

## Review

# Political economy of the new slave trade in Africa

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**A macro analysis of various inquiry into the nature and causes of Africa's crises may revealed a continent placed on perpetual slavery. From trans-Atlantic slave trade to colonialism; from colonialism to flag independence and Neo Colonialism; from trade imperialism to human trafficking; from the rampaging momentum of globalization to erosion of African culture and communal morality; from 'Tokunbo' Syndrome and America Lottery to the debt burden and fall of Africa's currencies; Africa seems to be on a verge of internationally-inspired perpetual servitude. The costs of these old and modern vices are enormous and the task of salvaging them is not less so. While the paper exposes the two divides, it goes to argue that, the actualization of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) remain a must for Africa as a continent, if she must survive the present socio-economic and political disempowerment eating deep to her efforts at meeting aims and objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).**

**Key words:** Political economy, new slave trade, colonialism, trade imperialism, capitalism, globalisation.

## INTRODUCTION

Slavery is by no means new. Neither is brain drain a new culture or invention. King (1998, p. 27), maintained that there has been an institution of domestic slavery which later become "commercialized, internationalized and racialized," Africa on this note, remains one of the unfortunate race, degraded and segregated in the comity of nations. The examination of political economy of the new slave trade and brain drain in Africa offers a veritable mode of analysis of grasping the context within which socio-economic and political forces globally operates in Africa states.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to present the chronicles of the means and methods of the consistent enslavement of African nation. This, we expect, will expose a line of social system of production, the economic relations between people in the process of production, the understanding of the material production in African societies and the construction of their social forces and classes.

## THEORETICAL ISSUES

The study of international political economy (IPE) has become a dynamic and expanding area of study in recent years. From initial rather narrow focus on the relationship between state power and decision making in the context of constraint imposed by the economic environment, IPE has expanded to include the activities of multinational corporations, the influence on state policy of military industrial complexes, the role of international organizations in the international economy and the problems of world debt and development as (Adeleke, 2003) puts it.

The traditional meaning of the term political economy is that branch of the art of government concerned with the systematic inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations, but Ajayi (2002) argues that political economy as a theoretical framework has developed beyond the contributions of classical theorists like Adam Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, Mills and others. The same author posits that "concerns of the discipline are now seen in relation to changes in the nature of the socio-economic structure within which it is operating and the

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practical material and intellectual problems that were thrown up within it".

While Ajayi (2002) examines critically the popular Marx explanation of political economy as different from the classical economist, he sees it as an analytical model for the study of the sum total of the relations of production and the economic structure of society, Banwo (1999) goes further to consider the works of Engel and Popov among others to explain political economy from scientific stand points; having realized the framework of analysis, its nature and the methodology of political economy. He conceptualizes it as a science which deals with economic laws governing production, exchange and distribution of wealth at various stages of the evolution of human society and that it studies social relationship between people in the process of production. As he puts it, it equally looks at the nature of political power in a given human society, the class content and character of the state and the influence of the state on the economy.

The above assertion has exposed the undeniable relationship between the economy of a given state and the socio-economic strata or classes that abide within the people of that state. Marxist-Leninist political economy studies the social side of production rather than its technical side (which is the subject of the nature and technical sciences). It does not examine material production as much, but the social relation of the people concerning production, the social system of production including the relations of distribution, exchange and consumption; that is, relations in all the phases of the reproduction of material values. For example, what is the social relations and economic gauge between the slaves and slave master's in a mode of production.

The above clarification throws up the nature of various connection and interaction with the development of production forces and its economic basis; the exploitation of the working people, the contradictions between labour and capital, the history of development from lower stages of social production to its higher stages. Above all, it exposes how the whole course of historical development paves the way for the triumph of socialism and communism and its present decline.

The immediate beneficiary of the demise of communism is, expectedly, capitalism. Essentially, capitalism has placed Africa at a 'rear' in a competitive market economy, the result of which is continued and consistent socio-economic and political dependency of Africa on the first world, giving rise to further enslavement and pauperization of the African continent.

## **SLAVERY IN AFRICA: RE-VISITING THE OLD ORDER**

The dominant place of the state in the economic process of Africa was historically determined (Mimiko, 2002). This started with the emergence of Atlantic slave trade. Human beings of colour were the primary commodities of

the slave trade. British became an early supporter of Africa slave trade. The famous Royal Africa company was formed in 1672 and the company was authorized not only to export English goods to West Africa but more importantly, it was encouraged to supply the American colonies with African slaves (King, 1998, p. 30)

From then, slavery became both a major racial and economic issue of international politics, where the Belgians, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Prussians and Spaniards all struggled for a share of the trade. The trade variously described as a first world wide commerce flourished for over four centuries and laid the foundation of the new industrial system. Dubois, in his work "The suppression of the African slave trade" noted that the Royal African Company shipped about 60,000 slaves from 1688 of whom over 14,000, died at sea. Since then, there has been an unconfirmed claim that over 100 million people were carted away from Africa, but Offiong (1980) claimed that between 15th and 16th century, the African continent lost in enslavement and killings between 65 and 75 million people.

One should note with great sadness, that the whooping population are in their productive ages, between 12 to 49 years, a very vital part of population, leaving the aged, children, the lame and sick. Onimode (1983, p. 25) captured the scourge when he described it as follows:

This depopulation, mostly of adult and women in their prime, represented enormous loss of productive capacity. The reconstruction of the associated destruction also wasted productive resources. A measure of this loss is the huge wealth which this expropriated black population created to make the united states of America the richest country in the world today. That is the meaning of capitalism and slavery (Onimode, 1983, p. 25).

The abolition of slave trade between 1772 and 1850 was not out of good intentions but that it had become an obstacle to a more lucrative trade in manufactured goods and quest for Africans primary products, which they called legitimate trade. The free trade here set the stage for yet another mode of social production, a kind of free trade imperialism (Onimode, 1983).

## **Colonialism and the imperialism of free trade**

Those who have identified imperialism as the higher stage of capitalism (Lenin, 1976) and the inevitable result of foreign investment agree that the historical occupation of Africa was done for economic advantages. Rodney (1972) wrote extensively on expatriation of Africa surplus under colonialism and the colonial Administration as economic exploiter, maintaining that the colonial state engaged directly in the economic exploitation and impoverishment of Africa.

This colonial legacy was listed by Ake (2001) as one factor that contributed to the apparent failure of the developmental enterprise in Africa. According to Ake the

colonial state redistributed land and determined who should produce what and how. Its attempt at supplying labour, sometimes resorting to forced labour, went into the business education to ensure that workers could do the jobs they were required to do. The colonial government made the colonies to produce the commodities they needed and resold back to the colonies in the price they equally dictated

Offiong (1980, p. 54) associated imperialism with monopolistic privileges and preferences, plunder of raw materials, seizure of territory, enslavement of the indigenous population, nationalism and militarism. He insisted that there is a general agreement in associating imperialism with economic, political, cultural and territorial expansion. Onimode (1983, p. 6) placed the expansion on two periods and two crisis. They include the booms of free imperialism of 1870s to 1914 and under multilateral imperialism from 1945 to 1970. The major crisis periods were during 1914 to 1945 under monopolistic imperialism and after 1970 in the era of multilateral imperialism.

Onimode (1983, p. 7) further identified five mechanisms of imperialism to include slavery, trade, foreign direct and portfolio investment or capital export, Aid in cash or kind and international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These he claimed have been a very powerful mechanism of foreign domination and exploitation. On this note, international capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial and economic oppression and financial strangulation of African continent by the advanced countries.

There has been the greed for maximization of multinational gains, dominating key sectors of their host countries. The ever increasing scientific, technological and the present communication revolutions in Europe, has been converted into a more formidable weapon of such domination and socio-economic oppression of 'non compliance' Africa economic, political and social development. The indigenous comprador bourgeoisie are equally caged, as they have been co-opted, in order to dictate events in their exploitation interest. Till date, the domination is extended to key and critical economic sector like petroleum, mining, manufacturing, banking and insurance, construction, import export trade, transport and communication as well as agriculture (Onimode, 1983, p. 142).

Ake (1994) discussed Structural Adjustment Programm (SAP) as part of the industrialized countries way of disempowerment of Africa, claiming that multilateral development agencies, that is, IMF and the world Bank are necessary for third world economies in distress, Ake exposed that African governments are not so convinced of the virtues of SAP, but they are obliged to go along; allowing the deep despair, wide spread malnutrition, unemployment privatization and currency devaluation unabated Ajayi (2002, p. 121) saw SAP as major component of the IMF. Discussing variously on the conditionalities to qualify for the IMF credit facilities; a

picture of clear further pauperization and perpetual slavery are guaranteed considering the long list of deregulation of almost all facets of socio-economic, political and even social life of so called benefiting countries.

The Bretton woods conference of 1944 on new international economic order, where the issues of free trade, free market and free capital market and the setting up of IMF and world Bank came up, and they are not meant to facilitate economic growth and development to Africa countries despite its under development and dependency structures. Currently Africa in essentially a haven for debt, dumping grounds of junks in form of second hand and out model goods, fake drugs, arms and ammunition for civil strife, toxic wastes and toxic fuel; all directly linked to the western world.

### **AFRICA: A NEO-COLONIAL VICTIM?**

Ajayi (2002, p. 124) observed that the few Africa countries that escaped colonialism are victims of neo-colonialism, where the third countries are subjected to a thorough exploitation of the resources by the European imperialist. Neo-colonialism, here involves the revision of forms and method of control to maintain old dependency relations. Africa today, is widely seen as a neo-colonial enterprise. Authors of Africa political economy analysis like Bade Onimode often ascribe Africa independence as mere 'flag independence'. The expectation that political independence would change the situation in Africa has not been fulfilled to any appreciable level. The result, usually, has been continuing alienation of the new ruling 'modernizing' elites from the more traditional masses of the people, and the consequent impairment and lack of legitimacy of the new governments, resulting in loss of self-esteem. There are also many evidences of 'colonial mentality' manifesting in over dependence on 'anything abroad'. As such the post colonial states, become generally weak both economically, politically and military, very unstable and unsecured.

European colonialist merely realizes the expensiveness of direct occupation of Africa, hence they disengaged to indirect control through puppets. This is exemplified in Balewa's style of governance and foreign policy in the first republic in Nigeria and the commonwealth praises for the present hard reforms and deregulations during Nigeria's hosting of the commonwealth Head of government meeting in December 2003 (Tell, 2003, p. 42). Academically speaking, there is the doctrine of neo-imperialism characterized by control without colonialism (Offiong, 1980, p. 60). It is also often referred to as the neo-Leninist, or contemporary Marxist theory of imperialism. Leninism analysis had implied that the postponed revolution that Marx had earlier predicted would come after the colonies have become independent, but after the 'flag independence' the new

nations found out to their detriment that very little had changed and that they were still being dominated and controlled economically and even politically from the metropole.

It was this experience that led to Nkrumah's (1965) crucial conclusion that underdeveloped countries would not make a forward march towards economic independence, neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism was vanquished. The third All-Africa People's Conference held in Cairo in 1961 listed some of the basic manifestations of neo-colonialism as follows:

- (1) Puppet governments represented by stooges;
- (2) Balkanization as a deliberate political fragmentation of states by creation of artificial entities;
- (3) The economic entrenchment of the colonial power;
- (4) Integrated Africa into colonial economic blocs which maintained the underdeveloped character of African economy, and,
- (5) Economic infiltration by a foreign power after independence through capital investments, loans and monetary aids or technical experts of unequal concessions, (among others).

Essentially, by the time of the end of colonial rule and the emergence of the African countries' 'flag' independence, the colonial state had accomplished its basic tasks. A specific variety of capitalism had taken hold as the dominant mode of production; and in the words of Nnoli (1986, p. 61) "the African population had been intimidated, coerced and manipulated into accepting and even internalizing not merely capitalist values but even the cultural values of the European powers."

The new form of slavery arising from the above description could be summarized from the work of Nnoli (1986) as follows:

- (1) Non-African models of outlook and behaviour in dressing, emigration for higher paying jobs, seeking political asylum, learning more about western world, an erosion of African culture and communal morality.
- (2) Dependence on external trade and preference for use of foreign resources.
- (3) Local African production to satisfy European style of consumption at the expense of basic needs of the people.
- (4) A high propensity to import the manufactured goods and services consumed by Africans.
- (5) A socio economic compartmentalization of the national economy arising from the economic activities of the foreign companies.

One aspect of neo-colonialism that needs to be mentioned here is the issue of foreign aid to African countries. Foreign aid is defined as foreign assistance provided by government (bilateral assistance) or

international agencies (multilateral assistance).

Serageldin (1995, p. 13) painted a very good picture of the usefulness of aid as tool for achieving greater welfare of people in the recipient country, but he was objective and magnanimous enough to expose the various arguments against it. As a western writer, he admitted that aid has failed and does not contribute to promoting development but that there has been continued misery and backwardness. He equally agreed that it promotes dependency in the recipient countries, which never succeeded in relying on themselves, and opined that trade is better than aid in promoting economic growth. A recent dimension into slavery is human trafficking, forced labour, prostitution and various forms of child abuse in Africa.

## GLOBALIZATION AS NEO-COLONIALISM

Globalization is fast becoming a new paradigm of analysis of international political economy. The recurrent question, however, is whether Africa is proportionately integrated to the world economy to compete effectively with developed countries. Regardless of the preparations of Africa, globalization had captured the world in all ramifications; its economic world as capitalism; its politics as democracy and the social interaction as communication.

Held (2000) sees globalization as the "increasing extent, intensity, velocity and impact of worldwide interconnectedness". Globalization or internationalization on this note, had to a greater extent polarized the world into two, the protagonist of globalization on the one hand and its antagonists on the other. The former are populated by developed countries and the latter by the developing countries.

If we consider Nel's (1999, p. 22) argument that globalization is an economic process, a financial markets where natural and national borders between people are disappearing and the world is becoming a global village; then it is suffice to say that Africa has made enormous contributions but all the same, lacks the capacity to compete on favourable terms and hence is at the receiving end of the side effects rather than the gains of globalization. On this note, Aina (2003) contends that globalization has been a force of inequality and marginalization, and that it has, rather than promoting oneness of the global village, constituted a dividing factor between developed and developing nations of the world.

Holtz (1998) agrees that globalization offers many opportunities but that it equally runs the risk of introducing a system of global economic apartheid. This may account for Khor's position that "globalization is what we in the third world here for several centuries called colonization" (Knorr, 1995).

The fall out of the above clarification is that the institutions of globalization - the Bretton woods

institutions such as IMF, International Development Agency (IDA), international Finance corporations (IFC) world Trade Organization (WTO) where developed countries have substantial influence, may further continue to put Africa at a comparative disadvantage. The present high technology and communication network may equally add to the burden of Africa as it has become a rallying point for globalization, which is more or less becoming an irreversible trend. Except Africa revive its human empowerment and technological innovations and development, the present communication surge may permanently banish Africa to the back sit corner of global political, economic and social relations.

### **BRAIN DRAIN AS A NEW FORM OF SLAVERY**

An indirect slavery system, gradually and fashionably eating deep to the 'fabrics' of African human resources has been the ugly trend of Brain Drain. It is coined to mean an escape for better life and greener pastures in the developed world. This variously involves the migration of Africa's trained and qualified professionals and academics to outside world. Ajayi (2002, p. 168) saw it as Trans-national Corporation (TNC) induced high-level educated man power from the host nations to the rich countries. He claimed that about 14,000 Nigeria medical Doctors who were actually trained in Nigeria are in the United States. It was also estimated that Africa countries has lost some 200,000 scientists, doctors and other professionals to the North since 1980's while about 23, 000 qualified academic staff emigrated from Africa each year in search of better working conditions, where 10, 000 qualified Nigerian academic staff are in the U.S alone (Abe, 2002). Abe equally observed that, the ongoing visa lotteries to mainly U.S. and Canada has further compounded the brain Drain problems as it provides a more "legitimate and easy avenue for the continued depletion and pauperization of the African continent".

In the same vein, several Agencies and organizations are out with massive and aggressive advertising on job opportunities in Europe and America and as Abe (2002) puts it, brain drain today is seen as a new form of slavery.

### **THE WAY FORWARD: CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The foregoing glooming scenario presented reason to be pessimistic about the way forward. Several years after the political independence of most African states, Davidson (1992), using Nigeria as case study, argued that the state was not liberating and protective of its citizens, no matter what its propoganda claimed and that it simply failed to operate in any social sense at all. This is also a reflection of what happens in most African nations. High rate of corruption, subservience to foreign manipulation, its second-class, hand-me-down capitalism is turning African continent into theatre of self

enslavement; or how else can we describe a situation where of the \$23 trillion global GDP in 1993, \$18 trillion is in the industrial countries; only \$5 trillion in the developing countries, though they have nearly 80% of the world's population (UNDP Human Development Report, 1996).

Be that as it may, and if Africa must be relevant in the present scheme of world technology, communication and globalization network, the campaign for a new political economy arrangement otherwise called New International Economic order (NIEO) launched in 1974 must be vigorously pursued and sustained. The North must take responsibility for the South's basic poverty, which they caused via manipulations of free trade, slavery and colonialism.

The Demands of the South, listed in Ajayi (2002, p. 204) must be achieved. They are deliberately itemized as:

1. Price indexation and standardization scheme.
2. An end to brain drains (a deliberate arrangement to sustain Africa to retain their professional for needed technological economic development).
3. Transfer of appropriate industrial technology.
4. Relieving of debt burden (not the partial relieve as it was done for Nigeria).
5. Representation in decision-making organs (the call for Africa nation membership of UNO Security Council should be considered and granted).
6. Increased aid and grants.
7. Regime of control of (T.N.Cs) Trans National Corporation.
8. Opening of North's market (The North should not only bombard our markets with their goods but should encourage products from Africa, getting to their own markets).
9. Joint exploration of the ocean for its resources.
10. Transfer of technology of global information systems.

No reparation can surpass the above, especially if Africa countries will pursue genuine democratization and stimulate a wealth generating economy. One could then say that the hope of socio-economic emancipation is in sight.

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