
The Nexus between Colonialism and African Underdevelopment: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract

Underdevelopment and backwardness continue to hunt African continent despite its vast natural and human resource endowments even after decades of colonial master's disengagement. While some people continue to blame the continent's woes on its initial contact with the Western world characterized by centuries of slavery and later colonialism which introduced indirect rule and corrupt bureaucratic system of administration, neo-colonialism proffering harmful economic policies such as Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), economy deregulation, arbitrary imposition of prices on natural resources extracts and commodity products at the international markets thereby impacting negatively on the people. Others blame the continent's woes to ineffective, greedy and corrupt leadership who blindly rip their states and stashed or invest overseas. Also, there is the allegation of underhand sponsoring of civil conflicts and violent wars to have hampered the continent's development efforts by the West. However, the paper questioned how long will it take African continent to self-realisation and put itself back on track? Africans should look inward and renew and advance their ancient entrepreneurial skills with the aim of blending it with Western technology. Operating true federalism that will address issues such as ethnicity, conflicts arising from resource control, honest and effective leadership recruitment gaps are imperative.

Key words: Africa continent, Colonialism, Self-realization, Underdevelopment, True Federalism

Introduction

In many instances scholars have implicated the colonial masters for African underdevelopment and backwardness as a result of exploitation of its natural and human resources. However, what is more curious is the allegation made by African elites that the continent underdevelopment has a historical link to the period of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Bairochii (1993) opines that there is no doubt that a large number of structural features of the process of economic underdevelopment have historical roots going back to European colonialism. Further, Bertocchi and Canova (2002) aver that Africa colonization exerted a direct impact on the colonial patterns of growth, human and physical capital accumulation.

Further, some people blamed the weak institutions left behind as responsible for the continent's inability to progress. Englebert (2000) attributes Africa poor performance to its weak, arbitrarily imposed colonial institutions. But, what he failed to say is how the colonisers were able to use these same institutions to get things done and achieve results and why African leaders cannot apply similar methods to achieve set goals.

Moreover, there are those who blamed the continent's backwardness to the interference of African's cultures by the Western culture. For example, some holds the belief that the level of corruption in the continent results from the young nationalists' attitudes inherited from the colonial masters which hindered development. According to Motsomi (2006), corruption is not a characteristic of Africa rather it is a widespread problem of greed which is a common feature of capitalist's society. Alemazung (2010) opines that besides the economic imbalance resulting from colonization of the social, cultural and political lives of the African, societies in Africa were greatly interrupted and transformed by the policies applied by the colonial masters in the period. For instance, the French used the policy of assimilation in French colonized

territories to transform the socio-cultural life style of Africa people into black Frenchmen and women. It transformed them to think, behave and live as French cultural entities existing in their colonies (Ekpo, 2003). On the part of the West, an African who can receive the kind of education and understanding of their culture and life style stood a better chance of getting assimilated into their culture and opportunities (Rodney, 1972). Education was the major path to civilizing native Africans into superior Western being in captured colonies.

The independence gained from the colonial masters was supposed to allow Africans do their things in their own ways and advance. However, many years after the end of colonization, developments have continued to elude the continent. These former colonies have not fared better as the hope for political freedom and economic prosperity turned to despair, hopelessness and despondency. One of the reasons given is that the Western powers still have preponderance influences in every aspects of life of African continent. Even their departure did not bring genuine independence in most of the former colonized nations. However, it seems most critics have overlooked the attitudes of the elites which have contributed more than anything else to this development deficiency.

Aetiology of Imperialism Linked to African Underdevelopment

Under this section we will consider some of the factors responsible for the underdevelopment of African continent.

I. Conquest and Domination

Most scholars holds that decades of imperial domination of African continent through brutal conquest and oppressive administration and the mindless exploitation of its natural resources depleted the continent's resources and potential for growth and prosperity. And the present neo-colonialism undermines its capacity for free self determination. Ruling over Africans was not based on their consent or choice and their benefits but for the colonial masters. The local elites used during indirect rule notes and inherited this predatory attitude which continues till date.

The initial defining factor of contact of Europeans with Africa was their quest for cheap labour so they captured, transported of millions of African across the ocean and forced them to work in their plantations as exemplified in slave trade. As if that was not enough, this tragedy was followed by colonization after discovering the continent's richly endowed natural resources (Alemazung, 2010). Colonization heralded the mass exploitation of the continent's vast and high quality natural resources to feed the economies of Western nations which continues in much more diplomatic and/or stealth manner. Today, though extracted resources are paid for however, they are arbitrarily determined by the West. In addition, large barges of crude are illegally bunked and wildlife poached though in collaboration with some local people and officials. During times of colonization and now they control and influenced African nations with their economic and political ideologies, and culture, which are variant with those of African people.

II. Introduction of Indirect Rule and Bureaucracy

After the conquest of African territories, indirect rule as an administrative system was instituted which made use of the local people administering the colonised areas. This system was primarily despotic and structured to exploit and degrade the people through a strong bureaucracy. A major characteristic of bureaucracy is the maintenance of the gap between the rulers and the ruled; the haves and have-not. It was a structure based on exploitation of the lower class by the ruling elites. Nnoli (1978) opines that the establishment of indirect rule in Nigeria by Fredrick Lord Lugard was a strategy of governance adapted and adopted that gave powers to traditional rulers in their jurisdictions and in turn corruptly used it to amass wealth, acquire land and establish patronage networks which in the long run encouraged tribalism and nepotism.

Expanding on the system of rule adopted, Labo (2010) notes that traditional rulers collected taxes and give part of it to the central government and keep part for administering of the local domain. Conceivably,

this is where the orientation of corrupt practices by the African ruling elites began. To validate this, Mangongera (2002) notes that after years of destruction under imperial forces, African countries have been ruled by a bunch of idle and thieving leaders who continues to blame colonialism and neo-colonialism for their persistent failures. Pointing further, that government officials were usually corrupt and have no respect for democratic ideals in their endeavour to remain in power.

African leaders are to blame for the continent's tragedy because they failed to steer the affairs the ship of governance to achieve economic development and peace. Rather, they pursued personal enrichment through plundering of their economies to the detriment of others. This covetous attitude is a historical injustice that has played a significant role in under-developing the continent (Mangongera, 2002). Further, the French operated a system of indirect rule where the chiefs are bound to hand over the whole taxes collected to the French officials who then pay them a meagre salary. This pushes the chiefs to force their subjects to give them extra taxes or bribes (Sabbo, 1978).

Corruption in the continent continues to thrive due to the continued sustenance and practicing of the bureaucratic system of administration bequeathed to it during the colonial era. This system allows bureaucrats and civil servant to seek ways to subvert the existing rules to redistribute national income and wealth in their favour. They increase their level of compensation by lobbying lawmakers and politician and by engaging in other activities to influence the political process and maximising benefits accruing to them. The independence from the colonial masters is incomplete because African states have continued to preserve this bureaucratic system without adapting indigenous system that blend with the core African traditional system of communalism and spirit of brotherhood.

Prior to the conquest of the continent by imperialist in search of free labour for their plantations (centuries of slavery) and later for natural resources the continent was a seeming self contented people with whatever they could find in their lands. However, colonialism succeeded in transmitting greedy culture and values as epitomised by colonialism to a once quiet and peaceful contented people. It was this culture of greed, materialism and individualism which requires alienation and hard-heartedness to survive that offset their pristine living. Colonialism heralded the division of morality into personal and public strands. In their personal dealings with family and friends some people hold to some standard of morality and is different and do not matched in their public roles while dealing with others.

III. Neo-Colonialism and Support of Despotic Rulers

Decades after independence of most African states, colonial masters continued to influence policies, decisions and programmes for them. The possessive and exploitative character of the colonial masters still have overbearing influences on the third world countries several years after their departure. Alemazung (2010) opines that Africa's connection and relationship is an asymmetrical one which has cost the continent positive and sustainable development politically, economically and socially. One practical aspect of neo-colonialism is that till date they continue to determine the prices of commodities at the international markets.

It vital to note that most ruthless dictators in Africa managed to survive and remained in power because they were puppets of the West who used them to plunder the continent's resources more effectively. They brainwashed their followers to support and uphold colonialism. This mass brainwashing of the post colonial rulers and their successors has sustained neo-colonialism to the detriment and development of the African people meant that the wrong political culture was instilled into the brains of the elites. Neo-colonialism has brought up the kind of political culture of power preservation for ultimate self-benefit and few supporters at the detriment of the majority of the people and the state at large. For instance, in Nigeria, Western banks happily received and saved millions of dollars from former military dictators from the likes of Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha among others that looted the treasury during their reign unmindful of the sufferings of ordinary citizens. These dictators did not do this alone since they need some form of legitimacy for their unholy adventure. So they formed their own networks of political

patronage by co-opting politicians and bureaucrats either by bribing them or by threats thereby unleashing a culture of corruption to flourish.

The main hallmark of their administration of these elites was a total disregard for the rule of law, human rights, rules and procedures and looting of public treasury into private pockets ignoring developmental projects. These same people and their cohorts are given red carpet treatments, honours and exposed and encourage them to buy exotic cars and homes overseas which many of their own political class and bureaucrats over there cannot dream of or imagine owning. Young (1986) avers that in the Middle East the dictatorial regimes that oppress the Arab people do so with the complicity of the US and some European governments. Corruption and political oppression in many part of African could be linked to colonialism. By extension, the Western nations nurtured a culture of military coups in African as a means of regime change to suit their ideological whims and caprices. This later became a veritable means of obtaining political power and amassing wealth by adventurers.

IV. Underdevelopment Induced by Unfavourable Policies

Good and effective policies implementation form the backbone to globalisation, trade liberation and free market enterprise achieves sustainable development which is the ambition of current global target. However, policies prescribed by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for third world countries has not helped in any way to bring about the intended goal. One such example is the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which has rather helped to under-develop and further impoverished the African continent. Mangongera (2002) opines that Western powers through the Briton woods institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have continued to prescribe flawed economic policies for African leaders and forced them to implement these policies as preconditions in return for aids which have condemned the generality of Africans into chronic poverty. In Nigeria for instance, during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida who had little or no understanding of such policies, was advised and pressured to devalue the naira to attract foreign investors and introduce the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The foreign investors never came and the policies resulted in economic downturn with its attended unemployment, and high poverty among the citizens. Evidence from the World Bank suggests that such policies and the manner they have been implemented have never worked in favour of the public rather increased elites' corruption.

Western powers have also been accused of opening markets on the poor continent by selling artificially made cheaper products that undermine local producers and markets, and in turn give aids that amounts to nothing while the general economy suffers. Western nations continue to control the economic fortunes of African economies through bad policies. For example, SAP and its conditionality do not allow the poor continent to make independent policies and decisions that would lead to development. It is either that they overlooked the fact that advanced and developing country differs in socio-economic and political peculiarities or that the strategies and logistics for their implementation are not fully grasped or totally lacking by African leaders.

V. Obsession with Materialism and Affluent Lifestyle

Another inherited characteristic of colonial system is the culture of obsession with materialism, flamboyant affluence, exotic taste and conspicuous consumption of expensive foreign products and services as a symbol of class consciousness and statues. Nduilor (1999) and Dike (2002) points that significantly, one unfortunate but popular indices of good life in Nigeria is the appetite for affluent lifestyle and glorification, and approbation by the public for ill-gotten wealth. There are motivations and compulsive attitude of the elites for shortcut to affluent and quest for wealth irrespective of the means they are obtained. This is why some people get into dubious and bizarre activities such as ritual killings, heartless arm robbery to make money.

Most people living in the Niger area were ignorant and poor before the colonial period. However, the change came when colonial masters introduced commerce, bureaucracy in public administration and the subsequent discovery of oil (black gold) that would have increased this opportunity. However, flagrant and pernicious graft and stealing of public funds undermined development. Nigeria elites live exotic and ostentatious lifestyle, owning flashy cars and luxury homes in serene environment. This is seen as symbol of success which motivates and influenced others' desire to emulate them. This lifestyle encourages privileged people to short-change others through sharp practices as well as depleting the public till to satisfy their desires rather than in re/investing in the economy which could lead to general development.

B. The Internal Aetiology of African Underdevelopment

There are some scholars who believed that though colonialism has impacted on Africa negatively in some aspect, but Africans themselves have largely contributed to the underdevelopment of their continent. Here are some of the factors to be considered in this section:

I. Political Manipulation and Ineffective Leadership

Throughout the history of Nigeria political development like many other African countries, leadership positions have never been occupied by those who are qualified and deliberately seek the post through popular acclamation (ballot box). Many political leaders in the continent do not win their election through popular decision at the election pools but by selection after bribery with huge sums of money or mortgaging the treasure of their (likely) offices or states to those that facilitated the process. Similarly, many parliamentarians do not win their seats from their constituencies through wise choice by the constituents based on the individual's character assessment of competency and selflessness.

Most often, political positions are not offered to those best qualified and experienced for the job but to those that are able to pay for it with the hope of recouping from it or to those that would play to the gallery. This is one reason that accounts why a typical public office holder (political class) manages state affairs as personal fief. The consequence of this is that most of these states end up having people that lacks the capacity to formulate and execute good policies to advance their country in every aspect. Nigeria is a pragmatic and a classical example of an African country that has seen its potential for growth destroyed by the suppression of democratic governance for selfish reasons by the elitist's class.

II. Greedy and Corrupt Leadership

There is no gainsaying the fact that most countries in the continent have enormous natural resources and varied means of generating revenue that can transform their societies to Eldorado. Taking Nigeria as an example as a paradigmatic case, if the revenues generated from crude oil sales, public corporations and taxes were reinvested within, it will indeed lead to tremendous development that will impact positively to even other countries in the continent. Unfortunately, it is a country where greed and corruption have greatly undermined its development efforts. The colonial masters lived lavish lifestyle in bungalows with distinctive architectural design, lucrative salaries, servants, and are chauffeur driven, including other benefits and conveniences. All these became an inspiration to the privileged Africans elites who were allowed access to observe them so it became a culture to be emulated. This perhaps explained some people have continued to blame the colonial masters.

After the departure of the colonial masters, governance in the continent operated by the elites became characterized by predatory and rapacious behaviour, based on very narrow and parochial mindedness and on ascriptive values such as filial relationships, and/or clannishness and collective interests became subordinated to personal interests. Vanda (2010) opines that seeking political position in third world countries is to get access to the state in order to control rents from various means which may include legal, semi-illegal, or outright illegal economies. It is the governing elites define or redefine what constitutes illegal economic behaviour and selectively issue exemptions from law enforcement prosecution to families,

friends, and its network of clients. This type of political arrangement has been so pervasive that some scholars see states in West Africa as “mafia-like bazaar, where anyone with an official designation can pillage at will. The entire state machinery exists to siphon-off cash, and functions of government have been adapted for personal gains in place of the development of the state. A society that is corrupt cannot maximise its potentials for growth and development.

Though, there is no doubt that the continent had its crude oil, mineral deposits and agricultural products looted under colonialism. But, to continue blaming the West for the continent’s problems till date is hypocrisy of the worst kind. There is nothing worse than the elites’ escape of self flagellation for the woes of the continent. They are responsible for the failure of the resource-rich continent from economic prosperity and social advancement, and for the disillusionments, hopelessness and frustration of their people. They continue unscrupulously to harp on historical colonial pillages to cover up for their political and economic mess and are sad manifestation and reminder of their manipulation of democratic processes, poor governance and graft. It is preposterous that long after the colonial masters relinquished power to the nationalists they have not made efforts to achieve the dreams and hopes which such an event was to bring to the continent. They have behaved worse than the people they tend to blame. For them, it does appear that nothing beneficial ever resulted from the continent’s encounter with the colonialists. They seem to have forgotten that the colonialists pioneered and opened up vestures and laid the foundation for development in sciences and medicines, technology and other numerous inventions that would have been adopted to advance the continent.

There have been allegations that some technologies that have become the West’s patent right were developed by Africans. The mass exodus (brain drain) of intelligentsias to foreign land in search of greener pastures are those that would have contributed their quota to the development of the continent. But, as a result of poor working conditions, under-employment and consequent frustration caused by political opportunists they have no choice but to leave their respective countries. If today, should there be a slave ship positioned in African countries, it will be filled overboard with men, women and children ever willing and struggling to board.

Similarly, most countries in Africa continue to lose revenue from illegal extraction and outright theft of their resources worth billions of US dollars and sold far below predatory official prices fixed by the Super powers. It is difficult to differentiate what is happening in modern times from the seemingly historical injustices and exploitations attributed to colonialism.

III. Inadequate Educational Funding and Research Investment

Some countries in the continent have poor attitude towards research investment and human capital development especially in youth who are the key driver and engine of growth and development. Rather, resources are lavished in ostentatious lifestyle and cravings for expensive luxury (foreign) goods without hard work. In most countries, owning expensive Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) and sending ones’ children/wards to study abroad is a prestigious thing to do and is seen as a sign of status symbols. This is done at the expense of funding institution to improve local the educational sector that would have benefitted many. Stolen funds are equally used in holidaying, shopping and buying exotic homes, receiving medical attention and for religious tourism overseas is a glorious thing to indulge. All these are indications of achievement and success in life.

Generally, the socio-economic and political arrangement in Africa continent is such that social norms, custom and attitudes, and the aspiration of most citizens is the craze for wealth and materialism, and is deep. Paper money, bonds, stocks and owning expensive properties promotes social status, flexible economic exchange and access to political power more than excellent good and integrity. The money that would have been used for investment to accelerate general socio-economic development is used in chasing luxury goods and services. Furthermore, public attitude towards academic achievement without wealth is far less than the standing ovation given to renowned criminals. This attitude became a disincentive for

academics pursuit and research embankment. It is this reason that people both in public and corporate world indulged pecuniary crimes to meet up with the society's notion of success in life.

IV. Indolent and Uncreative Attitudes of African People

With ideas, creativity and hard work a nation can rule the world. However, in Africa inventions are rare so the continent's development effort is undermined. Most Africans have lackadaisical attitude towards work, and they over rely on the government for everything including solving their personal problems. Traditionally, Africans believes in superstitions, and feel reluctant to take determined effort to change their lives. They equally over-spiritualised everything, and hinged greatly on the belief in destiny and the will of some unseen supernatural powers to determine their fate, and are quick to blame their failures to an old family member back home. Yet they envied and jealous those who succeed through hard work to the point of charming diabolically or poisoning them. This kind of attitude can never lead to development.

African situation is best captured by Donald Trump the American presidential hopeful who notes with bitter disgust that African are lazy fools who are only good at eating, lovemaking and thugger. That the best they do is gallivanting around and are enemies of progress. They steal from their own government and go and invest the money in foreign countries and yet import everything including matchsticks. African countries ought to be recolonized again for another 100 years because they know nothing about leadership and self-governance (Georges, 2015).

V. Internal Saboteurs and their Collaborators

In most countries of African continent there is an entrenched class interested in frustrating every attempt by their governments at transformation, and will do anything to undermined any development efforts. In Nigeria for example, petroleum products importers have undermined attempts at revitalising the oil refineries so that they continue to import petroleum products at subsidized rate which most times they do not supply or falsely overestimate quantity. Similarly, the development of Ajakuta steels company has been frustrated with billions of US dollar budgeted for rehabilitation embezzled. This is because it will limit the opportunity of making huge profit from steel and allied products importation. Fredua-Kwarteng (2005) notes that in Ghana both internal and external forces work together to maintain that it's educational system is culturally and developmentally irrelevant to their needs. They are quick to note that their educational system is below international standard which is a hidden code for Western education.

VI. Civil Conflicts and Wars

The aetiologies of conflicts in African and lack of capacity to amicably resolve crises are almost homogenous. They range from competition for resources, religious intolerance, fear of ethnicity domination, and political exclusivity. Mangongera (2002) avers that Africa is plagued by a plethora of wars that have ravaged the continent's resources and most of them stemmed from the frustration of some people to have access to or benefit from their natural resources. It also includes persistent failure to change unpopular and corrupt government through legal means which sometimes are encouraged or influenced by some unscrupulous Western countries. For instance, Angola fought for over three decades for the control of the rich mineral resources. It is the same case with countries such as Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Burundi and Mali are till tasting the bitter pill of civil wars. Many have accused the Western countries of fuelling African conflicts to burst their weapons sales.

In Nigeria for instance, the mutual suspicion among the various ethnic groupings has stalled its development agenda. For instance, the Ibo ethnic extraction in the country are gifted and noted being ingenuous at invention. Unfortunately rather this has posed a threat to the northern counterpart whose memory of the past civil war is still fresh in their minds. The issue is that there is the palpable fear that if they are given the opportunity they could overrun others if given the opportunity to develop their skills. Consequently it has retarded progress in the field of technological development that would have advanced the country.

African Brain Drain Syndrome

Brain drain is the flow of intellectual and skilled labour migrants from poor countries to more developed nations for better opportunities. The mass movement of highly trained manpower to industrialized countries is an old phenomenon. The overall consequence is that it has stunted the development of the African continent (Sara, Peter & Robert, 2012; Idahosa & Akpomera, 2012).

One factor that is most often not calculates into the calculus of the continent's underdevelopment phenomenon is the issue of brain drain which is the movement of young and bright intelligentsias and skilled professionals from their country of origin (usually poor) to advanced countries in search of better opportunities (greener pastures) over decades. These intellectual Diaspora are represented in various fields such as engineering, physicians, scientists, and information technology (IT) professionals.

Some reasons that can be advanced why the continent has continued to experience exodus of well educated and gifted individuals from Africa to much better societies has been among others the challenging socio-economic conditions such as limited or constricted opportunities back home, crime rate, corruption, underemployment and lack of freedom and autonomy, the desire to escape the rising social conflicts and sometimes persecution, and where they will be more recognised and rewarded economically. This human capital flight as it is known has adversely affected developmental agendas of most of the countries in the continent. The increasing rate of emigration of African best brains to America and Europe is a serious obstacle to Africa development quest. Particularly, it is losing the capacity for research and innovation which are the necessary drivers for development.

Way Forward

Developments do exist in places of constant rising tension, civil strife, terrorism and deadly conflicts as in Nigeria, Mali, and CAR among others that have placed them on precipice or on brink of disintegration. So, until the countries in the continent finds a means of resolving their conflicts amicably, the quest for development and progress will remain elusive.

Most countries will do well if commonwealth stolen and looted from the treasury is plugged into research and development programmes. Ingenious and gifted people should be assisted in the development and improvement of their projects. For instance, rather than destroying and arresting those involved in local technology of refining petroleum products in the Niger Delta area should be recognised and encouraged to improve after registration. After all, the advancement of Europe and western world started from the scratch.

It is absurd and vain hope to continue to wait for technology transfer from Western world to the continent especially in the wake of the present global economic competitiveness. It will be more rational to divert scarce resources in sponsoring overseas educational programmes with specific attention to technology, medicines, and engineering that will facilitate the development of Africa continent than religious pilgrimages which is a very personal affair.

There is no better time for African in Diaspora to make meaningful contribution to their fatherland than now. There should be serious engagement by regional bodies to negotiate with them to plug back into their homeland through investment. They should walk the talk and not just talk without action. Nobody will come and develop the continent other than its own people.

With the present emigration pressure mounting on Europe, America, Asia and Middle East in search of greener pasture in their climes, it behoves on them to devise plans to encourage the training and development of practical talents among Africans that will enable them to return home and develop their region and continent. Advanced nations should reduce the manner they rip or suck heavily from the continent and in turn give them aids which amounts to nothing or ends in the pockets of the privileged few. In its place African countries should rather be taught how to fish than being given fish to eat.

Conclusion

More than anything else, High Immoral Values (HIV) is the cause of African Independence Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in the continent. It is preposterous and misleading to continue to blame underdevelopment in the continent on the West after over decades they relinquished power to indigenous leaders. Africans elites are the continent's worst enemies, removed from their people, and driven by excessive self interest so that their people's interest is forgotten which is hardly different from the colonial masters. They are to be blamed for the under-development and except they change development will continue to elude the continent.

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