

American countries has surpassed that of the EU and is second only to the US. Countries in this bloc have expressed interest in BRICS membership (Roy, 2023).

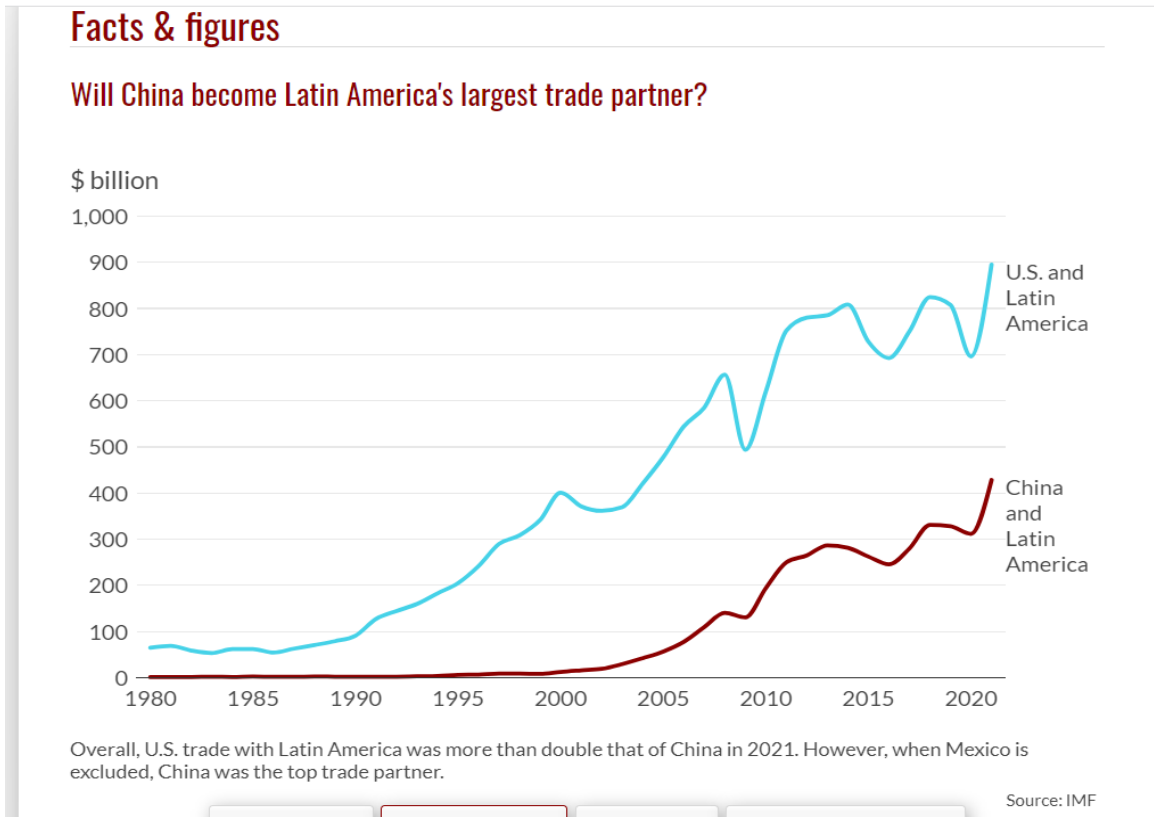


Figure 6: China's Growing Trade in Latin America

Source: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/chinas-economic-power-grows-in-latin-america/>

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE, are strong economically and have significant influence in the global market (Ghafar, 2022). The GCC bloc has positioned itself for a strategic partnership with BRICS, with some of its members already part of the BRICS bank.

Group of Twenty (G20)

The Group of 20 (G20) is an intergovernmental forum of 19 countries plus the European Union which focuses on the global economy, international financial stability, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development. It was founded in 1999 by the Group of 7 (G7), a group of liberal democracies organised around pluralism, liberal values and representative government and consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. G20 today has 21 members namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union and the African Union. It is considered a powerful multilateral platform today as its members are representative of all world regions. The G20 seems to have ambitions to be more active at the United Nations seeing that the Security Council is affected by the Russia-Ukraine war. A number of BRICS countries are in G20.

European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) calls itself the world's largest trading bloc, and is part of the Liberal Order, and therefore aligned with the US. However, confronted with a rising China, the EU is seeking a different narrative from the US that better serves the interests of its members. While the US asked the EU to distance itself economically from China, the bloc could not afford to play that zero-sum game with its largest trading partner and decided to maintain economic ties with China (Nardelli, 2023).

UK and The Commonwealth

After BREXIT, the UK is looking to strengthen its RBA made up of 56 countries of the Commonwealth, a grouping of mostly former British colonies headed by King Charles III. Its membership includes countries that applied for membership as they did not have colonial ties to the British Empire, like Mozambique, Rwanda, Gabon and Togo. The coronation of King Charles III was the UK's coming out as it demonstrated its convening power, with guests drawn from all over its former empire. While the UK is usually identified by its position in the West, it is seeking further alliances on its own. The UK-Africa Investment Summit (UK-AIS) in 2020 attracted 15 African Heads of State, and 24 or more are expected at the 2024 instalment. (UK

Government Report, 2023). The Commonwealth focuses on developmental support and cooperation; and trades among its members.

What Africa Needs to Take Note of in a Changing World

“The world today is undergoing major changes unseen in a century”.

(Jinping, X. 17 January 2022)

The above quote from the Chinese President, in his statement to the Davos Economic Forum in 2022, a statement he repeated to the Russian President in 2023 (AlJazeera, 2023), seems to provide the background for the unprecedented global activity taking place. Africa must not only take notice, but also act. Why? To take notice will help Africa to think globally and act locally if it is no longer a continent that is always acted upon, but an actor in its own right. What things should Africa take note of?

First, while there are major changes unseen in a century, some things have not changed. From the fifteenth century onwards, Africa has always been a battleground for superpowers, and its development has always been linked to geopolitics and geo-economics. This has not changed. Africa's future will undoubtedly be directly impacted by the global power shifts occurring in the 21st century, shifts the magnitude of which have not been witnessed in the last hundred years. This paper is prompted to pose a few questions such as, at similar junctures in the past, did Africa act promptly and wisely? This time will Africa remain a sitting duck? Will it continue to be a continent about which decisions that affect it are made externally by others? As the saying goes, Africa needs to think globally and act locally. If prompt and strategic action is not taken, the continent may fail to utilise the strategic opportunities that the changes unseen in a century present and it might remain a spectator at the periphery of world affairs.

Next to note is that Africa seems to be the hottest game in town, which some are referring to as the Second Partition of Africa. It is increasingly and comprehensively integrated into the global economy still as a supplier of cheap labour and raw materials which, as has been happening, drains the continent's resources that should have been for its industrialisation and development. Africa's resources include an abundance of critical rare earth minerals essential for powering

green growth and innovation in the next generation -lithium, cobalt, copper, oil, uranium and coltan (UNEP, 2023). While it is rich in resources, Africa experiences duality in its economies where a developed and isolated export sector exists side by side with a poverty-ridden underdeveloped population, itself a legacy of the colonial era. For instance, with 80 years of diamond exploitation, countries such as Sierra Leone struggle with underdevelopment. In the energy sector, much of rural Africa is not powered, yet foreign regional blocs and their members come to Africa to secure their energy needs, hence the dash for African gas by Western countries after the Russo-Ukraine war (Reuters, 4 October 2022). In the agriculture sector countries are coming to exploit Africa's productive land, yet parts of Africa are under famine and populations cannot feed themselves. Africa's concern is that its resources are not powering its industrialisation while its debilitating debt to the developed world is skyrocketing. This makes it necessary for Africa to carefully assess the goals in place for the investors it attracts and for each of its many strategic partnerships, which include the Africa-Arab, Africa-EU, Africa-Turkey, Africa-India, Africa-S. Korea, Franco-Africa, Africa-US, Africa-China, Africa-Russia, Africa-Japan (TICAD), UK-Africa Summit and the Africa-Asia Sub-regional Organisations Conference (AASROC).

Another thing to note is that Africa has some of the fastest growing economies in the world but the growth is not cascading to its millions. Geoffrey Sachs, the UN Secretary-General's Advocate for Sustainable Development Goals, concurred with a 2022 African Development Bank (2023) report to the effect that Africa is set to outperform the rest of the world in economic growth over the next two years. The increase in investors and the launch of the AfCFTA, which will be the largest free trade area in the world, will continue to contribute to Africa's growth. With the growth that is forecast, how will Africa ensure that poverty is not fleeing every other world region and finding a home in Africa?

It is important to note that Africa has a young population and is undergoing a population boom unequalled in the world today. The population boom could either help power future economic growth or, if not planned for, could bring about political instability across Africa and beyond its shores.

Africa already knows it, but it is important to note that Africa represents the largest voting bloc of UN member states and has more than one-quarter of the world's voice. No power can become a legitimate world leader without Africa's voting power. This is a significant strength that does not always benefit Africa, which struggles to speak with one voice at the UN and sometimes even on the continent. This lack of unity undermines both the African voice and its interests.

It is critical to note that Africa is fragmented. Experts say almost three years after its launch, AfCFTA, billed to be Africa's gateway to progress, is hampered by negligible intra-Africa trade due to fragmentation (Winand, 1993) which, if not addressed, will undermine the success of the initiative. As it is, AfCFTA which has signed trade MOUs with countries such as the US (14 December 2022), and with trade bodies such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency [(JICA), 5 December 2022], might benefit other regions, leaving Africa at the periphery. Much of the world, except Africa, views the continent and interacts with it as an integrated regional bloc, which makes both political and economic sense, while Africa continues to look at itself as fifty-four distinct political entities, which is unhelpful for its progress. African governments compete against each other where they could be pooling resources to present one strong and united front. If African countries are championing solitary engagement with minimal success in a globalised individualistic world; will a fragmented Africa survive in a regionalised multipolar world?

Recommendations (Options for Africa)

Faced with the present power shifts and new global configuration, what options does Africa have? This section will supply solutions to the concerns raised under 'Things Africa Should Note in a Changing World Order' above.

The Need for a Change of Approach

Is Africa thinking and acting strategically in preparation for a new global configuration, or will it be a sitting duck as in past centuries? Africa must be proactive and abandon the usual approaches that competitors think it always takes, which are:

- i) To choose the right wagon on which to ride and look for ways to extract benefits out of the arrangement. This simply maintains the status quo and will not do.

- ii) To complain about exploitation, neo-colonialism and the right of Africans to their resources and for Africans to craft solutions for African problems. The usual rhetoric is not enough. There is need for proactive initiative.

Africa needs to be proactive by assessing its geo-political position in global affairs and determining how it will be advantageous. After that the question to ask is not ‘among the competitors who has the better framework for Africa to fit in’, but it should be, how can Africa construct its own framework for managing its assets, countering the new scramble, and exploiting the world’s resources while collaborating with other countries’ frameworks of choice? Africa must make others adjust to its framework where Africa is concerned instead of it always adjusting to frameworks that feature non-African interests. If others are scrambling, Africa too should scramble; if they are jostling, so should Africa in order to build capacity in its people, governments and economies to re-position for future advantage. Do we have African policy papers on how to reposition in the next world order?

Unite or Perish!

Africa must deal with its fragmentation issues to prepare for the transition from the globalised unipolar environment which favoured individualism, to a regionalised multipolar setting which emphasises collective effort. The new global formation is emphasising RBAs and is forming alliances in all world regions at a furious pace. While Africa already has RECs, the bloc that will matter in the new order is Africa as an integrated RBA. It will not work for African countries to go it alone because they will not achieve economies of scale. Africa’s ‘RECs as building blocks’ strategy is moving at a slower pace than world events. The problems that AfCFTA faces now already reveal that economic integration without political unity will be difficult in Africa. Heads of State agreements to eliminate borders, visas, and numerous customs requirements are useless without implementation. Political will and leadership are needed now more than ever to get Africa past ‘agreements’ to implementation, otherwise Nkrumah, who said Africa Unite or perish, remains a voice crying in the wilderness. African leaders with a Pan Africanist orientation need to take the bull by the horns and take Africa forward to the final destination of a politically and economically integrated continent. Only then will Africa move from the ‘potential’ status to the ‘powerhouse’ realm.

Harnessing the Power of Youth and Women

In the new world order, trade is the watchword. Africa, the only region in the world experiencing a young population boom, should plan for young people, including women, to power Africa's industrialisation and economic growth. The fact is widely acknowledged that Africa's women have a sustained relationship with the continent's rural nucleus, and are closely associated with the subsistence economy, which offers a viable springboard for realistic growth. Furthermore, it is a fact that more females than males feature in the youth demographic. If the demographic boom is not planned for, it could trigger instability across Africa. The plan should take advantage of new opportunities to inter-connect youth and women's businesses across Africa, and to link them to international RBAs. The businesses ought to be encouraged in the areas of green and blue economies, exploitation and beneficiation of diverse African resources, including land, services and the arts, while they utilise technologies. Let the youth and women power the next stage of Africa's industrialisation while linking them to international RBAs.

The Need to Self-decolonize.

Africa needs to self-decolonize at every level - governments; bureaucracies; regional and continental bodies; institutions, especially of education and training; as well as its publics. After centuries of one form or another of western domination over successive African generations, from the fifteenth century to the present, many Africans are socialised into non-African values through assimilation, acculturation, modernity and globalisation. To articulate African interests and reframe African presence and progress, the African mind generally needs a re-orientation through decolonial action from non-African to African values and constructs. In decolonial action, each entity is responsible for its own decolonial liberation; no one decolonizes someone else or decolonizes on behalf of others. Decoloniality offers the choice to either assimilate or self-decolonise. To assimilate can be understood as to comply with the status quo and resign yourself to playing the game that is imposed on you while to self-decolonise would be leaving the game that is not yours but was imposed on you, and delink. Delinking from non-African constructs is followed by a relinking to the game that is yours or reconstructing it from scratch. The relinking leads to transformative action whereby Africa begins to act, to be, and to think

decolonially; building and rebuilding its presence, development and progress in ways that were disavowed or destroyed by centuries-old domination.

Empower the African Union

If Africa is the RBA that will champion the cause of millions of Africans in the new world order, it needs the African Union to be more empowered than it is now. The African Union, launched in 2002 as the next stage of Pan Africanism to spearhead Africa's regeneration and reverse its marginalization and underdevelopment, currently has no power to enforce any of the declarations, protocols, and conventions that it authors. It remains up to individual governments to comply or not, which renders the AU a pointless social club. If empowered, the AU would coordinate within Africa all the matters of note that are listed in the preceding section of this paper. Empowering the AU would require:

- African Heads of State to assess the role of the AU on the continent in the context of the new world order and revisit the powers given to it.
- African Heads of State to recommend programs to move the African Union from a WLWO orientation, in which it is socialised, to a new thinking in line with Africa's new direction. There is need to socialise the AU at every level into the idea of a New Africa, with emphasis on African values and ethics.
- The AU to be visible to African publics in local areas to impart the African vision to them and bring them continental programs. The AU must use information and communication technologies, as well as other emerging technologies, in this work,
- African Heads of State to revisit the 2007 Accra Declaration on the formation of an African Union Government and, in light of the state of Africa and current global changes, consider setting up the African Union as a nucleus for an African Union Government.

Make the AfCFTA work

AfCFTA is hailed on the continent and elsewhere as a game changer for Africa. Other countries and blocs know its potential and are rushing to sign trade MOUs. Africa needs to work overtime to eliminate obstacles to make AfCFTA work for Africa first, taking along Grassroots Africa, the Private Sector, Youth and Women. AfCFTA should focus, to begin with, on helping Africa to

achieve comprehensive intra-trade before the continent is opened up to be a dumping ground for external goods. There is a precedent for such action. The American administration of President Eisenhower, which espoused liberal economic values as the means to economic might, allowed the EEC (predecessor to the EU) to become a closed economic bloc in order to make Western Europe a powerful partner in the Cold War (Winand, 1993). Africa needs this to avoid being edged out of its program by competing regions.

Education and Advocacy

There is need to come up with re-orientation and capacity building programs to ready African people, governments, bureaucracies, institutions and economies for the transition from the ideological unipolar reign to which they were accustomed, to a multicultural multipolar world. Universities need to be the torch bearers in moulding the intellect to conceptualise a new paradigm that facilitates a fundamental rethinking of the European mischief of 1984/85, and that rectifies that monumental wrong. Universities can amplify the desirability and urgency of this sea change through constructive activism, which might include high profile symposia, seminars, and public lectures. The role of African universities in directly advising the polity has not been at all visible, implying that there is dereliction in that regard.

Conclusion

This paper briefly showed the factors that led to the rise of the WLWO, its characteristics and impact on Africa. It explored how WLWO values perpetuated colonial era values in Africa that led to continued marginalization, identity crisis and underdevelopment in successive African generations. The paper showed, not only Africa's, but also global discontent with the WLWO and the factors that led to its decline. It described the emerging world order and its characteristics, placing Africa within its context. The paper then gave options for Africa to rise from underdevelopment and to reframe its role, catapulting the continent from the periphery to the centre of global affairs, while casting away the stepchild image. In posing a number of questions, the paper indicated what the author considered to be fecund areas for further research and proposed a more robust role for African Universities in guiding continental thought and action.

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