

Africa's Underdevelopment: An Issue of External Influence

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the coming of the Europeans to Africa, Africans were happy and had an acceptable medium of communication and administration, no matter how savage and obscure it was and would be described. The partitioning of Africa under the guise of bringing Christianity and civilization by European (Colonialism) and the conscription of our able bodied men to work in their plantations laid the sad foundation for our woes. The continent in spite of its manifest and latent potentials have continued to lag behind in the scheme of development, economically and politically, as it is bedeviled with legion of crisis ranging from political instability, poverty, maladministration, high rate of infant mortality, serial unemployment and low life expectancy among others. This review opined that all the hydra-headed problems threatening the extinction of the continent is not and was not caused by Africans themselves rather by Europe and America who continue to interfere, proffer and prescribe policies and solutions that are alien to African problems. Hence, enforcement of Corporate Social Responsibility among multinationals and resistance to military aids and assistance among others can go a long way in repositioning Africa's pride of place in the global habitat.

Keywords: Africa, Underdevelopment, Colonialism, Neo-colonialism

INTRODUCTION

According to Ajayi (1993), Adolf Hitler once remarked that though "Men can be befuddled, the heaven cannot be bribed". This is axiomatic because truth remains constant and intelligent men cannot fail to notice it whenever it is seen and told. The persisting and seemingly intractable problems bedeviling the continent of Africa among others include Maladministration, nation building, rural poverty, urban unemployment, decay of social institutions, crisis of governance and other sundry problems, could be traced substantially to the evil of slave trade, Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism According to Ajayi (1993). Africa has been the theatre of sustained savagery perpetrated by European conquerors, slave dealers and Colonial plunders.

Africa is marked by crimes visited on her by imperialists, up till now her potentialities are restricted by under development which is typified by both debt trap and the inequitable terms of trade and economic opportunities which conspire to hold the continent down. Africa remains an object of charity and a pawn of international diplomacy (Ajayi, 1993). The continent is separated from Europe by a tiny strip of water and land while the cultural gulfs between the duo continents are enormous as the relationship between its people is marred by mutual suspicion, if not outright antagonism (Akomolafe, 1994). A European sees Africa as an unfathomable mystery while an African sees Europe as an opaque mirror, a sort of optical illusion, the more you look the less you see. Colonialism and slavery play

a big role in this mutual relationship and misunderstanding and sadly enough scholars continually distort African history to depict the sorry state of the continent (Akomolafe, 2006). Africans were living in total bal lands, where the most rudimentary technologies were yet to be discovered. Naked men and women incapable of thought which have nothing to do with food, sex, were swinging from treetop to treetop, eating wild berries and rodents. Europeans on the other hand, were at the pinnacle of civilization, arts, and sciences blossomed. People were living in mansions with all modern amenities. Europeans took advantage of the less endowed members of the human race with the pretext of helping them get out of the wood to pillage, improvised and further relegate them to the background and compounding their plights (Akomolafe, 1994).

Many Africans today still see Europe and America as a paradise on earth courtesy of Colonial education and massive western propaganda which supports this assertions and distortions. John Wayne and James Bond movies of the 1980s and 1990s were great tools in portraying these historical misconceptions about Europe and America. Africa's problems are majorly caused by external influences and blended with the fact that most Africans have lost confidence in themselves as well as abilities. They have joined forces at the external level to trample on their cultural values, norms, traditions, beliefs among other. This study therefore addresses Africa's underdevelopment as an issue of external influence.

AFRICA IN PERSPECTIVE

The continent of Africa is homogenous in terms of historical experiences. These experiences vary across the continent. Africa has suffered severally from colonial domination and exploitation. Slave trade had been more associated with African continent than any other continent. These indices if properly examined and explored should serve as a unifying factor, but it is unfortunate that colonialism has generated more than enough problems for independent Africa (Umozurike 2000). Countries with common colonial history tend to cooperate and are always in opposition and with grave suspicion of other French colonized countries. Pre-colonial history in Africa is fraught with stories of kingdoms, empires and states, each competing for supremacy with segmentary societies. Pre-colonial African societies were predominantly agrarian and pastoral in nature with the least technological endowments and drive, but, with a developing system of inter-state relations. The process of occupation of Africa was a flagrant attack on the sovereignty of independent traditional African States (Alli, 1995). Unarguably, whether Africans live under monarchical, despotic or democratic rulers or regimes, they were not or are not to be deprived of their sovereignty over their possession because of their unbelief, since sovereignty is a positive matter, and unbelief is a matter of divine law, which cannot annul positive laws.

Worthy of mentioning, is the fact that whatever position Europe is canvassing for in Africa, there was hardly no part of the continent that was under the jurisdiction of a sovereign and or recognized ruler as this was demonstrated when the act of occupation and conquest and colonialism was vigorously resisted by the local people. This was a direct affront on them as they viewed it as an infringement on their fundamental human right. Acquisition of territory even within the norms of traditional law ought to be based on

clearly defined rules (Boalen, 1990). The occupation of Africa was immediately followed by slavery and slave trade. The phenomenon of slave trade had grave consequences for the continent. Colonialism and slave trade, the latter long abolished but the former, the memory and its negative impact has continued to hunt the continent politically and economically. The Continent is still grappling with the sore taste of Neo-Colonialism as actions, policies and all the decision making machinery of all African states are largely being determined by outside influences, (EUROPE AND AMERICA). Year in year out, Africa is repatriating in excess of US\$100 billion dollars to European and American banks and governments. That is, interest payment alone on the debt Africa is supposed to owe (Akomolafe, 2006). Many countries are using more than half of their entire budget for debt servicing, even at the height of severe famine.

The only thing we hear is obscene claims that Europeans are aiding Africans. Euro-America government claim Africa owes over US\$500 billion, the big question to be asked here is that, where in Africa do we have projects worth that much? Or are we to believe that corruption and bad government alone have swallowed that mind boggling amount? African nations are prodded into war of death and destruction, from which their citizens may continue to bear the consequences. The display of the results of these devastations is on televisions and the legacy of West geo-political strategies are dying children and starving population (Akomolafe, 1994). American officials boasted in an August issue of TIME Magazine that wars and the perennial conflicts in Africa orchestrated by Europe and America were not to ensure that one side triumph over the other, but just to turn brothers against brothers, so that people will continue to live wretched lives. (Allen 1989). Based on this premise, it can be inferred that one way the colonial masters use to gain advantage of the African society is by setting up one society or a group within one society against another. When they succeed to split them apart, the same people will turn back to play the mediator role hypocritically. Several cases abound. For instance, the true reason for Libya's predicament may not be that the late Col. Mummah Gaddafi had over governed Libyans neither will it be unconnected with the fact that the late Gaddafi had tenaciously resisted every attempt from all quarters to exploit the natural resources of his country.

ORIGIN OF AFRICA UNDER-DEVELOPMENT

Over the years, European governments and their collaborators (multi-national) have continued to undermine Africa and treat every of its problems with utter levity. With the state of the arts media of communication, they blow issues out of proportion. When they talk about dictatorship and corrupt government, don't they know we know they are fooling us? Who install and maintain these dictators in power in Africa? Who provides the training? Who pays the bribes and where are they taken to and kept? How many times did France, Belgian and American troops intervene to thwart the efforts to topple Mobutu of former Zaire? How many times have Western secret agencies organized coups in Africa? Whatever vices that is ravaging African continent today are what were passed to African leaders by their colonial masters who themselves were not coming to Africa with the mind to develop

it in the truest sense of development. The murderous regimes that slaughtered Rwandans were in cohort with the French and Belgian governments. The troops were trained and armed by European nations. When the rebels wanted to take over Kigali, the capital, French paratroopers intervened and stopped them. What it means is that, without French intervention, half a million Rwandans might still be alive today. Former French President, François Mitterand once said that France has stopped organizing and financing coups in Africa (Browne, 2011). He did not tell us the untold hardship France, America and European intervention has caused and is still causing the continent. The crisis in the horn of Africa today, particularly in Somalia where the quest for power has resulted into a conflict of unimaginable proportion resulting in the near absence of an organized government and a failed state scenario, where terrorism, hostage taking, kidnapping and sundry other vices are the order of the day. This is to say the least about how Europe underdeveloped Africa (Meredith, 2006).

In an article entitled “Africa and the World” Browne (2011) notes that African Nations having lost their sovereign rights to chart an economic and political Blue print for their future, have fallen hook line and sinker to the antics of Europe and America led IMF and World Bank. The World Bank and IMF now manages virtually all the economies of African nations. Their experts are busy prescribing puerile economic solutions as western politicians are busy shouting themselves hoarse on the best political track for the continent. Some of these solutions are proffered by people who know next to nothing about Africa. Western style of democracy has been promoted to praxis level and touted as the cure to all solutions to Africa’s ailments. It does not matter if these systems and institutions are failing in Europe, Africa must adopt them, even when Europe is becoming apathetic about their political system. It is a nice thing to have democracy.

Western styled democracy is working in Europe and America and they are trying to export it wholesale to Africa not taking into cognizance, the fact that, Europe and Africa do not have the same socio-political history while democratic structures and institutions are too expensive to maintain by the already impoverished African nations. Already, Greece sovereign default is imminent, this could ignite reaction engulfing Italy, Spain and Portugal. Already growth in England, France and Germany is near zero while Banks in Europe are experiencing a critical liquidity crunch (Dayo, 2012). The just concluded elections in France which the incumbent president, Nicolas Sarkozy, was trounced by socialist standard bearer; Francois Hollande is another sour point. He was voted out because of the downturn in the economy occasioned by the high rate of unemployment in the country, while blaming the poor economic run on the sluggishness of the global economy (Tracy, 2012). This is the same system Europe and America is daily lecturing us to accept hook, line and sinker.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The global economic recession which is blowing like a whirlwind is no respecter of any nation developed or developing. We are poor in Africa not because we are poorly endowed; we are simply poor because our human and material resources are being mismanaged by Foreigners. Europe and America should spare us all the lectures they are giving us, they

should wait and keep their unsolicited advice until when we ask for it. If at all there is any problem, it is Africans that can solve their problems. It is high time Africa stopped mimicking their historic aggressors, we should start thinking new thoughts, start dreaming new dreams and should take much pride in the values with which we were brought up and taught. Same should be bequeathed to our children. Africa cannot be taken seriously as long as we continue to imitate others. For Africans to get out of the wood politically and economically, she must resist Europe and America in the following areas:

Resist military aids and assistance: It will be recalled that the cold war was not fought in Africa, but it was and still very hot in places like Somalia, Ethiopia, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and others bugged down by one form of conflict or the other. This depicts the negative legacies of western ideological wars, the entire continent is militarize and flooded with arms and ammunitions when in the real sense, there is no tangible arms industry in Africa (Akomolafe, 2004).

Resist the idea of being bombarded with foreign cultural values: In this regard, African culture is almost extinct.

Enforcement of Corporate Social Responsibility among multinationals: Every multi national corporation doing business in Africa must be made to account to the people through the provision of infrastructure as a mark of their corporate social responsibility.

African leaders should be bold enough to ask their American and European counterparts to make reparation: Every stolen, misapplied, misappropriated African money, assets and otherwise must be returned with a corresponding interest, while Africans must evolve its own political and economic system to be *in tandem* with the realities of African culture and values without any interference from Europe and America.

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