

Neo-Colonialism in Africa: The Roles of African Elites

Dr. Francis Paschal Nwosu

Department of History and International Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: afrikanambassador2006@yahoo.com

Abstract

The direction of African States economic policies by former colonial masters or countries of the developed nations of the world with superior technologies and industries are not done without African States elites in the continent of Africa. The study therefore, demonstrates the areas in which African elites that are the comprador classes in the governance of Africa cooperates with the neo-colonialists to continue the exploitation of the resources of Africa and eventually underdeveloped the continent. Work that narrates the role of the African elites' involvement in the perpetuation of neo-colonialism in Africa were collected and analyzed to drive home the point raised in this study. The study concludes that neocolonialism did not come from the air; it was generated from colonialism these African elites encourage due to the rents that they get from it. The study therefore recommends the need to start the development of Africa's indigenous technologies in order to apply it in her industries to reduce the reliance on western nations industries. It also suggests that African elites in governance should be ready to make sacrifices that will lead to the development of the continent.

Introduction

In the words of Kwame Nkrumah he stated that

--the essence of Neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it, is in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international Sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside''
... represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage ... the essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.¹

This direction of African States economic policies by former colonial masters or countries of the developed nations of the world with advance economies and superior technologies are not done without African elites in the continent of Africa. In most countries of Africa, a comprador class comprising the educated elites and petit bourgeoisie class was installed as a necessary condition for granting of independence. These elites were the people trained by the Colonial governments or acquired Western education and culture in post-colonial period and whose characters were not different from that of the Europeans. They include the ex-service men, top military personnel, businessmen, civil servants, religious leaders, politicians and others that constitute the leaders of a country in Africa. These people constitute the comprador or petit-bourgeoisie classes in Africa. They cooperate with the Western nations in turning their countries into a client State open to foreign investments on terms that are decidedly favorable to the Western capitalists' investors.² In turn place the continent of Africa and its people into deep indebtedness, hunger, diseases, illiteracy, civil strife and serious economic crisis,³ that resulted to the underdevelopment of Africa.

The paper is therefore discussed in the following format to show the role of Africa elites in the promotion of neo-colonialism in Africa after independence by breaking down the sub-topics into; the colonial system and emergence of the elites in Africa, decolonization and the Western imprint, African elites in post-colonial era in Africa, Africa neo-colonial economy, conclusion and recommendations are made to combat neo-colonialism.

The Colonial System and Creation of African Elites

African elites or the petit-bourgeoisie classes in Africa were a creation of the colonial system of governance in Africa. It was these same elites created by the colonial masters that led the battle cry against colonial practices in Africa.⁴ For effective administrations of the colonies, the colonial authorities in Africa due to shortage of manpower gave limited opportunities to Africans to be educated or trained to occupy some supervisory positions in the economy in order to fully exploit the continent. On this the content of the colonial educational system in Africa was directed to the creation of elites that were completely dominated by European values and willing to collaborate in the colonial master's designs even after independence. Those Africans who had the opportunities to be schooled under the colonial educational system were placed in a special position of leadership to continue the economic exploitation of the continent, this time through the petit-bourgeoisie class created by colonialism before the ceremonial political handover of governance to the Africans.

The administrative system practiced by the various colonial authorities in Africa of no doubt also helped in the promotion of class consciousness for rulership in the colonial system. For instance, the British adopted the indirect rule system, the French the policies of Assimilation and Association. Both systems could only work effectively through the cooperation of Africans. The privileged chiefs and those Africans that acquired European cultures through education were the ones employed to assist the Europeans in the colonization of Africa. This generated a class consciousness within the African populace that could stand in place of the colonial masters or help in the perpetuation of colonialism even after independence, as the elites or the petit-bourgeoisie became wealthy as a result of the accumulation of wealth due to the privilege positions the colonial system placed them in African societies.

Decolonization and Western Imprint in Africa Economy

The decolonization process in African States left much to be desired in the discussion of the political economy of African States today. What actually took place in the decolonization era in Africa was that, African States succeeded in politically replacing the control of their States with blacks but the economic structures to sustain their governance were left in the hands of the colonial masters or advance economic countries of the West like America that came to the world lime light after 1945. These place African economic policies under direct control of the Western nations through the comprador classes put in place as the rulers of the States in Africa. The situation that have helped in the exploitation and underdevelopment of the continent to the advantages of the Western nations, as economic means which is supposed to be the main stay of the societies in Africa are like air which one could not get hold of even when it is available everywhere in the continent, hence the continued reliance on the West for survival even after many years of independence with all the abundance of resources in every regions of Africa.⁵

This show that nothing changed in Africa after independence, the only change that took placed was the replacement of colonial governments with African elites that serve as their agents for the continuation of their exploits. The colonial administrative structures were maintained as well as the economic structures in order to preserve the continue flow of wealth from Africa to the West that began in the days of colonialism. The elites that took over the leadership in Africa, to have strong control on their States upheld the autocratic nature of the political systems of their colonial masters in order to benefits from the resources in Africa and in the same time promotes the foreign interest of the West over the domestic interests of their countries. The centralized system of political administrations inherited from the Colonial Masters helped the African elites to maintain the dependent political and economic structures left behind by colonialism. The elites in Africa got involved in this post-colonial client relationship with the West through brainwashing to support the economic and political policies of the West for selfish reasons. For instance, Mobutu of Zaire and Idi Amin of Uganda ran centralized political systems in their countries that promoted the economic interests of the West to the detriment of the developments of their people. The resultant effect was bad governance that consumed lives and resources in the process. The West saw nothing wrong with their administrations until when their interests was affected. This act to continue the colonial political culture in post-colonial Africa by the

elites have no doubt continue the perpetuation of neo-colonialism in Africa and this have prevented elites to move their minds and actions to come up with concrete solutions to address neo-colonialism in Africa. Attah, has much to say on the above point that,

"it was within the vortex of decolonization that neo-colonialism was strategized by the departing colonial powers in order to perpetuate their economic influence even after independence in Africa."⁶

The statement credited to one-time British Colonial Secretary Ian Macleod in 1960 made the new phase of imperialism that is neocolonialism more clearly in our time. That;

...we did not go abroad to govern, we went abroad to trade .
.. so if we are wise we can stay in countries that we once ruled
- as traders, farmers, planters, shippers, businessmen,
engineers, etc.⁷

Today in African States, the practice of the Europeans is exactly the picture described by Macleod in the above quote. From the North to South, East to West of Africa Multinational Companies owned by the developed nations of the world are in control of the African economies in various States of Africa. This is a sad situation that has placed the continent in deep economic crisis that have resulted in various forms of instabilities and insurgencies that have claimed millions of lives due to unequal economic exchanges in the relations of the West and Africa.

Unfortunately, these practices of neo-colonialism are assisted by the African elites in the position of governance in Africa. For instance, using Nigeria as a case study to show the act and practice of neo-colonialism arrangement in the decolonization process in Africa; there were several measures put in place by the departing British colonial masters during the decolonization era to have grip on the Nigerian economy after independence - ranging from tax laws, to bilateral agreements between Britain and Nigeria to continue Britain domination of the country after independence.⁸ This bilateral economic and financial policies favored Britain to the detriment of the Nigerian economy. The Income Tax Ordinance established by the British was used by some foreign companies in Nigeria to evade taxes. As the Ordinance stressed that British companies could only be taxed on profit declared not from their total operations in the country. This policy reduced what would have come to Nigeria as proceed of taxation from foreign companies operating in the country- The British make sure that before departing the oil resources of the country were also under the control of the monopoly of the British Petroleum and the Royal Dutch Shell Company, These companies oversee the production of the oil industry from production through marketing to ensure profits are made at the detriment of the development in Nigeria.⁹ This did not change much even after independence when Nigeria claim ownership and exploration rights also given to other nations of the world like America, French and others, the control, management and regulations are still in the hands of these companies that belong to the British.¹⁰ This shows that in this post-colonial era the function of the Nigerian State in control by the comprador class is that of tax collector which is the necessary condition of neo-colonialism if imperialist nations must have their way in domination of foreign economies. This is the practice in all States of Africa that came under colonialism; economic policies were put in place that protected the interests of the departing colonial authorities in the post-colonial era. The ruling elites in Africa were comfortable with it; more so their interests were how to get hold of power for a long time and do not care about what happens to their economy provided their interest is protected.

Africa Elites in Post-Colonial Era in Africa

The role played by African elites in post-colonial era in Africa has received much criticism from within and outside Africa due to continue poverty of the continent in the 21st century. The criticism has come due to the impact of neo-colonialism in Africa. The elites in Africa have occupied commanding positions in African societies from the local to the central authorities in the economy that were formally under the direct control of the colonial masters are today dominated by the African elites yet the continent is still poor. These made critics of imperialism in Africa to believe that Africa has not fully gain independence. As independence is only complete with economic independence; ¹¹ which have

become the cries of the African people after independence yet to no avail despite the material resources of the continent. Though Kwame Nkrumah, through his charismatic leadership of the African struggle against colonialism called for African States to seek political independence and all other things would be added to it after independence, through the determined struggle of the African people to throw off the yoke of imperialism and transform the continent yet not all the manifestation of colonialism have been removed.¹² Imperialism still resurfaces in neo-colonial form through the comprador class comprises of the African elites. This to a large extent helps to support the view of Frantz Fanon about the role of the African elites in the independent continent of Africa. That the African bourgeoisie which in its present structure represents African elites in the governance of states in the continent is thus:

... in the history of underdeveloped countries is a completely useless phase . . . that nothing new has happened since independence was proclaimed, .. the bourgeoisie take over unchanged the legacy of the economy, the thought and the institutions left by the colonialists.¹²

The present state of the post-colonial economy in African States is still geared towards the exploitation of the continent resources as it were under colonialism in Africa. The comprador bourgeoisie classes at the seats of political power and economic structures of the African States are there to protect their interests to the detriment of the continent and the people of the African States. It is still the exploitation of African resources all the way to the development of the advanced economies of the West. African elites have decided to allow the status quo to remain due to the rents they receive from the Western multinational corporations that drive their economies to the disadvantages of the entire African continent.

This status quo is maintained also through Western aids collected by the elites in Africa to run their governments. The elites that took over power mal-administered their States governance through their centralized and autocratic nature of administrations that result to continual economic failure that increase the level of poverty in African continent. These bad governments after crumbling their countries' economies turned to their ex-colonial masters and international institutions like the European Union (EU), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank for aids,¹² this aids come with conditions that tie African States economies to the direct control of Western nation's economies. The Western nations in order to create a dependency syndrome encourage the bad or corrupt governments in Africa to continue coming for such help as their governments do not pose any threat to the extraction of resources to the markets of the Western world. These results into serious consequent on Africa development as the aids come with political and economic conditions that are disadvantageous to the people of the continent. For instance, Nigerian Government in 1995 embarked on reforms as part of the conditions given by the Western nations for aids and foreign direct investments in the country by enacting two laws. These laws are Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC) Act 16 and the Foreign Exchange (Monitoring and Miscellaneous Provision) Act 17. The laws provide for foreign investor to setup business with 100 percent ownership, the reforms encourage foreign multinational corporations that belong to the West to come to the country at the disadvantages of her economy. This entrench neo-colonialism in Africa as African States through their elites in governance also carried out such reforms to attract aids and investments from the West.

Post-Colonial elites in Africa abandoned the ideologies of the economic development of their States to their erstwhile Colonial Masters. Thus decisions as to the road map to economic development of Africa years after independence have been maintained along Western models prescriptions. However, these prescriptions have been in the favor of the West as it gives them the opportunity to perfect what was begun under colonial rule by turning Africa into dependent economic region of the developed nations. This helps to generate neo-colonial dependencies that put African States at the mercy of Western economies domination in Africa as African leaders look up to the West for the requisite skills and guidance for their economic developments.¹³ More so, at independence African States lack the needed skills, manpower, technological know-how, infrastructure and the administrative skills to embark on their own developmental agenda. The situation was made worst by the narrow base economic practice

that renders the continent as the primary production base of the Western industries. Africa leaders had to turn and put their trust on Western model for their own growth and development. This did not bring the needed development instead push Africa States the more into neo-colonial exploitations of the West. African elites base their development plans and visions on technical advice, theories and policies packaged in Western capitalism by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. By this African States have been used as a guinea pig and their conditions have deteriorated from bad to worse. For instance, during the initial stage of African States independence, the World Bank model for Africa's growth and development was based on import substitutions industries;¹⁴ this policy had negative effect on African States economies, as it encourages foreign industrial finished goods to flood the markets in Africa. This create a dependency of the Africa economy on the Western economy as it is today in this era of globalization.

The State of Africa Neo-Colonial Economy

According to Chinwizu

Economically speaking, the issue in dispute between African nationalism and western imperialism can be stated simply: Shall Africa develop a strong, productive processing and manufacturing sector around which to integrate an African regional economy, or shall she not? The West maintains that Africa need not, ought not and better dare not".¹⁵

African States economies in the post-colonial era is structured in a way that the economies of the advanced Western nations dominate and have control in directing the economic and even the political policies in Africa after independence. These control by the neo-colonialist nations over African governments are done through foreign financial institutions and the activities of the multinational corporations that support African elites in the various governance of their individual States.¹⁶ This neo-colonial practice survived because it is in the interests of the African elites to keep the economic dependent status quo on the economies of the West as it were under colonialism. Hence today African States still remain primary producer of resources for the industrialized nations of the West. By so doing contribute less in world economic structures, the resultant effect is the underdevelopment of the African continent and impoverishments of its peoples. It is disheartening to still see African continents contributing one percent or less than that in the world manufacturing productions in the 21st century given the human and material resources available in the various African States. Where States like India and China in the continent of Asia classified as backward nations few years ago are today taking giant strides in manufacturing and industrialization in the world economy; what then is the problem of the African States? Should we continue to blame the cause of African underdevelopment on neo-colonialists infiltrations having known where the problem lies?

Africa post-colonial economy has been foreign investment driven. The elites have been "indoctrinated to believe that Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) promote sustainable economic growth and industrialization."¹⁷ This notion which the West has indoctrinated in the hearts of the African elites in governance has made them to abandon the essential of the economic structure for industrialization to take place in the continent. Industrialization has a take off base; it must begin from the indigenous arts and crafts of a people in the society. It is the continued improvements on the arts and crafts of a people take for instance, the Western nations that build the technological base for the industrialization in Europe and America. It is not achieved by the abandonment of the arts and crafts used in their agricultural productions. The Western societies through improvement on their crude arts and crafts transformed their agriculturally base societies into industrialized one. The opposite is the case of the African States stories, the elites in governments would not want the economy to go through the transformation the way the Western economy did, instead adopt the quick means through Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs), consequently neglecting their arts and crafts and agricultural economic strengths due to their arable lands and begin to rely on the Multinational Corporations that have the motive to make profits at the detriment of the continent.

Multinational Corporations are in Africa for business. The goal of any business is profit. It is no news Multinational Companies discourage the development of indigenous industries in the countries in which they operate. This is to make the country become a market for them to sell their products, which is a necessary condition to continue domination of the country economically and otherwise. African elites in governments across the continent help to sustain this domination as a result of the rents they get from it. In some cases, they are made boards members in the Multinational Corporations and become rich and privilege at the expense of the development of the Africa continent.

Over the years the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have forced African States to open their economies to Western penetration; these increase exports of primary goods to the West. Thereby increases profits for the Western multinational corporations that operate in Africa. In the 1980s the Bretton Wood Institutions introduced African States to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). SAP requires African governments to:

"cut public spending including eliminating subsidies for food, medical care and education, raise interest rates, thus reducing access to credit, privatize State enterprises, increase export and reduce barriers to trade and foreign investment such as tariffs and import duties."¹⁸

These policy conditions given to the African governments are supposed to generate export driven growth that will attract Foreign Direct Investments in the continent that could reduce the debt burden and poverty of African countries. The effects of the SAP programs in Africa expanded the poverty, inequality and insecurity in the continent as countries of Africa States instead to reduce their indebtedness and improved on their economies sank deeper and deeper the more due to economic crisis that emanated from the loans given to them as a result of the conditions attached to it by the World Bank and the IMF, African States economies became opened much more to the operations of Multinational Corporations sponsored by the World Bank and IMF and this did not yield any result in terms of industrialization in Africa.

Today, African States are faced with the realities of globalization in Africa. The question is, what do we have in Africa to globalize in our economy, when globalization is about industrialization? Globalization simply means countries of the world should integrate economically in order to remove barriers to trade at the international level. That is having common trade policies that allow market forces to determine the price of commodities. However, with remarkable increase in trade Africa's share in global trade is too little. Statistic records show in 2013, that Africa's share in world trade was only 2.8 percent,¹⁹ the items for this percentage records were mainly primary products not manufactured goods. It shows how industrially poor Africa continent is. The removal of barriers to trade in the global environment can only yield positive effect on African States economies if they also market industrial finished goods. The Western nations and their industries smiles home with huge profits after paying rents to the comprador class on the hinge of the porous economies of Africa in the global markets, a necessary condition for neo-colonialism to have its way and drain and keep African economies permanently dependent on the West.

Africa's post-colonial economy has been opened to Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), which has not been favourable to the continent. This situation which Africa find herself, has made critics to describe the activities of the multinational corporation along with IMF and World Bank as recolonization.²⁰ This time not done by individual European countries but by the economic activities of the Western nations and their financial institutions. Neo-colonialism penetrates African States economies and renders its subservience to the economic interests of the industrialized West, in the guise of free trade and neo-liberal policies that have put Africans in disadvantageous corner of the global trade.

Conclusion

It is sad to say that with the decolonization in Africa, imperialism did not end. It continued even after independence in Africa. This neo-colonial form of exploitation did not come from the air; African elites that constitute the comprador class in African States governments join in this economic strangulation

of the continent for their selfish interests to collect the rents that comes with the neo-liberal policies of the West. These have impoverished the continent and open it for exploitation without direction.

Recommendations

The paper therefore would make the following recommendations to help curb the menace of neo-colonialism in Africa. The target of neo-colonialist nations of the West is to economically dominate Africa and perpetually keep her dependent on them. This is done through their superior technologies in their industries. Part of the solutions open to Africa to curb Neocolonialism is to seek her own technology and build her industry. Is either we Africans go back to the basis and start the development of our own home grown technology and apply its in turning our raw materials into finished goods or we are left at the mercies of the neo-colonialists exploitation till when the kingdom of God come to rescue us from the untold hardship caused by the Western neo-liberal policies.

African States are due for elites that are ready to make sacrifices irrespective of their positions in government. At least to say no to neo-liberal policies that are not favorable to African States. This will put the West under check in either in its bilateral or multi-literal economic policies that they are into.

Endnotes

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