

Assessment of Neo-Colonialism in Africa

Dada, Ayoola A

Department of Sociology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban, South Africa

Abstract: The period of colonialism subjected indigenes or natives of the various colonies to harsh inhuman conditions in such a manner that revolt against the system became inevitable. During the colonial period, a vast majority of Africans were living in intolerable poverty and in absolute deprivation. It is a continued control of former colonies through ruling elites compliant with neocolonial powers. This paper therefore, evaluates the effect of neocolonialism in Africa with a view to proffer possible way forward.

Keywords: Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism.

1. PRELUDE TO NEOCOLONIALISM

The period of colonialism subjected indigenes or natives of the various colonies to harsh inhuman conditions in such a manner that revolt against the system became inevitable. During the colonial period, a vast majority of Africans were living in intolerable poverty and in absolute deprivation. The natives were made to produce what the Europeans considered needful for their home industries. In a related development, Ellen Meiksins Wood (1978) in her *Empire of Capital* described colonialism as “means by which the wealth of the subject was being transferred to the master”.

The emergence of a few Western educated individuals as well as some opinion leaders and scholars in the West stood against colonial rule. It was condemned in its entirety.

Jean-Paul Sartre (2001) opined that “*Colonialism is in a process of destroying itself. But it still fouls the atmosphere, it is our shame, it mocks our laws or caricatures them, it infects us with its racism, it obliges our young men to fight, despise themselves and die for Nazi principles that we fought against ten years ago; it attempts to defend itself by arousing fascism even here in France. Our role is to help it die, not only in Algeria but wherever it exists*”. The belief in liberty and equality and right of self determination and governance inspired the freedom fighters across the continent in early 20th century. Other event such as the World War II also dealt a devastating blow on the justification of colonialism. Other European countries saw the advancement of Hitler Germany as an attempt to colonize them. During this period Africans were recruited to fight against Nazi Germany.

It therefore, became imperative to question the continuous subjugation of Africans by these Europeans who united vehemently to fight against the attempts to subjugate them by fighting the Second World War. Further more, the creation of the United Nations in 1945 added an impetus to the fight for decolonization.

At the end of the Second World War, Europe was exhausted while super powers also emerged in the global arena. Also the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations and the success of the struggle for independence in India reinforced the ending of overt colonialism.

The Charter of the United Nations established, in chapter xi (Articles 73 and 74), the principles that guided the UN decolonization effort was borne out of the yearning of the people of the colonized territories for respect for self-determination. After the defeat and post war exhaustion of some of the European countries who had colonies, the administration of such colonies was taken over by the UN. They were referred to as “Trust territories”.

In black Africa, Ghana became the first country to gain independence in 1957 6th March. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah led the crusade in Ghana, and later championed the course for other African countries, which led to the formation of the

organization of African Unity. In 1960, Nigeria gained her independence led by key figures such as Herbert Marculey, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikwe, Anthony Enahoro among others.

The forms which the process of decolonization took varied from country to country. Using Ghana as a case study, it can be said that its “struggle” for independence took a dynamic turn in 1914 and 1939 respectively. During the above periods (especially 1939) the then Gold Coast Native Regiments of the Royal West African Frontier Force were called to arms to fight Britain’s wars in Europe and North Africa.

They executed the wars but upon their return, their compensations and benefits were withheld. Agitation for their compensation and benefits assumed a different dimension in 1947 when during a peaceful protest in Accra the police opened fire. A large contingent of former service men who were peacefully carrying their petition to the Governor to seek redress of their grievances ended up being the Martyrs of a new nation as they lay dead and bleeding on the streets and dusty roads of cities and villages throughout the colony.

The barbaric event sparked off unquenchable fire for self rule and independence in Ghana led by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. He skillfully directed a highly organized movement of revolt against British rules in the Gold Coast. He was invited from self imposed exile to the secretary-ship of the major radical party, organized further campaigns, went to jail again, won the first election from jail, was released to head the first African administration, and won further elections before internal self-government. He eventually became the prime minister after independence.

This pattern of progress, with minor variations, was to be repeated throughout British African. The road to independence in French colonies in Africa took a different route. Black colonial elites were assimilated into French culture and society and their political leaders were elected to the French National Assembly in Paris.

However, with the coming to power of General de Gaulle in 1958 he gave each French African territory (except Djibouti) the stark choice of immediate, ill-prepared and unsupported independence or membership of the French Community. Only Guinea voted for independence and was ruthlessly abandoned forth with. Two years later the other French territories, irrespective of preparedness were moved en masse to independence.

2. NEO-COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

According to Jack (1967), the compulsion on imperialism to abandon almost everywhere its old forms of direct colonial rule, political domination and economic exploitation has meant a real retreat on the part of the Western powers. And the retreat, in its turn, has resulted in these powers seeking for new forms through which they can maintain the essentials of their economic domination and skill wield political influence

The concept of neocolonialism is usually traced to Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, (Robert Young (2001), Bill Ashcroft et al (1998)) who became aware that the gaining of independence and national sovereignty by African states were purely token and in a substantial way altered the relationship between the colonial powers and colonized states. This means that the granting of independence created room for dependency and exploitation.

Neocolonialism, to Leong (1996) is an indirect form of control through economic and cultural dependence. He therefore, describes neocolonialism as “continued control of former colonies through ruling elites compliant with neocolonial powers, populations that are exploited for their labour and resources in order to feed an insatiable appetite for finished physical or cultural commodities made by the metropole”.

Thus, Nkrumah (1965) stated that “neocolonialism is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress”. He further made the following points as being characteristic of neocolonialism:

It continues to actively control the affairs of the newly independent states.

In most cases neocolonialism is manifested through economic and monetary measures. For example the neocolonial territories become the target markets for imports from the imperial center(s).

While neocolonialism may be a form of continuing control by a state’s previous formal colonial masters, these states may also become subjected to imperial power by new actors. These new actors include the United States or may be international financial and monetary organizations.

As the ruling elites pay constant deference to the neocolonial master the needs of the population are often ignored, leaving issues of living conditions like education, development and poverty unresolved.

The case of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe corresponds to the aforementioned issues. The activities of World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as other creditors are exactly what Nkrumah highlighted as being characteristic of neocolonialism.

As alleged by critics of neocolonialism, capitalist powers and in particular the United States aim to control other nations through indirect means. They employ economic, financial and trade policies to dominate less powerful countries. It is a known fact that the condition necessary for granting of loans by the International Monetary Fund/World Bank are detrimental to the economies of borrowing nations or states, increasing instead of alleviating their poverty.

Africa today pays more money every year (in loan interest payment) to the IMF/World bank than it receives in loan from them. Structural adjustment programmes consisting mainly of economic process of transferring property from public ownership to private ownership as a policy by IMF/World Bank has not in any significant way helped the third world countries.

This is because the so called investors are the neocolonialists from the metropolis. The profits from their investments do not remain in their former colonies for reinvestment but are rather transferred to the metropolis thereby repeating the process as it was during colonialism.

The multinational Corporations are not left out in these neocolonial activities. Neocolonial thinkers aptly believe that investment by multinational corporations enriches few in developing countries and causes humanitarian, environmental and ecological devastations to the populations where they operate. The activities of oil giants in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria fits into the picture just described above. While few are making millions every day, the environments do not fear better. Attempts to liberate the peoples and save their ecology are constantly met with stiff oppositions from the powers that be, a situation that has become characteristic of most third world countries and Africa in particular.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The road to socio-economic and political advancement of third world countries is a difficult, tortuous and complex one. Our economies have been and are still being distorted by decades of domination by powerful imperial capitalists as well as socialist's states. We are surrounded by diseases, poverty illiteracy made so by neocolonialists as well as their indigenous collaborators who have been financially empowered and enthroned as our rulers by the neocolonialists, so as to perpetuate their interest. The onus is on us to liberate ourselves from the yoke of socio-economic and political dependency. So far this paper has been able to evaluate neo-colonialism in Africa, we therefore recommend that:

Africans should advocate for debts relief or cancellation so that the debt servicing payments will be put into urgent social investment in health, education, drinking water, control of AIDS and other needs.

Government should gear effort towards improving local industries and encourage citizens to make use of locally made goods in order to save most African countries from perpetual economic imbroglio.

Funds generated from excess crude oil should be reinvested instead of the present cut and share arrangement.

There should be a re-focus away from oil monoculture to agriculture (with mechanization) for staple food production.

Also, public office holders should desist from diverting public funds for their personal selfish use and Africans should shun money laundering and be more patriotic.

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