

Colonial Legacy and the Refracted State: Africa in Motionless Motion

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ABSTRACT

The concern of this paper shall be to explore with modicum of profundity the “tragic” experience of slavery and colonization in Africa as a continent and the attendant challenges of subjugation-psychological, social, economic and political conquest by the colonizers. The poignant level of development in most of the African states has been a subject of intense scholarly concern as the debate has led to externalists and internalists schools of thoughts (Ayittey, 2005) on the cause(s) of Africa’s supine position which Joseph Conrad derogatorily referred in his book Heart of Darkness published in 1899. The history of African continent has been that of pristine aesthetics, cultural independence, composite values and communalistic disposition. Regrettably, the compelling impact of colonization has refracted the states of Africa and the effect has been monumental as the African states have not recovered from the overwhelming impact of colonization even after independence.

Introduction

The history of Africa as a continent is chequered. The slave trade that took place between 14th and 19th centuries had a great impact on Africa as, according to some historians, more than fifteen (15) million Africans were forced to leave Africa to cross the Atlantic to be sold to slavery. The abolition to slave trade in the nineteenth century which coincided with the industrial revolution in Europe and North America fuelled a growing demand for free rather than service labour and need for primary agricultural products for the growing industries in Europe and North America. These agricultural products were found to be abundant in Africa hence the need to possess Africa. The scramble for Africa (1885-1910) was so intense that no major European nation wanted to be without colonies. The competition was particularly strong between Britain, France and Germany. It is on record that in just twenty five years, all of Africa was colonized.

Colonization, Colonial Legacy: An Overview

Colonization is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another. One of the difficulties in defining colonization stems from the fact that it is hard to distinguish it from imperialism. Frequently the two concepts are treated as synonyms. Like colonialism, imperialism also involves political and economic control over a dependent territory. The etymology of the two terms, however provides some clues about how they differ. The term colony comes from the Latin word colonus, meaning farmer. This root reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin. Imperialism, on the other hand, comes from the Latin term imperium, meaning to command. Thus the term imperialism draws attention to the way that one country exercise power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty or indirect mechanism of control.

Colonialism is not a modern phenomenon. World history is full of examples of one society gradually expanding by incorporating or annexing less powerful territories and settling its people on a newly conquered territory Ancient Greeks set up colonies as did the Romans, the Moors and the Ottomans.

In the case of Africa, colonialism or colonization of Africa, by European countries was a monumental milestone in the development of Africa. The Africans consider the impact of colonization on them to be perhaps the most important factor in understanding the present condition of the African continent and of

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the African people. Therefore, a close scrutiny of the phenomenon of colonization is necessary to appreciate the degree to which it influenced not only the economic and political development of Africa but also the African people's perception of themselves.

In the literature therefore, the two largest colonial powers in Africa were France and Britain which both controlled over two-thirds of Africa before World War I and after the war. The popular aphorism "partitioning of Africa" was achieved in 1885 when all European powers met to share Africa with each recognizing the shave of the other.

The conference forged a common position to reach agreement on imperial boundaries so as to avoid any future conflict among European powers.

Ostensibly, therefore, Africa as a continent is a product of external creation. It is so because, the traditional African societies existed with their communalistic values and cultures before the advent of the colonizers. The pristine heritage was polluted by the imperialists repositioning of the social, political, and economic gamuts of Africa. The traditional African societies were "responsible and responsive" states with the citizens playing roles and discharging their civil obligations. The incursion of colonization thereafter brought to Africa states without citizens as the closely-knit relationship between the government and the governed in the traditional African societies was fatally dissolved by the authorization system inherent in colonial system and administration.

Colonial legacy can be variously conceptualized. It lends itself to "path determination" (G. Austin, 2010), "heritage", "outcome", "results", "influence" and so on. Really, it involves what the colonial masters have bequeathed to the African states in the areas of economy, social, religious, politics and many more. Thus, colonial conquest led to loss of sovereignty as colonial rulers replaced indigenous leaders. This was one of the ironies of British indirect rule. Based on empty platitude, British indirect rule often led to the recruitment of British collaborative agents and porters into leadership positions. Colonial governance through council chiefs, native tribunals and local native councils was therefore a mockery of democracy (Ndege, 2009).

In essence, authoritarianism and quasi fascism was entrenched into the political system of Africa through the use of the colonial and administrative machinery that were meant to keep Africans in subordinate position. Law and order was therefore, maintained in the interest of British capitalist accumulation (Mandari, 1996).

On another pedestal, colonial plans, and governing strategies were concerned and developed in London. The Europeans dominated executive and legislative council and formulated policies and budget for the colonized states. Thus, the British indirect rule kept governance at a distance from the people.

The colonial state, centralized, racialised and ethicized power. Obviously, this may be the precursor of the stateless nation that scholars have identified in the modern African states. In a fundamental sense therefore, the post-colonial governance became even more autocratic.

Further to the above, the economic and social legacies impacted heavily on the post-colonial states of Africa. African economy was tied sheepishly to the European economy. In fact, the qualities of African products and their price were being determined by Europe. Pitiably, Sir Fredrick G. Lugard, the high priest and agent of British imperialism in East and West Africa once made the following statement: "European brains, capital and energy have not been and never will be expended in developing the resources of Africa from motives of pure philanthropy" (quoted in Chiryankandath, 2007:7). At the social level, Africans were encouraged into living a life style similar to the Europeans. The dress pattern, language, consumption pattern, social activities, music, sports were all entrenched into African social gamuts.

Similarly, Christian missionary activities destroyed African culture through the gospels of salvation, obedience, and work. Through western education, which they dominated, Christian missions preached against African cultures and indoctrinated their converts to see the pristine African traditions and cultures as satanic. Colonial education which was foisted on Africans fostered the emergence of quiescent and obedient elites. This process facilitated the installation of the colonialists surrogates as leaders in the post-colonial/post-independence African states (Ndege, 2009)

As earlier pointed out the African economy was deliberately packaged to rely on Europe. Most African states were made to embrace the production of goods/commodities. Industries were not established in the colonies to process these commodities rather, rail stations were built from the interior to facilitate the exportation of the primary goods to Europe to help their industries. The finished product will then be shipped back to Africa at an exorbitant prices. In essence, both the colonial and post-colonial economies were characterized by two major forms of disarticulation: geographical and structural (Ake, 1980). The first refers to enclave development, which is the concentration of development activities in a few urban areas. Structural disarticulation refers to the development of a limited range of activities that are largely centered on agriculture with a very limited range of secondary industries. This ostensibly confirmed the submission that African economy is submerged to Europe, America and Asia.

Thus, African economy as a result of its obsequious and complacent disposition to the former colonial powers has continued to be technologically, financially, commercially and monetarily dependent on Britain, United States of America, Japan and China. The consequence of this has been the creation of a rental state which does not need statutory tax from its citizens to run and this has created “commodified states”, “state as edible cake” and prebendal state-dysfunctional, lop-sided, parochial, inchoate-with so much resources but with abysmally low level of development.

As part of the consequences/legacies of colonization in Africa, income inequality and poverty have become more prevalent since independence (Ndege, 2008). Colonialism promoted rural-urban, regional and classes in development. The stratification of international and domestic bourgeoisie, between the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, and between capital and labour (Ake, 1980, Swainson, 1980 and Leys, 1996) have impacted on the socio-political and economic life of modern African states.

The inglorious partitioning of Africa in 1885 which was hap-hazardly done and consequently separated kin from their kins and kindness and created boundary and terminated distortions is also a legacy of colonization. Thus, boundaries/territories were demarcated without consultation with the African people. Ethnic groups were balkanized and made to live under different states inspite of being from the common origin. This has created ethnic problems as groups that were forced to be together thereby raising tension and discontent between and among the heterogeneous groups. The Bakassi peninsula, (Nigeria and Cameroun) is a case in point here. Also, the Somali secessionist attempts by the Kenya Somali in their bid to join their Kin and Kith in neighboring Somali is very apt in this connection (Ndege, 2009).

The Refracted State: Africa in Perspective

Refraction is accepted lexically to be a scientific word. It is a term mostly used with another term called reflection.

Thus, refraction and reflection describe two ways that waves as of sound or light change course upon encountering light change course upon encountering a boundary between two media. The media might consist of two different substances in different states in different regions. Refraction occurs, as in a lens when a wave passes from one medium into second, *deviating from the straight path it otherwise would have taken*.

In this paper, our conception of refraction and its relevance to African state will be placed on the threshold of critical analysis especially, the influence of the colonial legacy on the states of Africa which is “deviating from the straight path it otherwise would have taken”.

The question will naturally be asked by every discerning scholar of African government and politics thus: What is the path that African states have taken towards developments?

As earlier pointed in this paper, Africa was unfortunate to have experienced slavery and colonialism which is regarded as twin evil. But, should Africa continue to lament over an experience that can be corrected and subsequently place the continent on the path of greatness?

Scholars have adduced reasons for the refraction of African states some have portrayed Africa as a victim of powerful external forces and conspiracies – a group that may be described as “externalists”. On the other hand are those who believe that the refraction i.e causes of Africa’s crisis is mostly within African – in the

nature of government (governance) or how African runs its own affairs. This group may be described as the “internalists”.

The externalists with Professor Alli Mazrui as one of its proponents see Africa’s crises and woes as a product of Western colonization and imperialism. “The West harmed Africa’s indigenous technological development in a number of ways” African’s collapsing infrastructure (roads, railways, and utilities) is due to the “Shallowness of Western Institution”, “the lopsided nature of cultural acculturation and the moral contradictions of Western political fuselage”. In fact, the political decay is partly a consequence of colonial institutions without cultural roots in Africa” “Therefore, self-congratulatory western assertions of contributing to Africa’s modernization are shallow.”

Thus, the externalists also identified the pernicious effects of the slave trade, racist conspiracy plots, exploitation by avaricious multinational corporations, an unjust international economic system, inadequate flows of foreign aid, the neo-liberal policies of the World Bank, IMF and deteriorating terms of trade. (Ayttey, 2005).

However, the “Internalists” are the new angry generation of Africans who are fed up with African leaders who refuse to take responsibilities for their own failures and instead used colonialism to conceal their incompetence and mismanagement. This school of thought believed that, it is unarguable that colonialism has contributed immensely to the woes of Africa. But since Africa got independence in the 1960s the successive leaders of the post-independence Africa have done more harm than what the colonizers did. It is on record that over 80% of African leaders abused power, corrupt themselves and implemented autocratic policies in their states since independence. Worried by this development, UN secretary General Kofi Annan himself an African lashed out at African leaders at the organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Lome in July, 2000. He pointedly told them that they are to blame for most of the continent problems (Daily Graphic, July 12, 2000). He also pointed out that “Africa is the region giving him the biggest headache as the Security Council spends 60 to 70% of its time on Africa. He admitted sadly that the conflicts on the continent embarrasses and pains him as an African (the Guide July 18-24, 2000 p.8).

Considering the stand point of these two schools of thought, one would see clearly the reasons for the refraction of African state. Obviously, colonial legacies and its debilitating effects are weighty and sacrosanct as the inherited political, economic, social and religious values of the colonizers have impinged heavily on the growth and development of African states. Also, the gluttonous disposition of African leaders and the tendency to foster stateless state where the peoples tax do not count has severed the relationship between the government and the governed. Most African states are rental and prebendal states.

I will here endeavour to posit that the cause of the Africa’s refraction, obscurantism has a third perspective. This perspective I will refer to as the “passivist school” or fellowship apartheidism”. This theoretical proposition places the problems and woes of African states on the door step of passive/weak followers/citizens who are complacent and have refused to take their destinies in their own hands. This school you may call it “Donald’s passivist theory” contend that African citizens endures and cooperate with unsavoury conditions and only complain without taking steps to bring their leaders to account for their stewardship. This partly has contributed to the insensitivity of the leaders who now created “vampire state” where the government has been hijacked by a phalanx of unrepentant bandits and crooks, who use the machinery of the state to enrich themselves, their cronies and tribesmen, while excluding everyone else (the politics of exclusion) . The richest persons in Africa are leaders of state and Ministers. Quite often, the chief bandit is the head of state himself (Ayttey, 2005).

Colonial Legacy, Refracted State: A Critical Perspective

In the contemporary study of African Government and politics, the critical impact of colonialism to the modern or post-independence states of Africa cannot be over-emphasized. It has become an invincible phenomenon. The shape-political, social economic etc of Africa has an inseparable link with colonialism. Obviously therefore, the post-colonial Africa is in a transitional phase ie: moving from a traditional or semi-traditional way of life to a modern one (Diop, 2012).

The movement of African state from one primordial phase to the other and ultimately to the modern phase is susceptible to the antics of neoliberal capitalism. In spite of the communitarian principles of the traditional cultures, the dictates of neoliberalism has forced people to embrace individualism which is part of the legacies of colonialism. This has created unbridled lust in the elites to acquire wealth while the commoners are left to suffer. The post-colonial Africa has lifted material acquisition to the sublime. The result of this was the creation of a new class of individuals exposed to aspect of European culture that were super imposed on the local ethnic cultures. The product was a multi acculturated Africans.

The theory, of P.P Ekeh (1973) "motion of two publics" is apt here where we have the primordial public and the civic public both impacting on the running of the state. The bureaucratic class that was nurtured during the colonial era was naturally promoted as new instrument of exploitation as the era of neo colonialism took hold. This was the genesis of Africa's comprador bourgeoisie. It was the function of the members of this class to facilitate the continuing exploitation of Africa's resources. (Diop, 2012).

The irrepressible passion to speak against the colonial subterfuge which slowed down the progress and development of African states overwhelmed writers such as Fanon (1963) in his *Wretched of the Earth*, Suns of Independence (1963) by Ahmadou Kourouma, Ayi Kwei Amah's *The Beautiful One's are Not Yet Born* (1968) and *Bound to Violence* (1968) Yambo Quologem. The major thematic pre-occupation of their writings was to warn of imminent danger that would befall the newly independent African states especially, considering the westernized appetite of the post-independence leaders and the wrong orientation that the elites had given to the new nations. This new orientation was promotive of a new forms of production under the rubric of the developing economic system now known as capitalism. Adam Smith became the totemic god of this new system. Under such new circumstances ethnical systems were also bound to change. The pursuit of wealth and the accumulation of material goods, became the measure of a person. The Christian religion whose worldly function was to prepare souls for the afterlife now saw itself falling under the sway of science, technology and capitalism. The goal of humans were to pursue and to seek a material paradise in heaven. This invariably led to the Schizoid personality- hybridized and split- of the African: on the one hand modernizing but on the other hand culturally beholden to tradition. The compatibility of the two modes of the modern African personality is therefore confusing, complex and fraught with inherent danger to the newly independent African states.

The "refracted" states of Africa –East, West, Southern and Northern with fifty four states (54) all had varying degrees of colonial experiences (save for Liberia and Ethiopia) and the colonial incursion that was mixed with the post-independence leadership challenges in Africa has to make Africa to be regarded as "Third World". Africa is not in the "First World". Not in the "Second World" but a "Third World" which validates its quagmire position. African people too owing to the authoritarian experience of colonialism have become passive and dormant in their responses to challenges of nation-building. According to Fatunde (1985) who was critiquing Quologem's work titled *le devour de violence* a literary work that speaks about post-independence disillusionment in African states, he portrays, the working people "as passive and dormant victims who hardly protest against their living conditions as even in the post-colonial Africa, spirit of resistance has warned." This is what I referred to as followership apartheidism earlier or her "passivism theory" which "blurred" or refracted the African states in her quest for development.

The challenges of nation-building , prosperity and development has been very intense as economically only for few African states - Libya, Bostwana, (A.J Samatar, 1999) could have a Gross National Product (GNP) per capital of over \$7,600 whereas many other countries like Somalia, Mozambique, Rwanda struggles to recover from decades of civil war with a GNP per capital of less than \$900 (Shroeder).

To further address the problems of Africa in the post-colonial era, various theoretical models/paradigm have been developed by scholars. Prebendalism as espoused by Richard Joseph (1991) explains the patron-client structure of relation in African government and politics where the patron and his clients are united towards a major common goal of siphoning the resources of the state for their personal aggrandizement. The "notion of two publics" of P.P Ekeh (1973) explains that the refraction of African states is caused by the two publics - Primordial and civic - that are existing to corner the state resources for their own use at the expense of the people. Jean Francois Bay at (1989) theorized on what he referred to as the "politics of the belly" or what Adedibu - a frontline politician in Ibadan, Nigeria would refer to as "Amala Politics". This theory advances the concepts of synonymous metaphors such as patromonialism, primordialism, god-fatherism and others which are relevant to the study of contemporary African politics and government.

Other theories include, the rentier state theory which portrays the state as existing without citizens. Governmental activities and programmes hardly recognize the existence of citizens as the state is not run with people's tax but rather by the income from primary products e.g. Oil, Cocoa e.t.c. that are exported to Europe and America-the erstwhile colonial lords. The greed and grievance theory explains the reason for tension and war in some African countries where there are no food security, where there is environmental scarcity and where there are palpable injustices as in the case of Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Nigeria (Bakassi, MEND, Boko Haram) and others.

Rising conflict/rising poverty theory was postulated and developed by one of the Africa's most brilliant political scientist – Professor J.B Adekanya (2007) in the theory, he explores historical and contemporary paradigms on the challenges of nationhood/statehood in Africa especially from the angle of the rising conflicts occasioned by scarcity of resources which placed ethnic groups and communities at daggers drawn with the others while the state actors/leaders are busy amassing wealth of the state which they often use to fan the embers of discord and conflict (Donald, 2013, Unpublished).

The resources curse theory is a poignant thesis that explains the paradox of situation in most African states where there are more resources but there is less effect of the resources on the living standard of the people. The sizeable part of the available resources are cornered by the political elites/ actors thereby turning what should be a blessing to a curse.

It is therefore no longer too fashionable to Africans to continue to blame external factors for their woes. African leaders should admit that they have failed the continent (Ayittey 2005) and so should examine themselves and restructure their countries to achieve prosperity. We may need to be less attached to the Walter Rodney thesis, *How Europe under developed Africa* if Africa as a continent is to control the refraction inherent in its development efforts. According to Ayittey (2005), "Only reform –intellectual, economic, political, and institutional- will save Africa but leadership is not interested. Period. Using satirical connotation, Ayittey submits:

Ask these leaders to develop their countries and they will develop their pockets. Ask them to seek foreign investment and they will seek a foreign country to invest their booty. Ask them to cut bloated state bureaucracies or government spending and they will set up a "Ministry of Less Government Spending." Ask them to establish better systems of governance and they will set up a "Ministry of Good Governance" (Tanzania). Ask them to curb corruption and they will set up an "Anti Corruption Commission" with no teeth and then sack commissioner if he gets too close to the fat cats (Kenya). Ask them to establish democracy and they empanel a coterie of fawning sycophants to write electoral rules, hold fraudulent elections with opposition leaders either disqualified or in jail, and return themselves to power (Ivory Coast, Rwanda). Ask them to reduce state hegemony in the economy and place more reliance on the private sector and they will create a Ministry of Private Enterprise (Ghana). Ask them to privatize inefficient state-owned enterprises and they will sell them off at fire-sale prices to their cronies. In 1992, in accordance with World Bank loan conditionalities, the government of Uganda began a privatization effort to sell-off 142 of its state-owned enterprises. However, in 1998, the process was halted twice by Uganda's own parliament because, according to the chair of a parliamentary select committee, Tom Omongole, it had been "derailed by corruption," implicating three senior ministers who had "political responsibility" (the East African, June 14, 1999). The sale of these 142 enterprises was initially projected to generate 900 billion Ugandan shillings or \$500million. However, the autumn of 1999 the revenue balance was only 3.7 billion Ushs.

The position of Ayittey (2005) as highlighted above calls for sober reflection. It also calls for need for the emergence of young patriotic and selfless African leaders who will take the continent away from the woods created by colonialism and the post-colonial leaders/actors who are currently profiting from the refraction of African states.

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