

Article

A Link between Neocolonial Hegemony and Structural Violence in Africa of the 21st Century

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Abstract

Amidst the nationalist struggle for the political emancipation of Africa were fears for the future of the soon-to-be-born post-colonial states. Fears about the future, birthed from doubts about the capacity of the soon-to-be independent states exercising and experiencing full political emancipation and sovereignty. Decades later, the veracity of their fears is glaringly confirmed as genuine, as African post-colonial states have mostly either refused to grow or are retrogressing; which is a far cry from the situation of some Asian and South American countries who also underwent the colonial experience. Some queries therefore arise; what is the problem with Africa? Why can't African states develop and become responsible states upholding the welfare of their citizen? Why can't the African free herself from imperialist and neocolonialist influence? Many have blamed corruption, prebendalism, ethnicism, economic downturns, and even natural cum meta-natural mishaps as being the cause without much attention paid to the political elites who in collaboration with cosmopolitan imperialist interests, usurp the wealth of the people for pecuniary gains. Inevitably maintaining or even deteriorating (in most cases) worse conditions than were obtainable during the colonial era, thus increasing vulnerability and precarity upon the citizenry.

Keywords: Africa, political emancipation, neocolonial hegemony, structural violence, political elites

Introduction

The 1950s and '60s marked a critical phase in the life and history of sundry African countries. This was the period in which many African countries secured independence or political liberation. At this point, countries that were previously under the control of their colonial masters were declared free to run their affairs and manage their resources. This phenomenon led to widespread celebration amongst different groups, peoples, and categories in Africa. But decades after, and roughly six to seven decades after, the fruits imagined and envisaged by these states are not manifest. That is if states are construed from the purview of their primary function of delivering public good to their citizenry, (Rotberg, 2003) then many African states have not fared well; leading to massive underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, strives, and wars. This has become a source of worry to scholars of different disciplines, from economics to philosophy to mention a few.

This study seeks to submit that the hegemony, segregation, and exploitation amongst other ills that beclouded the colonial era are still present today. While at that point, a foreign race was at the centre of injustices and inequalities meted out against hosts and natives from African lands and territories. The case is slightly different today, as the physical structures that existed then are not present today, but the experiences and impacts of those times are still being felt today. That is, while the natives seem to be in charge of governance today, their activities, and the impact of their hold on



power continue to further promote and entrench the ills that impoverished the natives during the age of colonialism—leaving the masses as perpetual victims, poor, and underdeveloped. In this case, the structures that are supposed to deliver the public goods are hijacked by the political class who employ the people's wealth for personal and class use; thus, denying the people access to basic amenities akin to their survival. This paper deployed submissions from neocolonial hegemony and structural violence to describe and portray how harm has been carried out by some African elites, and in some cases collaborating with foreign interests, with whom there is a sphere of influence relation to shortchange their people and deny them of their rights as inhabitants and citizens of the land.

Current Situation in Africa

The continent of Africa is marred with challenges that have made some scholars describe the continent as one replete with failing states. If states are to be construed and measured from the teleological prism of being platforms or instruments through which public goods are distributed (Razzolini, 2004), then most African states have not been able to justify the reason for their existence as states. Thus, they have largely grappled with establishing their presence in the lives of citizens and on the international stage; inevitably struggling to justify their existence and statehood. The continent has several countries that are either grappling with dilapidated or the absence of critical infrastructure. Critical sectors like health services, transportation, economy, education, and electricity clearly exemplify this. This infrastructural deficit has hampered growth and also prevented investors from coming to operate within these terrains (Mafusire, Schwidrowski, Anyanwu, & Mabila, 2010).

This unwholesome situation is ubiquitous in different spheres of life, as evident in the different sectors that are either in or nearing comatose. The healthcare system, for example, exposes most Africans who live under the poverty line to either cough out expensive healthcare service sums or stand the risk of remaining unhealthy. Thus, Songwe (2022) points out that “out-of-pocket (OOP) health spending in Africa remains excessively high compared to other continents”. Also worrisome is the abysmal doctor-to-patient ratio at 1:50,000; “which is far above the recommended ratio by the World Health Organization (WHO) which is 1:600.” (Faruk, Surajudeen-Bakinde, Abdulkarim, Oloyede, 2020). This grants credence to the WHO's submission that Africa has “more than 24% of the global burden of disease, but has access to only 3% of health workers and less than 1% of the world's financial resources,” (Songwe, 2022). So its healthcare system grapples with a myriad of challenges which, according to Oleribe, Momoh, Uzochukwu, Mbofana, Adebisi, Barbera, Williams, and Taylor-Robinson (2019), includes inadequate manpower, healthcare financing, poor leadership and management. Amidst this health crisis, is a strong presence of poverty.

Most African countries fall within the category of underdeveloped countries that host some of the poorest people on the earth. As Saleh (2022) points out, “Poverty is a widespread issue across Africa. Around 460 million people on the continent were living below the extreme poverty line of 1.90 U.S. dollars a day in 2022. Since the continent had approximately 1.4 billion inhabitants, roughly a third of Africa's

population was in extreme poverty...". This poverty is further exacerbated by a high infrastructural deficit, which the Africa Development Bank estimates would require a funding injection of around \$68bn to \$108bn annually (Jaiyeola, 2022). Africa's educational sector is not immune to this nauseating reality. Thus, Mwakideu and Mules, affirm while citing a United Nations report that "Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, has the highest rate of education exclusion globally" (Kaledzi, (2022). Where "nearly 60% of youth aged 15 to 17 are not in school."

Worsened by the presence of corruption, the Washington Post reports that African countries lose \$1.26 trillion yearly to "corruption, theft, and tax evasion—enough to lift 1.4 billion people above the poverty line for six years" (Christiaan Keulder 2021). Also, the African Union estimates that \$140 billion is lost annually to corruption. Adekoya, (2020) insists that this has crippled the "economic and social landscape in African countries." This position is also affirmed in Transparency International's report which submits that while 43 percent of Africans are held down by poverty, "over \$50 billion worth of stolen assets flows out of Africa every year." What Africa cannot deny is the fact that in the face of a great infrastructural deficit, corruption thrives. Rational minds exposed to this fact would want to know, Who is to blame? In answering the question, one may have to consider some factors which include how these states or nations emerged and how leadership had impacted these states. The focus of this study is not primarily on how the former emerged, but on how the latter has impacted the lives of those being led. It is no longer news that the colonial setup was primarily designed and deployed to produce and proliferate exploitation and oppression (Mbeki, 2005). The bane of the situation is the fact that the harm that was present at that point is present today. The African political elites inherited and continued the administration of exploitation and suppression; thus, confirming the fears of nationalists like Fanon, who had reservations about the set of leaders and the kind of leadership that would administer the soon-to-be independent states (Fanon, (1963). This corollary to the nature he had perceived and projected of them, he avers that "...no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste, avid and voracious, with the mind of a huckster, only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it...shows itself incapable of great ideas or inventiveness" (Fanon 1967, p. 141). The danger here is that not just the immediate elites who took the reins of power had this greed and avarice Fanon complains of, even subsequent generations of elites maintain this trajectory. The other phase of this work portrays the harm done to Africans by these actions of the elites, either alone or in connivance with foreign interests as violent, and can be considered under the prism of structural violence.

Structural Violence and the African Condition

Structural violence asserts injustices and inequities entrenched in social structures and normalized by stable institutions and regular experience (Aghtaie, & Staines, 2022). Structures here depict social relations and arrangements—economic, political, legal, religious, or cultural—that shape how individuals and groups interact within a social system. These include broad-scale cultural and political-economic structures such as caste, patriarchy, slavery, apartheid, colonialism, and neoliberalism, as well as poverty and discrimination by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and

migrant/refugee status. As Galtung (1969) quips, this form of violence “is built into the structure, and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (p. 171). These results in avoidable deaths, illnesses, and injury; and they reproduce violence by marginalizing people and communities, constraining their capabilities and agency, assaulting their dignity, and sustaining inequalities (Rylko-Bauer, & Farmer, 2016). Structural violence is manifest in “a society where the life expectancy rate is twice as high in the elite class than in the lower classes” (Galtung 1969, p. 171). What is needed for structural violence to occur is the careful manipulation of instruments that are supposed to be employed and deployed for the generality of the people, to be deployed only for a few people. That is, while the state is supposed to be an instrument through which public goods are provided and harnessed by citizens due to its teleological nature, the state becomes an instrument through which a category harnesses that which is meant for all to themselves. This study picks out the form of activity perpetrated by some African bourgeoisie classes whose activities have not only weakened the state by hampering the distribution of public goods but have led to diversion for selfish purposes. The resources that are supposed to be held in trust for the state and its inhabitants and deployed to meet their basic needs are pilfered away through fronts and agreements like white elephant projects used as smoke screens to source and divert funds for personal interests. So the state is “instrumentalised” to enable the pilferage of resources by African elites. This is captured in Ayilteh (1992), thus:

Not many people thought that we would be fighting for the same basic rights that we fought for. We kicked the British out and replaced them with our brothers and sisters who turned out to be more brutal than the British (p. 13).

One thing that is clear from the above submission by Ayilteh, is that some of the gory experiences that were present during the colonial era, which many Africans thought had become a thing of the past, were still present, and even worse. He points to a continuous brazen denial of the African public of the rights and goods that ought to be provided and guaranteed by the state. There are different levels of this brutality. There is one that happens on the home front or locally, where elites are involved in massive corruption to the detriment of their people. And the higher level where there is an inter-connective effort between local and foreign interests to short-change their people. This is done sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly by the elites. In the case of the former, the elites take advantage of deceptive arrangements like offshore accounts, amongst other platforms, made available by foreign interests to cart away monies meant for the generality of the people; and unknowingly as victims of ploys in the forms of aid, policy suggestions, and other clandestine means to short-change, impoverish, exploit, and underdeveloped African countries. Like the Structural Adjustment Programme which provides aid, but proffers stringent conditions that in the long run weaken African economies and social security (Mbeki, 2005).

The foregoing is made possible through interrelationships and events like the exchange and sale of raw materials and resources without the proceeds being utilized for the betterment of the people, and the illicit financial dealing carried out between such elites and foreign interests and the stashing of monies in foreign accounts. The

impact of this phenomenon on the infrastructure is a dilapidated infrastructure, where an infrastructural deficit has led most elites to engage in varied forms of tourism to meet their needs. Corollary, medical tourism, and educational tourism amongst others are patronized by elites who rather than develop key sectors for public consumption would plunder such resources, and end up patronizing saner clines where quality standards are maintained. This confirms the veracity of Fanon's (1967) assertions on the "greedy caste, avid and voracious" nature of the elite (p. 141). He points out that they hastily "make their fortunes and set up national systems of exploitation", which inevitably leads to obstacles in the pursuit of the ideal life or what he calls "Utopia" (Fanon 1967, p. 141). For them, exploitation can only be achieved when there is disunity. So they invest in producing and promoting disunity. As he puts it, "The national bourgeoisie... are quite clear as to what their objectives are, have decided to bar the way to that unity" (Fanon 1967, p. 141) and strive to foil coordinated efforts by the masses to triumph over stupidity, hunger, and inhumanity at one and the same time. This is a confirmation of the strategic attempts made by these elites to sustain their hold on the people. This displays the hegemonic tendencies of these elites. As Gramsci (as cited in Martin, 2023) points out, for hegemony to thrive there needs an ideology.

Neo-Colonial Hegemony and the African Condition

Hegemony derives from the Greek word *hegemon* meaning chieftain, and avers of situations where a social class exerts more power or control than required by the law over others. This implies that the law for maintaining peace, order, and harmonious coexistence allows for the exertion of power and control of some over others; for example, leaders over followers. But as spelt out in the above definition there is a measure of power, control coercion that the law permits. And once this limit is exceeded, a problem arises. This is the problem Gramsci (as cited in Roger, 2019) pointed out in the critique of the capitalist society. He submits that the bourgeoisie uses existing cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies. In this ploy, they employ ideology, rather than force, power, or coercion. Also in interstate affairs, states, under the ruse of aiding weaker and less developed states exploit these states by fitting them into the global space, to earn and attain other benefits; get their raw material and labour at undervalued rates, and add value to them and resell these products to them at a higher rate. In this exchange, poor countries are impoverished. This is similar to neo-colonialism.

Neocolonialism describes a new form of colonialism. Colonialism can be recalled as a "political and economic domination involving the control of a country and its people by settlers from a foreign power" (Longley, 2021). In this case, there was an overwhelming agreement that states from outside the continent deployed their citizens, whom they shipped to other lands to rule and control other peoples and their resources. Although this was said to have been done under the pretext of helping to civilize the natives or local peoples, the activity of these settlers later proved otherwise as their religious, economic, political, and other activities showcased a crusade to exploit, control, dominate, usurp, and shortchange the resources of the people. This they did without any sense of moral or human consideration, and the impact of their activity is still being felt today.

However, African states at some point secured independence, but the tragedy is that some of the phenomena experienced in those dark days are still being experienced today—the domination, subjugation, betrayal, theft, and diversion of resources among others. That is, while the interest and evil of the past remain, the patterns, methods, and strategy employed slightly differ. A look at the thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah may help elucidate better, as he points out in his 1965 classic entitled, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. “Africa is a paradox which illustrates and highlights neo-colonialism. Her earth is rich, yet the products that come from above and below the soil continue to enrich, not Africans predominantly, but groups and individuals who operate to Africa’s impoverishment” (Nkrumah 1965, p. 1). This is a depiction of what neocolonialism is and entails, which points to the case where resources that ought to be held and managed in trust for the people, have been diverted and benefited only a few. This they achieve by exercising hegemony over the ‘others’ as the colonialists succeeded in doing. This directly fits into this paper’s construing of neocolonialism as a ‘biconceptual’ notion made of ‘neo’ and ‘colonialism’. While the former represents new, the latter depicts hegemony and control over a people’s state or territory. In this case, the exerciser of the control or hegemon is the African political elite, while the ‘exercise’ is the people—more specifically the poor masses. This is the premise from which this study indicts the African political elites as colonizers who have replaced the foreign political elites and continued their reign of oppression, suppression, and exploitation.

Many have blamed colonialism as the reason for the developmental deficit in Africa. For them, the resources carted away during this era were in large volumes both in the form of human and non-human resources. This, they claim, has helped the developed world while leaving Africa underdeveloped. The veracity is debatable. There is no doubt that Africa has suffered from the ills of colonialism; however, the fact that other victims of colonialism have grown to become largely developed and self-sufficient creates doubts about the veracity of these claims. For example, Asia, and South America, amongst others who were also victims have largely outlived its consequences. In these climes, leadership employed the right approach which has aided in heralding development and peace. This, according to Plato and Pareto (as cited in Priya, n.d) is a necessity for a thriving society, which Achebe (1983) asserts is missing in Nigeria in particular and most African countries. Since independence meant African states took charge of themselves through African elites, who not only inherited an oppressive system but perpetuated and sustained it to their benefit and the detriment of their citizens, then they share the blame. The role of external forces promoting dependency cannot also be ignored. However, for these policies to succeed in a country, the leaders have a role to play. The leaders can apply discretionary and prudential management in ensuring that the key sectors of the state function optimally, to bring peace and prosperity to everyone or at least the majority. This will help mitigate the harm currently done to Africans who are not able to fulfill their potential. This is in tandem with Galtung’s (1969) thesis on interpreting the impact of the phenomenon of poor leadership bringing harm to peoples and inhabitants, then violence will be construed as that which prevents an agent, individual, or group from reaching their full potential, and as Obinyan and Otoide (2021) point out, the

...inability of the citizenry to fully take delivery of the dividends of democracy may be traced down to two possible causes; the inability of the political elite to deliver the goods of democracy due to their ignorance or the inability to deliver due to deliberate greed (p. 80).

Conclusion

This study has established that the independence and political emancipation secured decades ago with much joy has become a charade, since the states, as most of them have proven, have not been able to meet up with the demands of their citizens. Rather, they have failed to justify their existence. Engaging data from different sources, the paper was able to showcase the fact that almost every sector critical to human development has come under the gale of underperformance and thus become comatose. And amidst these, rising corruption is still the order of the day amongst most of their elites, who like the colonialists, see governance and the state as means to exploit and shortchange the masses. This attitude has harmed most African states; denying her not just the benefits of political liberation or true freedom that independence brought, but the benefits that accrue from being part of a state. This, therefore, confirms the veracity of Fanon's claim about the greed of the African bourgeoisie or political elite. This has greatly harmed their people, and if sustained would most likely dovetail into a full-blown insurrection as the patience of the peasant or masses is fast running out.

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