

NEO-COLONIALISM AS A FACTOR IN AFRICA'S STATE COLLAPSE SINCE INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

The legacy of colonisation has continued to impact on African countries since independence. One way in which this impact has been felt is through neo-colonialism, which has contributed to the dwindling state of several African nations. The state collapse of Africa has been attributed to various factors, including weak governance, bad and corrupt leadership, ethnic conflicts, and poverty amongst others. However, one key issue that seems to be overlooked is the role of neo-colonialism as a major contributing factor to the state collapse of the African continent. The paper attempts to critically examine the impact of neo-colonialism in Africa to discuss how Western interests and domination of Africa have continued to persist even after African States gained independence from European powers; all, to the detriment of Africa's nation-building. The research questions thus include the following: How has Neo-colonialism contributed to the state collapse of African nations since independence? Are there strategies put in place by African nations to curb the effect of neo-colonialism on Africa? If yes, what are these strategies? If not, why so? The paper criticizes Western Powers' diplomacy and their methods of meddling in the status and affairs of their former colonies in Africa through an ongoing and unrelenting hegemony over their political, socio-cultural and economic systems and interests even after independence. This research strongly argues that neo-colonialism has played a significant role in the state collapse of post-independent African states, by perpetuating economic dependency/exploitation, political instability, and social inequality/identity crisis. The major problem is that neo-colonial international institutions like the Bretton Wood's institutions – International Monetary Fund, World Bank, General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs and its successor World Trade Organization (WTO) as well as other corporations – who are tacitly responsible for upholding the prevailing global or international order, have crushed and damaged almost beyond repair the socio-political and economic drive needed to usher in Africa's development. This research highlights the historical context of neo-colonialism in Africa, and uses case studies to illustrate how neo-colonialism has undermined African states. The approach to data analysis in the course of this work will major in critique while drawing narratives or essays. There is a need for regional integration and the diversification of Africa's economies to break away from the clutches of neo-colonialism.

Key words: Neo-colonialism, Africa, state collapse, contemporary,

Introduction

One cannot talk about neo-colonialism without tracing it to the history of European colonisation in Africa, which has had long-lasting effects on the continent, including the exploitation of natural resources, the displacement of indigenous peoples, and the imposition of European political systems. The colonisation of Africa was designed to aid the survival and extension of Capitalism for the development of the metropole (the West) and the strengthening of her industrial complex and markets through the invasion and overrun of weaker territories in the African continent, where opportunities abound for the creation of new settlements to explore their potential economic resources and commerce.¹ Babatola² posited that in an attempt to reconstruct African history, empirical data and historical facts have shown that the emigration of Europeans to Africa and the domination of the continent's economy – trade and capital – by Europeans and their local collaborators and partners, were designed to further prosecute the European agenda in which Frederick Lugard argued to involve the partition of Africa primarily for the economic necessities of increasing the supplies of raw materials and food, to the benefit of the industrialized nations of Europe.

Pakenham³ argued that the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 to fight over and divide Africa and the subsequent colonization of Africa remained a turning point in the balkanization of Africa, emphasizing European expansionist goals toward fostering their economic and trading interest rather than the modernization and development of the African society. This was because, as earlier established, Europeans searched for markets to sell their finished products from the expanding industries while exploring and exploiting Africa by sourcing for their raw materials to be used to expand their economic influence.⁴

In contemporary times, African countries continue to struggle with the legacy of colonisation, as manifested through neo-colonialism. The term neo-colonialism was first coined by Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. Nkrumah defined neo-colonialism as the last stage of imperialism whereby former colonialists continue to exercise social, economic and political control over their former colonies.⁵ Neo-colonialism is essentially a continuation of colonialism, but with a different approach that does not include the use of direct military force to control African countries. It relies on the use of socio-economic means and political influence to achieve the same outcome. Neo-colonialism is defined as the political, economic, and cultural control of a nation by a former coloniser or other foreign power, often through covert means.⁶ Africa has been the subject of intense scrutiny of neo-colonialism in the 20th and 21st centuries. Scholars such as E.N. Mordi⁷, S. Amin⁸, K. Nkrumah⁹, and W. Rodney¹⁰, hold the view that former colonial powers and other dominant nations have continued to assert control over Africa and other developing countries and little or no appreciable results have been recorded in the quest to break free from the tentacles of these imperial and neo-colonial systems that have consistently emplaced Africa and other developing continents under almost unbreakable prison of social, economic, political, and technological dependence and subservience. The social firepower needed to usher the development of Africa has been crashed and damaged almost beyond repair through the instrumentality of neo-colonial international agencies like the Bretton Woods Institutions (IMF, World Bank as well as General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) and its successor World Trade Organisation (WTO) as well as corporations, who are tacitly responsible for maintaining the prevailing global order in the interests of advance capitalist economies.¹¹

In contemporary times, writers like Ake¹², Amin¹³, Frank¹⁴, and Wallerstein¹⁵ strongly argue that the undue advantages in past colonial adventurers in Africa and elsewhere around the globe

are used by neo-colonialists for negativity. Neo-colonialism has contributed in no small measure to the collapse of several African states both socially, economically and politically; and this will be captured in the subsequent subtitle of this research. Thus, the objective of this study is to establish how neo-colonialism has derailed the development of African nation-states since independence.

Neo-Colonialism in Africa's State Collapse

Certainly, it would be an understatement to say that Africa is currently experiencing a socio-political and economic crisis. The majority of African nations lack basic infrastructure and economic development. Access to necessities like food, health care and education amongst others, is often limited and expensive. Amidst all these, the continent became heavily indebted to the industrialized Western nations of the world, in a bid to combat the economic difficulties necessary for successful nation-building.

There are many theories and perceptions as to what led to the current crisis in Africa, which include but are not limited to, political instability, underdeveloped human resources, oil crises, massive increment in government spending after colonialism, the legacy of subpart colonial economic and trade practices (which were designed to serve as sources and sinks to the 'former' mother country – colonists – rather than the people), and total reliance of primary industries, failing to diversify. The negative effect of these on nation-building cannot be overemphasized. The predominant focus of Africa's neo-colonial experience has been on global conspiracies and transnational dominance, which has featured economic, political, and social exploitation.

Economic Exploitation: One way in which neo-colonialism has contributed to state collapse in Africa is through economic exploitation. Statistics have shown that one negative economic effect of neo-colonialism in African countries is the stunting of economic growth. Research conducted by Ndulu et al.,¹⁶ found that on average, African countries under massive neo-colonial influence experienced stagnating or slower economic growth compared to those with little of such influence. The study further showed that the economies of the former, grew at an annual rate of 1.5% between 1975 and 2004; while that of the latter grew at an average rate of 2.2% and above within the same period¹⁷, owing to economic exploitations. Such exploitation has been effectively achieved through the instrumentality of multinational corporations like the International Monetary Fund(IMF), World Bank(WB), and oil industries such as Shell, amongst others.

Many African countries have been unable to fully control their natural resources due to the influence of foreign powers. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, foreign actors have constantly exploited the country's vast mineral wealth, often with the complicity of corrupt government officials, without equitable compensation to the country or its people. This exploitation has led to a loss of revenue for the state, as well as environmental degradation and social unrest.¹⁸ African states are still heavily reliant on exports of primary commodities, such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products, which are subject to price fluctuations in the global market. This leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks and undermines their ability to plan for the long-term development of their economies. In addition, the neo-colonial model of development has encouraged the privatization of key sectors of the economy, such as water, electricity, and healthcare, which has resulted in the exclusion of many Africans from accessing basic services.

D. S. Tosin¹⁹ posited that Credit Aid investment and foreign trade were designed to strengthen Africa's dependence on the West and loans granted with collateral in place made the Africans to depend on the perpetrators of neo-colonialism. The result is the indebtedness suffered by most African countries today with virtually no hope of means to offset these debts. Foreign direct investment has depredated the African economy coupled with the continued colonial control that has militated against sustainable economic growth and development in Africa. In all of this, the influence of multinational corporations as agents of neo-colonialism in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Multinational corporations have emerged as significant actors in African economies since the attainment of independence. These corporations have been accused of engaging in neo-colonialism by exploiting African natural resources and labour. They often engage in unethical practices, such as environmental degradation, corruption, and human rights violations. These practices undermine African institutions and contribute to the state collapse. Multinational corporations undermine African economies by perpetuating a cycle of dependence and inequality. They often extract natural resources from African countries without providing adequate compensation, which undermines the development of other sectors of the economy. This also contributes to political instability and social unrest. In Nigeria for instance, the oil industry has been dominated by multinational corporations like Shell, Chevron, etc., that have little accountability to the Nigerian people. They cause environmental damage and human rights abuses, while providing little benefit to the Nigerian economy.²⁰ The gross mismanagement of the Oil industry has also brought about socio-economic unrest in the Niger Delta region. The Nigerian government has been unable to regulate the industry or to ensure that revenues from oil exports benefit the people. The result has been a proliferation of armed groups and criminal gangs, who have taken advantage of the economic atrocities caused by the mismanagement of the oil industry. Economic exploitation has contributed to the state collapse of Nigeria, as it has undermined the legitimacy of the government and fueled an unstable economy which is antithetical to nation-building.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank as well as other multinational corporations that have been heavily criticized for their role in the state collapse of African countries. These institutions promote economic policies such as deregulation of institutions, devaluation of African currencies and the liberalisation of trade which in turn undermine African institutions and contribute to massive underdevelopment. The deregulation/privatization of government institutions invariably makes it difficult for citizens to assess basic amenities of livelihood at a subsidized price. In Africa where the poverty rate as of 2022 stood at about 50% among rural population, and 10% in urban areas²¹, the hope for the 'common man' in accessing these commodities remains far-fetched. Devaluation of African currencies on the other hand has led to a high rate of inflation. In recent times for instance, reports have shown that the worst hit currency on the continent by the devaluation policy of the IMF as of 2022 is the Ghanaian Cedi, and Sierra Leone's Leone which depreciated by more than 45% value against the dollar in 2022.²² Inflation rate of Ghana as of December 2022 stood at 54.1%²³ while that of Sierra Leone the same year stood at 27.21%.²⁴ Trade liberalisation has done nothing more but turn Africa into prospective markets for Western finished goods, all to the detriment of Africa's nation-building.

Akinrinde and Oyewole²⁵ argued that the policies promoted by the IMF and the World Bank often prioritize debt repayment over social and economic development. They also promote the privatization of public services, such as health care and education, which makes it difficult for the state to provide basic services to its citizens. All these negate the nation-building course.

The structural adjustment programs (SAP) promoted by the IMF and the World Bank have also contributed to economic stagnation. These programs have promoted inequality and perpetuated a cycle of poverty in African countries, reinforcing unequal trade relationships and less diversified economies.²⁶ Thus, African countries are forced to export primary commodities at low prices while, importing finished goods at high prices. More often than not, their dependence on a single commodity for exports does not give room for accelerated growth. They are thus left indebted to the West. To buttress this fact, Mordi²⁷, argued that commodity prices degenerated to their lowest levels since the early 1950's leading to the reduction of total export earnings from the U.S. – sixty-four billion dollars in 1985 to forty-five billion dollars in 1986 – while Africa's total debt from all sources amounted to two hundred billion dollars in 1986. The annual report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)²⁸ showed that as of 2022, public debt in Africa reached USD 1.8 trillion. The report further poised that Africa's debt has increased by 183% since 2010, a rate roughly four times higher than its growth rate of GDP in dollar terms. In Nigeria alone, a total of 1.24 trillion naira was used by the Nigerian government to service debt in the first quarter of the year 2023, as total public debt hit 49.85 trillion naira.²⁹ A good chunk of these debts are paid to such neo-colonial multilateral corporations such as the IMF and World Bank, amongst others. This has rendered African states financially incapable of piloting nation-building projects across the continent.

Political Instability: Neo-colonialism has also contributed to political instability in many African countries, which in turn has led to state collapse. Many African governments have been propped up by foreign powers that have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo – dominance and exploitation. This has led to corrupt and authoritarian regimes that are more concerned with preserving their own power than with serving the needs of their citizens.

In Somalia, for example, foreign intervention has contributed to a fragmented and unstable political landscape. The country has been embroiled in civil war for decades, and foreign powers have often supported rival factions in an attempt to maintain influence in the region.³⁰ This has led to a lack of effective governance and a breakdown of institutions. Western powers have often supported authoritarian regimes in Africa, as long as these regimes are willing to cooperate with their economic interests. This has led to the suppression of democratic movements and the stifling of dissent. The result has been a lack of accountability and transparency in governance, which has contributed to the erosion of state institutions and the breakdown of the rule of law.

Perhaps, a good example can be seen in France's continuous influence on Africa. France has maintained its influence in its former African colonies, even long after they gained independence. This continued influence has been facilitated by several factors, including the maintenance of military bases, economic ties, and cultural influence. France's military bases in Africa have been used to intervene in political conflicts in African countries, often at the behest of French-friendly governments. This has undermined the sovereignty of African states and contributed to political instability. Cohen³¹ argued that France's political approach towards Africa has remained stuck in a pattern heavy on military action in countries like Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, and Mali, with little recourse for new foreign policy tools. The approach employed by France has ignored ongoing political and social dynamics in the Sahel, amongst other areas in Africa. It has also kept France from doing enough to discourage the militaries of countries like Chad and Mali from overthrowing their leaders in coups. In a nutshell, France's political influence on African states has been criticized for promoting a

colonial worldview of political domination and for contributing to ethnic conflicts and social unrest which is antithetical to nation-building in Africa.

Another example can be seen in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The exploitation of mineral resources by foreign countries like China amongst others, in this country, has contributed to a cycle of political conflict and instability. The DRC is home to some of the world's richest deposits of minerals, including cobalt, copper, and coltan, which are used in the manufacture of electronic devices. The extraction of these minerals has often been carried out by armed groups, who use the proceeds to fund their activities. The involvement of foreign companies in the exploitation of mineral resources has further marginalized local communities and perpetuated the cycle of violence. China's Sicominex deal secured with DRC is at the forefront of China's big indirect role in the continued resource curse mineral-driven conflict in the DRC's Eastern region driven by mineral resource wealth.³² All these have unarguably contributed immensely to Africa's state collapse.

The constant pressure from the West on the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to maintain a colonial geo-political set up that asserted boundary to new states, some of which cut across pre-existing ethnic group states and kingdoms, has also resulted in political instability and constant inter-boundary dispute in Africa. Moreover, some of the states that emerged were different in sizes with unequal natural resources and economic potentialities. For instance, Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia are very rich in natural resources like gold, crude oil, coal etcetera; while Chad and Niger are not so fortunate. Also, Nigeria and Sudan tends to be larger than Gambia and Togo. Thus, the maintenance of these uneven boundary structures by African states, even at its peril, has further reinstalled the neo-colonial grip of the West on Africa, which will remain a cog in the wheel for an even successful nation-building to take place in the continent.

Social and cultural Fragmentation/Marginalization and identity Crisis: Neo-colonialism has led to socio-cultural fragmentations and identity crisis in Africa. The imposition of western values, languages, and education systems has eroded local traditions and indigenous knowledge. This socio-cultural dominance has created a sense of alienation and disconnection amongst African populations, exacerbating social divisions and weakening social cohesion. Certainly, neo-colonialism has also contributed to social marginalization in many African countries, particularly for marginalized groups or communities such as ethnic minorities, etcetera. Foreign powers have often influenced and supported governments that discriminate against certain groups, perpetuating inequalities and exacerbating social tensions. More often than not, the leaders of such governments in Africa are enticed by material gains from foreign influences, at the peril of the citizens or group.

Good examples can be drawn from Zimbabwe and South Africa. In Zimbabwe, the discrimination against the country's white minority, as well as the Ndebele ethnic group has fueled social unrest and undermined the legitimacy of the government.³³ In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid has contributed to ongoing inequality and poverty, fueling social unrest and undermining the country's stability.³⁴ Neo-colonialism has perpetuated social inequality in Africa, by entrenching the power of elites who benefit from the economic and political structures created by neo-colonialism. The neo-colonial model of development has favoured the interests of multinational corporations and foreign investors over the needs of local communities. This has resulted in the displacement of people from their lands and the destruction of the environment. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few has also led

to a widening social gap between the rich and poor, exacerbating social tensions and fueling conflicts. Under such auspices, no meaningful development can take place in Africa.

There have been several social upheavals and evictions as a result of the colonial geopolitical structure that imposed boundaries to new governments, some of which straddle pre-existing ethnic group states and kingdoms. For example, the Bakongo group is split into the borders of Angola, the Belgian Congo, and the French Congo³⁵ amongst others. Today, some Ewe people reside in Ghana, others in Togo, and also in Benin.³⁶ The Somali group is shared among Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Djibouti amidst the other countries that speak the language.³⁷ One significant result of this has been the ongoing boundary conflicts that have hampered social relations between some of these independent African states, including Ghana and Togo, Somalia and Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda, and Nigeria and Cameroon, among others. Thus, each African nation-state is created by the arbitrariness of these borders. The nature of these boundaries further divides African nation-states made up of people or groups with diverse cultures, traditions, origin and languages. This in itself remains antithetical to the success of nation-building in Africa.

The fueling of the religious crisis in Africa by the West has been another neo-colonial tool that has led to state collapse in the continent. Countries like Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mozambique, Chad, Nigeria, DR Congo, Mali, and Libya, have been recorded as African countries with extreme violations of religious freedom caused by Islamic extremism.³⁸ Religion in Africa has been politicized and used by the elites and the West to mobilize support for certain government which is believed would serve the interest of these former colonial powers that be. Religious rivalry culminated in most civil wars in the African continent and the result was quite devastating. More often than not, these conflicts lead to displacement and migration of individuals from Africa which brings about brain drain; the looting and destruction of life, properties/infrastructures which in turn lead to economic down turn; as well as mutual mistrust and suspicion amongst ethnic groups within the diverse nation-states. All these negate the nation-building process.

Conclusion

The legacy of colonisation has continued to impact Africa since independence, particularly through the phenomenon of neo-colonialism. This paper argued that neo-colonialism contributed to the state collapse in Africa by perpetuating economic exploitation, political instability, and social identity crises/marginalization. Using examples from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Somalia, South Africa, Sierra Leone amongst others, the paper showed how foreign powers have interfered and contributed to the breakdown of economic and social institutions, not omitting the undermining of legitimate governance. Africa should be driven to seek out and fight against further institutionalization and the continuation of the neo-colonization of her lands to ensure its existence and the realization of its development goals. The study observed the need for Africa to promote regional integration within its nation-states, by creating regional markets, developing infrastructure to facilitate trade relations; and diversifying its economies through investments in industries like manufacturing, technology, and services, to increase its bargaining power in the global market and break free from the neo-colonial shock that is holding back its socio-political and economic growth objectives.

Endnotes

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