

AFRICA AND THE CHALLENGE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT: ISSUES IN IMPERIALISM AND NEO-COLONIALISM

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SUMMARY

The late 17th century saw Africa being incorporated into the mainstream of the world capitalist system. It has been argued that Africa's state of development as at this point in time was not at parity with the rest of the world. The study adopts a descriptive approach and seeks to mirror on the processes that have been used to incorporate Africa into the capitalist system which of course has further led to her under-development and its attendant consequences. The study reveals that processes of imperialism which had existed before independence still continue to persist and are being perpetrated by the western powers through acts of Neo-colonialism and Dependency which does not allow for meaningful development in the Third-world Countries. It is seen that although African Countries make efforts towards development through various strategies, these attempts meet with failure because of external influence and insincerity on the part of leaders. The paper therefore

recommends Africa must extricate itself from western economic grip by shunning their economic policies while adopting policies that are amenable to the African culture and environment.

INTRODUCTION

From onset, people have shown a capacity for independently increasing their ability to live a more satisfactory life through exploiting the resources of nature. To this end, each continent independently participated in the early epochs of the extension of man's control over his environment – meaning in effect that every continent can point to a period of economic development which was brought about as a result of indigenous expertise and effort.

Africa as a continent was not left out, being the original home of man; it was obviously a major participant in the process in which human groups displayed an ever increasing capacity to extract a living from the natural environment. No wonder, in the early period, Africa was the focus of the physical development of man as such, as distinct from other living beings. Development was universal because the conditions leading to economic expansion were universal. Everywhere, man was faced with the task of survival by meeting fundamental material needs, and providing better tools were consequences of the interplay between human beings and nature as part of the struggle for survival. Human history is not a record of advances without contradictions. There were periods in every part of the world when there were temporary setbacks and actual reduction of the capacity to produce basic necessities and other services for the population. But the overall tendency was towards increase production, and at given points of time the increase in the quantity of goods and material well-being of the people

was associated with a change in the quality or character of society, (Rodney, 1972). This change as it affects the third world particularly Africa is our main focus.

Theoretical Foundation

There are two broad competing paradigms or models that seek to explain African underdevelopment. These are theory of modernization and theory of imperialism. The instrumentarium of the theory of modernization has been derived from a convergence of sources in the social sciences in the western societies over a long period of time. The most contributions have come from economists who have provided descriptions and explanations of the great transformations that first initiated the industrial revolution in the West. Similar contributions have been made by sociologists who have meticulously described and explained the enormous transformations that occurred in the non-economic institutions of these societies. What modernization theorists most often end up with is in eventuating ethnocentric practical recipes which admonish the poor societies to copy from them. In other words, join the Calvinistic cult and experience a sudden leap into modernity, (Offiong, 1980).

On the other hand, the theory of imperialism derives its concepts from Marxist sources. They postulate that the wealth and poverty of nations result from the global process of exploitation. The point is that the problem of the poor countries is not the lack of technological know-how, cultural traits conducive to development, or modern institutions, but that they have been subjected to the exploitation of the international capitalist system and its special imperialists agents, both domestic and alien. The infiltration of western capital into the poor countries has resulted in situations characterised

by what the economists term as "growth without development as in the case of third world Africa, (Offiong, 1980).

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of underdevelopment does not mean absence of development, because every people have developed in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent. Underdevelopment makes sense only as a means of comparing levels of development. It is very much tied to the fact that human social development has been uneven and from a strictly economic view-point some human groups have advanced further by producing more and becoming more wealthy, (Rodney, 1972 and Alakpiki, 2001).

The moment that one group appears to be wealthier than others, some enquiry is bound to take place as to the reason for the difference or gap. For example, when we compare third world Africa with Europe or North America, we say that Africa is underdeveloped. Our main concern is with the differences in wealth between on the one hand Europe and North America and on the other hand Africa, Asia and Latin America. At all times, the cardinal ideas behind underdevelopment is a comparative one. Therefore, it is possible to compare the economic conditions at two different periods for the same country and determine whether or not it had developed; it is possible to compare the economies of any two countries or sets of countries at any given period in time.

Another important component of modern underdevelopment is that it expresses a particular relationship of exploitation namely, the exploitation of one country by another. All of the countries named as "underdeveloped" in the world are exploited by other; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now pre-

occupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation. African and Asian societies were developing independently until they were taken over directly or indirectly by the capitalist powers. When that happened, exploitation increased and the export of surplus ensued, depriving the societies of the benefit of their natural resources and labour.

Historical Antecedent of Africa Underdevelopment: A Recourse

As earlier observed, the word underdevelopment is a comparative word because there is no country or continent that is not developed. This notwithstanding, the root of African underdevelopment can be traced to the commercial slave trade that the Europeans introduced into Africa. The fact is that there was domestic slave trade which was carried on between and among wealthy Africans and Europeans alike and that was on a very minute scale, while there was also Arab slave trade especially in North-East Africa which was also on a very small scale. But with the introduction of European slave trade or commercial slave trade from 1445 to 1870, Africa suffered economically, politically, psychologically and technologically. The European slave trade robbed Africa of between 10 and 20 million able-bodied men and women that were carted away to Europe, the Americas', West and East Indies plantations, (Alakpiki, 2001).

European slave trade brought woes to Africa, for about four centuries, the population remained stagnant (1450 – 1850), while other continents grew at abnormal rates. This stagnation affected human resources as well as economic base of Africa on the reverse side, for four hundred years and above, the European and Americans were using African free labour to develop their own countries. But suffice to say that before the introduction of

European slave trade, Africa was developing at the same pace with other continents with civilised empires and kingdoms such as Mali, Bornu, Ghana and Oyo to mention a few. These kingdoms and empires decimated with the introduction of imperialism and colonialism.

Another reason for African underdevelopment was colonialism. Africa was seen as a source of raw materials, minerals and markets for economic development of Europe and America. This condition has persisted till today. Scholars of economic development refer to this as "Neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism". The contention here is that African economy is regarded as an appendage of the metropolitan economy, to be exploited for enhancing the national power, profit, and prestige, (Rodney, 1972). The attendant effects of European slave trade and colonialism on Africa amounted to loss of development opportunity associated with technological advancement during the age of scientific inquiry. That opportunity was lost because Africans were half-baked educationally.

Integrating African Economy into Western Capitalist Economy: An Organic Relationship

Colonialism was a factor that integrated African economy into the world capitalist economy. Although African economies were and are dominated, the point here is the effect of the particular manner in which they have been integrated. So the organic relationship is the process in which African economies were joint to the Western economies.

The processes were;

Monetisation

African economies were monetised by annihilating the pre-colonial currencies which had represented a rudimentary monetisation, but were limited as currencies

that they would have been serious obstacles to fundamental monetization. They were annihilated by depreciation and displacement so that the way was paved for the development of a modern monetary system. To achieve this, first they encouraged wage labour often by force – they do this by appropriating arable land from Africans and thus reducing them first to squatters and eventually to wage labourers on their land. The expansion of wage labour not only had the advantage of monetising the economy but also of facilitating the control of the economy and a more reliable supply of labour.

Second, African economies were monetised by imposing taxes and insisting on payment of taxes with the European currency. The issue is that, paying of taxes was not new to Africa, but what was new was the requirement that the taxes be paid in European currency. Compulsory payment of taxes in European currency was a critical measure in the monetisation of African economies as well as the spread of wage labour. Also, the ascendancy of European currencies saw the emergence of modern credit system with the establishment of modern banking system (Ake, 1981).

The organic relationship as it relates to cause and effect is that the process of monetization went hand in hand with the spread of capitalist relations of production which led to the proleterianisation of the African peasant as well as some African entrepreneurs. It also went hand in hand with the development of capitalist institutions such as the money market. These were to the advantage of the metropolitan or European economy.

Imperialism of Trade

Trade between the colony (Africa) and the colonising power was a critical mechanism for the integration of African economies into the European

capitalist system. Trade imperialism promoted complementarity, or interdependence, albeit an unequal interdependence between the African economies and the metropolitan economies. Trade created interdependence through complementarity by encouraging specialisation in the primary production of raw materials needed by the metropole, while the metropole specialised in manufactured goods. The money income accruing to the colony from colonial trade went largely to the consumption of imported manufactured goods from the metropole. The colony's ability to purchase manufactured goods depended on its export earnings from primary products. So the growth of incomes arising from trade merely encouraged ever-rising demand for metropolitan imports and encouraged its specialization in the consumption of manufactured goods.

On the other hand, the European demand for African primary products, and the brutally self-interested way in which it was satisfied, led to a dependent relationship. The colonizers went for minimum input for maximum output. Trade expansion required some amount of development, especially in the area of infrastructures. A minimum of infrastructure development was allowed to take place in just those places where they were necessary for tapping particular primary products of interest to the metropole. Roads and railways and other models of communication were developed to link the sources of raw materials to the points of exit to Europe and other metropolitan countries of the West.

Additionally, colonial trade tended to destroy the traditional crafts and craftsmanship in Africa. This is because it flooded the market with substitutes which were cheaply produced but considered exotic, more desirable or more functional by the African population than the

traditional substitutes. Put these together, African economies became incoherent, incapable of autocentric growth and dependent upon the economies of the advanced industrialized societies (Ake, 1981).

The Impact of Foreign Investment

Foreign investment created linkages between the metropolitan and colonial economies. This was obvious, because in trying to stimulate primary production in the colonies was linked to the metropole. The spread of capitalism in the colony was integrative in more subtle but effective ways. It encouraged the growth of a small class of indigenous capitalists who had common interests with foreign capital. Western capitalist encouraged investment in some infrastructural development as well as the development of administrative system. Such money used was not written off, rather, the emphasis was on recovering such investment with a good return in the shortest possible time. That meant a lot of emphasis on the improvement on the balance of payments which in turn placed pressure on primary production.

As noted by Raul Prebisch, market forces in the global economy tend to work towards the transfer of income from poor countries to rich ones. Incomes in the African economies rose too slowly to be very significant in producing internally-generated industrialization or even growth. Also, the investment in primary production did very little to generate external economies. The point is that foreign investment increased primary production without significantly raising incomes, improving the development of productive forces or even capital accumulation, it did not hold much hope of the colony breaking away from its role in the division of labour established in the early periods of colonialism between the colony and the metropole; (Ake, 1981).

From the above, we can say that Africa was being underdeveloped for Europe to be developed. This shows that development of Europe is a part of the dialectical process in which Africa was underdeveloped, (Rodney 1972). At this point, one would expect that with the attainment of independence by some African countries, the tide would change in favour of third world Africa. An examination of Neo-colonialism and post colonial development will prove the assertion right or wrong.

Neo-Colonialism and Post-Colonial Development of Third World Africa

Neo-colonialism is seen as a situation in which a country is in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and its political policy is directed from outside. The neo-colonial state is controlled by the colonial power that formerly ruled the territory in question. It is also seen as a process of handing independence over to the African people with one hand, only to take it away with the other hand, in other words, African countries were given flag or political independence without economic independence (Nkrumah, 1970).

A change from colonialism to neo-colonialism in all colonised territories followed an intense and protracted struggles aimed at achieving independence. The independence won, following these struggles was and still remains nominal or pseudo independence, since the former colonial power still exercise political, economic and social control of the former colonies, (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002). Therefore colonial political economy established the material and institutional foundation for the development of the neo-colonial economy, (Williams, 1980).

With the social and institutional foundation put in ,

place, the transition to the neo-colonial political economy was easy. The development of neo-colonial economy needed the granting of independence or the transfer of state authority into indigenous hands to give a semblance of independence and the exercises of sovereign authority, (Williams, 1980). The limited independence granted is evidence by neo-colonial economy which is characterised by expatriate domination of investment opportunities, made possible by access to credit, technology and managerial skills necessary for industrial production. This resulted in a situation which stalls the accumulation and re-investment of capital by indigenous entrepreneurs who lack the resources necessary to compete with multinational corporations. This resulted in the reduction of indigenous entrepreneurs to compradors bourgeois. Put it the other way, indigenous entrepreneurs became agents or intermediaries between foreign interest and the indigenous polity and economy, just as they also turned to the state for capital and contracts, (Williams, 1980).

We shall examine different facets of neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism ranging from cultural, political and economic neo-colonialism.

Cultural neo-colonialism; this is made possible through education and training. The introduction of formal education marked the formalised process of cultural imperialism. Colonial education was a misdirected or misrepresentation of reality. Colonial education encouraged its receivers to glorify all things European and look down on all things African which helped to cultivate in the colonized, inferiority complex. The culture of Africa was portrayed as uncivilised and primitive, while that of Europe and America were extolled. African names were dropped, local languages abandoned, the tradition and culture of the people relegated in preference for all things

foreign. This external mind-set which still persists till today perpetuated neo-colonialism and left the Third World psychologically and socially disoriented, (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002).

Political neo-colonialism: most third world African countries in spite of the claim to independence and sovereign status, are still indirectly under the control of foreign powers. This could be seen by their internal politics and policies being defined, determined and directed from external sources. Before independence, colonizers indoctrinated a crop of indigenous leaders who took over the mantle of leadership and used them to further the cause of imperialism. These local leaders ensured that their countries were and are still controlled by the external forces that enthroned them by being subject and loyal to them.

Also, neo-colonial political order is seen by the post-colonial states of the Third World whose political processes, and the institutions of state bureaucracy are directed by external forces. This according to Okereke and Ekpe (2002) is made possible by surrogates of the imperialist powers who, as indigenous political leaders, have been nurtured by these powers, not only to assume leadership of their post-colonial states, but while there, to use state apparatus to ensure the domination and control of their society.

Neo-colonial control is further seen in Third World African military formation/institution whose members are trained in foreign institutions and whose operational equipment are sourced from the western Military Industrial Complex. The Third World Africa depended heavily and still depend on the western power for their security need. The danger is that neo-colonial dependent relationship remains that Third World Countries cannot

pursue an independent security and strategic interests that differ from that of their foreign masters. An attempt toward that direction was and is always met with frustration by the colonial masters, example is Nigeria Military Industrial Complex established in 1965 with nothing tangible emanating from it compared with similar firm established the same year in Brazil, (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002, Ibezim, 1991).

Economic neo-colonialism; this is seen in the expatriate domination of invested opportunities occasioned by their easy access to credit facilities, superior technology and managerial skills. Since indigenous entrepreneurs lack the resources, technological and managerial skill, they cannot compete effectively with foreign companies. Economic domination of Third World Africa by Western power is made possible through multi-national corporations. This domination hindered the development of an independent national bourgeoisie capable of internally generated and initiated development, thus retarding development in these societies, (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002). By means of multinational corporations profits are not re-invested in the host countries which could have stimulated economic activities and authocentric growth, rather, such profits are exported away by what is known as capital flight. This is further worsened by acts such as tax evasion, under-declaration of profit and over-invoicing among others. No wonder Nkrumah (1966) sees the multinational corporations as epitomes of neo-colonialism and hence agent of imperialism.

The above facts about Third World Africa vis-a-vis Western powers or capitalists can be seen by Nkrumah's Revolutionary Path which he summarised about colonialism, thus:

It is more insidious, complex and dangerous than the old colonialism. It not only prevents its victims from developing their economic potential for their own use, but it controls the political life of the country, and supports the indigenous bourgeoisie in perpetuating the oppression and exploitation of the masses. Under colonialism, the economic systems and political policies of independent territories are managed and manipulated from outside, by international monopoly finance capital in league with the indigenous bourgeoisie... a single productive process is divided between states. Communication, banking, insurance, and other key services are controlled by neo-colonialists. The regional economic groupings in Africa have been encouraged, controlled by neo-colonialists, which therefore further strengthen international finance capital. Backing up these processes, the power of international monopoly finance is used to force down the price of raw materials, and to keep up the price of foreign manufactured goods (Nkrumah, 1973: 310).

The third world African predicament as summarised by Nkrumah is further seen in independent African countries efforts toward their economic development and emancipation in their strategies of economic and industrial development such as' import substitution, indigenisation policy, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), technology transfer etc. All these attempts met with failures because of external influence and lack of focus and sincerity on the part of African leaders in

implementing these policies. The situation persists till date.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we see that underdevelopment of Third World Africa did not come by accident, rather, it was and still remains a calculated attempt by the western capitalist countries. This condition will persist if the existing capitalist relations of production are maintained, and if the dependence of Africa on international capital continues. So for Africa to be free, it has to extricate itself from Western economic, politically and technological grip. Africa must come together to form a solidarity group, both political and economic. Above all, African leaders must be willing to pursue changes with all amount of sincerity taking into cognizance local contents as applicable to African ecology as against western imposed methodology.

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