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## AFRICA'S BACKWARDNESS: THE DANGER OF ABUSIVE REFERENCE TO NEO-COLONIALISM.

### Abstract

Neo-colonialism can be said to be a new form of colonial exploitation and control of the new independent states of Africa, as well as other African states with fragile economies. Multinational corporations, such as petroleum and mining companies, are responsible for much of the neo-colonial influence in African countries in the early twenty-first century. Investment by multinational corporations enriches few in underdeveloped countries and causes humanitarian, environmental and ecological damage to their populations. These countries remain reservoirs of cheap labor and raw materials, while restricting access to advanced production techniques to develop their own economies.

This paper reviewed the concept of Neo-Colonialism in Africa with a view to discuss the perpetuation of western interest and the subjugation of Africa long after the independence of African States from European powers. However, this paper also attempted to answer the following questions: is the current poverty of African countries the result of neo-colonialism? Would the abusive or erroneous reference to neo-colonialist intentions have the counterproductive effect of masking endogenous dysfunctions and hampering the capacity for action of Africa and Africans? It is time for African leaders to make the right choice between money and Africa.

**Keywords:** Africa, colonialism, development, imperialism, neo-colonialism, poverty.

### 1. Introduction

Imperialism laid the initial stage for the domination of the African continent by the European powers in the 18th and 19th centuries. The situation resulted in the invasion of Africa which John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson conceived as making Africa a 'sphere of influence' on which Europe could build an economic empire with or without 'a formal, legal control by one government over another country.' (Gat, Azar, 2006, p. 542- 55)

At best, the motive behind European Imperial conquest and eventual colonization of Africa resulted from 'economic motives primarily and prestige motives secondarily' (D.T. Osabu-Kle). Imperialism is a 'creation and or maintenance of unequal economic, cultural and territorial relationship usually between states and empires based on domination and subordination' (R.J. Johnston, 2000, p.375). Hence, the stage of economic domination and subjugation of the African continent as a raw material exploration field and a finished products exploitative market required the use of state apparatuses to conceive the colonial state as a sphere of interest in order to aid the successive exploitation of the African continent with limited resistance and orderly process.

Colonialism is defined as the practice by which a powerful country directly controls less powerful countries and uses their resources to increase its own power and wealth (Cobuild Advanced English Dictionary). On the other hand, neo-colonialism is defined as 'A policy whereby a major power uses economic and political means to perpetuate or extend its influence over underdeveloped nations or areas.' (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English

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Language). It is the continuation of the economic model of colonialism after a colonised territory has achieved formal political independence.

Frederick Lugard, first Governor-General of Nigeria; stated in his book titled - *The Dual Mandate* thus:

‘The Partition of Africa was, as we all recognize, due primarily to the economic necessity of increasing the supplies of raw materials and food to meet the needs of the industrialised nations of Europe...For two or three generations, we can show the Negro what we are: Then we shall be asked to go away. Then we shall leave the land to those it belongs to, with the feeling that they have better business friends in us than in other white men...’ (T. Pakenham, 1991).

It is noteworthy to mention that a country that has never been colonized can also be “neo-colonized”. Countries such as Liberia and Ethiopia, which have never experienced colonialism in the classical sense, have become neo-colonial states because of their dependence on international financial capital because of their fragile economic structures.

The old debate of the post-independence era of the Dark Continent on neo-colonialism has been revived by the recent accusations of Italy against France and its president Emmanuel Macron, denouncing Paris to "impoverish" Africa and to use in particular the CFA franc to continue its colonizing work there<sup>1</sup>.

This declaration, in addition to having ignited diplomatic relations between the two European countries, quickly toured the African techno sphere and gave new life to the theories of those - young and old alike - who are convinced of the full responsibility of the old metropolises and the new rich nations, by their neo-colonialist work, in the current impoverishment of African countries.

At a time when a real rush of world economic powers is taking place in Africa, is it not time for Africans to stop brandishing the threat of a spectre of neo-colonialism and to face the real threats to the development of the continent?

## **2. A Dualism which Feeds the Theories of Neo-Colonialism**

The rise of emerging countries in the context of financialization of capitalism has radically changed global dynamics. The formerly uni-polar world, dominated by the first world (essentially the United States of America), has today experienced a transition to a multi-polar world where the emerging second world plays a pivotal role, both economically and geopolitically. A new dynamic whose strength and sustainability can only be guaranteed by strengthening diplomatic, economic, military, and commercial cooperation - of this second world with what political scientists initially agreed to call the "third world", in particular Africa. Indeed, the last few years have seen a considerable increase in the interest of foreign powers and their investments in African countries.

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<sup>1</sup>In January 2019, the Italian Deputy Prime Minister, Luigi di Maio, described France as being a still colonialist metropolis which "impoverishes" Africa. Paris is even responsible, according to him, for the death of migrants in the Mediterranean.

For example, between 2010 and 2016, 320 foreign embassies opened in Africa<sup>1</sup>. On the military level, we are witnessing an increase in the presence of American and French troops on the continent to strengthen the fight against jihadists in the Sahel, and the signing of military cooperation agreements between Russia, China and several African states. Also, the surge in trade agreements has something to impress: Chinese investments on the continent increased by 226% between 2006 and 2018. Those of the Indians by 292% and the EU by 41% (The Economist, March 7, 2019.), expanding profusely the range of Africa's trading partners and almost relegating to the background its traditional partners who were, in 2006, the USA, France and China mainly.

Today, with the arrival of other players, including India, Indonesia, Turkey and others, France is ranked seventh (The Economist). A place that justifies the recent tour of French President Emmanuel Macron of an unprecedented duration of four days - from March 11 to 14, 2019 - in East Africa (Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya) and the subjects of which largely underline the 'strategic importance of the Horn of Africa and East Africa, even though it makes this continent a priority in its foreign policy', as Le Monde magazine writes (Laurence Caramel, 2015).

The Economist, therefore, rightly described the new dynamics on the international business and government scene on the continent as "a new rush for Africa" in its March 8, 2019 front page. A real rush in which some see unprecedented opportunities for the continent, while the latter faces a rate of extreme poverty that has no comparison with that of other continents. Indeed, today, Africa is the continent with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty. The breakdown by continent is as follows: 383 Million in Africa and 327 Million in Asia. In a similar vein, the continent's share of global GDP today is less than 3% (Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, 2013).

A situation which alarms at the same time the most sceptical who perceive in this dualism "rush to Africa - poverty" a growing spectre, even a materialization, of neo-colonialism by the Western powers and by the masters of the emerging second world. It should be noted that the field of the concept of neo-colonialism has shifted: from relations between former metropolises and decolonized states to relations between rich nations - sometimes without a colonial past or passive - and poor nations. Thus, in the wake of colonialism (involving the use of violence), the whistleblowers of neo-colonialism systematically associate the presence of foreign countries in Africa with continuous and aggravated impoverishment of the continent.

### **3. A more Innovative than an Accusing Approach**

Let it be allowed to refute this theory, at least in large part. On the contrary, it is this prism of underdevelopment explained by neo-colonialism that contributes precisely to the impoverishment of Africa. Kwame Nkrumah, a Ghanaian politician and revolutionary who was the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, having led the Gold Coast to independence from Britain in 1957, denounced in his book on the question (Marc Semo, 2019), the cogs of international monopoly capitalism in Africa and later demonstrated that "the neo-colonialism, insidious, complex and a real threat to the African people is even more dangerous than the old colonial system". The tactics that the author already mentioned at the time (economic and financial means, making aid subject to the convenience of foreigners, including high-interest

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<sup>1</sup> The formerly uni-polar world - dominated by the United States - has experienced a transition to a multi-polar world marked by the emergence or re-emergence of powers like Brazil, Russia, India, China - the famous BRICs - and well others (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia, etc.). The concept of "emerging countries" has replaced that of "new industrialized countries" which was common in the 1980s. The emerging countries that make up this "second world" are generally distinguished by their rapid integration into the global economy. " from a commercial point of view (significant exports) and financial point of view (opening of financial markets to external capital).

rates, military bases, presence of military, economic or political advisers, etc.) still characterize many of the interventions of developed and emerging countries in Africa today.

The existence of neo-colonialist manoeuvres in Africa cannot be denied, especially if the theme is defined by any policy aiming at taking advantage of the weakness of "decolonized" states to gain political, economic and cultural benefits (Kwame Nkrumah, 2009). This, however, raises two types of insidious question: is there only one form of truly disinterested cooperation and / or assistance in the world? And is interested cooperation necessarily the expression of a neo-colonialist policy? It would be interesting to rethink the debate on the responsibility of Africa's underdevelopment and shift the approach of explanation and solution of poverty of the continent towards an innovative approach rather than an accusative one.

Already in 1965, Philippe Ardant<sup>1</sup> warned of the unfortunate consequences of a reference - abusive or erroneous - to the ambitions of neo-colonialism (Philippe Ardant, 1965.). When used incorrectly in poor countries, the constant and systematic reference to neo-colonialist intentions can go beyond its objective of strengthening national unity and divert attention from real problems of those to whom it is addressed, thus distorting the perspective of national realities. Ardant went further by arguing that the explanation by neo-colonialism of the setbacks encountered in certain areas could serve as an easy outlet, which avoids looking for the real causes of failure, thus delaying the solutions of the problems of construction of the national society.

In summary, this approach aims simply, through an exercise of deconstruction of some arguments brandished by the theorists of neo-colonialism, to put back into the equation a fundamental datum for the development of the continent: the power of action of Africa and Africans (Jeune Afrique, 2017).

#### **4. Unfair Capital Ownership by Foreigners in Africa?**

It is enough to examine the shareholding of large operators on the African continent, especially in certain sectors such as the extractive economy, telecoms or even banking services, to see that their capital is mainly held by foreigners (Laurence Caramel, 2015.), at the notable exception of a few groups in South Africa, Angola or Morocco. Even more striking; the income and profits repatriated by these companies reach a significant proportion of 5 to 10% of the GDP of the countries where they operate, an estimate which exceeds the amount of official development. Moreover, each year, more than \$ 50 million in assets are diverted by African leaders, an amount that could be invested in job creation or social services and which, for the most part, is making the case for tax havens (Maria Helena Meyer Dolve and Saule Mullar, 2019).

Despite this backdrop, it should be noted that the majority of foreign ownership creates appropriate incentives and offers a greater opportunity to increase the value-added of businesses. The problem is therefore not the distribution of the shareholding of the companies between local or foreign, but how the added value created by these companies is collected, distributed and used by the public powers, and re-injected in the African economies in favour of long-term growth of countries and the continent. In the same vein, it is also important to stress the importance of policies to promote local industries and businesses, because between these and the total rejection of foreign investment there is a vast field of action favourable to the long-term development of countries.

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<sup>1</sup>Philippe Ardant (July 21, 1929 – June 6, 2007) was a French jurist, former president of the Constitutional Court of the principality of Andorra, former president of the Arab World Institute and former president of Panthéon-Assas University. He had been a professor at the universities of Poitiers, Beirut and Panthéon-Assas. He had co-founded *Pouvoirs*, a journal of constitutional law and political science.

## **5. Leonid Plunder of African Resources**

Another issue often raised is that of acquisition contracts or infrastructure projects with foreign groups from Asia, the Middle East or the Persian Gulf. The opacity and restrictive terms, among others, which sometimes characterize them, do not always make it a good example of cooperation. We will remember, for example, how Sri Lanka found itself in debt following an agreement with China. After borrowing \$ 1.4 billion from Beijing to develop a port, it was forced in late 2017, due to its inability to repay, to cede full control of the infrastructure to China for 99 years (Le Point, 03/09/2018.). The same economic suicide and threat also hang over Kenya today with its port of Mombasa.

Yet another example is the mining extraction contracts. These cases are treated as if the said contracts had not previously been studied or at least approved by African leaders. Once again, when we uni-directionally accuse Western oil groups, for example, of fuelling armed conflicts, environmental degradation and the end of neo-colonialism, we almost forget to point the blame first to the governments of the countries concerned. Beyond their interest, it is their responsibility to ensure that these activities are in harmony with human rights, local laws, good governance and the development goals of the continent.

From the preponderance of Western languages and educational programs in African schools to the export to the continent of toxic fuels and cigarettes, including overfishing in continental waters, poaching of protected species and the very controversial CFA franc; the examples raised by neo-colonialist conspiracy theorists are legion. At the end of 2017, for example, the Burkina Faso government closed public and private schools for two days during the visit of the French head of state. Several local organizations have denounced French imperialism.

## **6. Conclusion**

The actions of foreign forces on the African continent have in the past considerably upset and harmed African countries, instead of contributing to their development and growth. The stereotype of foreigners arriving/operating in Africa as settlers ready to exploit their natural resources to the detriment of all ethics and morals is still very much alive.

But to tackle these issues from the sole angle of a global conspiracy, with the main expected result, the resurgence of the colonial fact and the new control of Africa is a serious error. This prism of re-colonization entangles Africans in a submissive, powerless, inept and inert dynamic, and significantly diminishes the continent's capacities to influence its destiny and that of the world.

Furthermore, this hypothetical threat of the imperialist forces and the call to fight against them are ineffective in a context where, in many cases, the problem is endogenous. When wrongly mobilized in poor countries as is often the case, the abusive or erroneous reference to neo-colonialist intentions can go beyond its objective of strengthening national unity and serve as an easy outlet, thus avoiding the search for the real causes of African underdevelopment, and delaying the solutions to the problems that hamper the building of the national society.

Indeed, the drifts and abuses noted in Africa, the leonine clauses of contracts with foreign actors, are very often the results of the imperiousness of its leaders, the non-observance of the principles of governance and a lack of political will. The factors prove to be essential at least as much, if not more, than the actions of foreign actors. As a result, the energy devoted to watching out for the resurgence of this colonial fact should rather be dedicated to the search and implementation of effective solutions that serve the interests of Africans. With the new rush of economic powers today on its resources and its potential, Africa must put in place the strategic measures that will allow it to regain its real sovereignty, promote its true integration into global flows and its legitimate aspiration to finally be part of the next generations of world powers.

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