

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LEGACY OF COLONIALISM IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE AFRICAN STATES

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Abstract

Colonialism has impacted the political and economic conditions of the contemporary Africa. Post-independence African states are a western model. African states adopted the more centralized and authoritarian system of administration of their colonizers. Post-independence African political system is characterized by ethnic based exclusion and marginalization. African states tended to one-party system, and though opposition parties are emerged they are highly restricted in their operation. Besides, corrupt behavior of the contemporary leaders of Africa also contributed by the colonial experience. Economic wise, African resources are extensively exploited by colonizers, thereby rendering Africa economically weak and looser in its interaction with the global economy.

Key word: Colonialism, Political Legacy, Economic Legacy

INTRODUCTION

Africa had experienced brutal, exploitative and oppressive form of colonialism. It is also obvious that colonialism has left negatively impacting legacy on the African continent. This study, therefore, tries to reveal the legacy of colonialism in the post-independence (contemporary) Africa. More importantly, the paper examines the political and economic legacy of colonialism in the contemporary Africa. To this end, secondary sources such as books, journal articles, reports, periodicals, and website source are utilized. For the sake of convenience, the paper is organized in the following manner. Firstly, it explains political legacy of colonialism in Africa. Secondly, it deals with economic legacy of colonialism in Africa. Thirdly, it confers some recommendations. Finally, the paper presents conclusion of the study.

POLITICAL LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

Colonialism has far reaching influence in the political aspect of the continent. The present political system of the continent is the direct reflection of the colonial system. Colonialism greatly influenced the politics of the continent by replacing indigenous institutions by strange administration (Farah &

Mazongo, 2011: 2). Africa had had democratic culture in the pre-colonial era which later dismantled through the influence of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (ibid: 3). Wyk (2007:3) interestingly noted that the "contemporary state in Africa is a remnant of a colonially imposed system". African states adopt the colonialists' centralized state system which produced ethnic and authoritarian based political culture (ibid: 7). Colonialists neither interested to flourish democratic system in Africa nor prepared African states to administer themselves effectively in the post independence era, instead, they used and threw them. Besides, it is clearly noted that "the colonial state in Africa was an authoritarian bureaucratic apparatus of control and not intended to be a school of democracy"(Copson, 2001:12)." This shows the fact that state was used as instrument of exploitation throughout the colonial era. During the colonial era, there was no such concept of African popular participation (ibid). This malpractice inherited by the post-independence African leaders. It is due to this fact that Africa has suffered from, *inter alia*, evils of corruption and authoritarianism since the time of independence.

Hence, what African states inherited from their colonizers is their undemocratic and authoritarian rule. Since the very purpose of Europeans was to exploit the resources of Africa, they employed undemocratic system of administration which is something forcefully imposed from the above. Putting it differently, they failed to take into account the interest as well as realities of African people. What Europeans planted in Africa or African leaders familiarized with is, therefore, the cruel administration used for utilizing the continent. The colonial experience of post-independence African leaders greatly impacted their way of administration, which is highly autocratic. Brutality of the colonialists' system of administration was inculcated in the mind of anti-colonial leaders of the time which later become leaders of the independent African states.

Moreover, the notion of ethnicity left behind by the colonial powers has posed adverse impact on the overall political system of African states. Ethnic division which was multiplied by colonial system left persistent rivalry and conflict in the continent and thereby resulted in exclusion and marginalization in African political societies (Alemazung, 2010:79). Kidane (2011:15-16) also asserted that the fragmentation of ethnic identities into several states and the uneven socio-economic development among several ethnic groups become an obstacle to manage diversity. Instead of being rectified, this unholy colonial legacy has been exacerbated in the postcolonial period (ibid). It is common practice to favor one ethnic group over the other and blurred inter ethnic relations in the post-independence ear. By doing so, post-independence leaders exacerbated inter ethnic conflicts.

Colonialism has also its own contribution in the present Africa's political party system. The colonial administrators and political elites made decisions on behalf of the indigenous population without taking into account their idea or consulting them. Inheriting from this monopolized system, African political parties become a top-down organizational structure and therefore tend to be autocratic. Salih *et al* (2007:41) argued that "African political parties originated in the non democratic setting of colonial rule which was neither democratic nor legitimate". This shows that African party system has

inherited the undemocratic colonial tradition. Even though multi party system is introduced in Africa it is not genuinely exercised. Though parties are allowed to emerge, the environment has not been conducive to compete and hold the power of the government. Even it is common to see many opposition political parties in Africa banned, criminalized their activities or undermined their contribution to national policy. Most post-independent governments perverted into one-party states or military dictatorships characterized by corruption and inefficiency (Gordon, 2013:4; Mazrui, 1994:61). Any form of opposition to the state faces ruthless oppression and imprisonment (Gordon, 2013:4). Hence, democratizing Africa becomes very challenging in this contemporary era.

The African rulers are also known to be highly corrupted, which could be traced back to the legacy of colonialism. Colonial powers' evil socio-political culture produced the habit of corruption in public service of the contemporary Africa (Njoku, 2005:99). From this, therefore, one can deduce that the existing corrupt behavior of the contemporary leaders of Africa is the continuation of the policies and administration of imperialists. It is obvious that corruption is one of the most attributing factors for poverty and poverty in turn leads for corruption creating vicious cycle. This situation is true in Africa and it is attributed to the far reaching effect of colonialism. In many of African countries leaders enjoy political power as a means of accumulating wealth (Wyk, 2007:5). Thus, state has got its instrumental value for the wealth of the few, leaders. Thus, the greedy, selfish, and rent-seeking nature of contemporary African rulers is also traced back to the deed of colonizers.

ECONOMIC LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

Colonialism has influence in the contemporary African economic performance. The economic underdevelopment of Africa is rooted from the European colonization (Nunn, 2003:2). As it is obvious that the European colonizers heavily exploited the resources of Africa, its negative effect on the contemporary Africa's underdevelopment is a well established fact. As Rodney (1973:146) clearly expressed Europeans taken away the young, healthy and the most productive forces of the continent leaving the children, aged, and unhealthy section of the population. Thus, it is easy to deduce from this that the European powers contributed a lot to the economic underdevelopment of contemporary African states. The colonizers left African poor and oppressed states. Hence, Africans started their economic performance at zero level.

Colonialism turned the continent to produce of primary products and cash crops as well as raw materials which have no more market value. This, in turn, caused unequal trade transactions (Farah & Mazongo, 2011:3). As a result of the exploitation of necessary resources, the continent has been forced to rely on the importation of foreign products (Thomson, 2010:192). This compelled African states to import very expensive manufactured goods from outside by what they gain from export of their cheaper primary products. This leads to unequal exchange of market products and trade deficit. Hence, Africa's integration into the world capitalist economy with its less valuable products is plainly

unequal and usually makes it risk taker.

THE WAY FORWARD

The adverse effect of colonialism in the political and economic conditions of African states is undeniable fact. Nonetheless, despite its deep rooted negative impact in the continent the researcher strongly believe that Africans shall no more blame the colonizers for their failures as colonialism is not the only cause for current African problems. Rather, they should also attribute their failures to themselves and be committed and vigorously strive to bring changes in political, economic, and social development of the continent. They should not externalize all their weaknesses to colonialism. Colonialism shall no longer be the reason to their failures. They should look into those countries which were under the yoke of colonialism but now advanced and prosperous, though the degree of exploitation differs.

CONCLUSION

Colonialists left Africa with a long lasting adverse effect. Colonialism has political legacy in Africa. Contemporary African states are western models and their political institutions are also inherited from the colonial states. As a result, the contemporary African leaders are authoritarian, rent seekers, corrupted and exclusionary to other opposition groups. This is why democratization process in Africa remains difficult. The economic sphere is not also an exception. Colonial powers effectively exploited resources of the continent. Besides, they turned agriculture to production of primary products and cash crops. Thus, Africa's integration into the global capitalist economy using its poor products and raw materials in exchange for western manufactured products usually results in unequal economic transaction. Colonial economic policies undermined the economic future of the continent. Generally, the historical foundation laid by colonialism should be taken into consideration to understand the present and forecast the future political and economic condition of African states.

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