

The Political Economy of Nigeria and the Continuing Agenda of Recolonization: A Challenge for Critical Knowledge Production

by

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Abstract

The question of the history of the Nigerian state is a question of a 'Third World' in an era that views the world as a 'global village'. Nigeria as a third world country is confronted with the problem of dearth of necessary factors necessary for moving the country forward. There are many reasons to believe that the present condition of the Nigerian state can be partly or mostly accounted for by the country's history of colonialism and subsequently that of neo-colonialism. This paper tries to examine the structure of the present amalgam as well as the processes of knowledge production that may free the amalgam from the present neo-colonial instruments of intellectual discourse.

Neo-Colonialism and Flag Independence

The ending of colonial rule in most countries in Africa has not resulted in a complete control of their economic or political affairs. They are sovereign states only in name. In reality, many of them remain under the economic and political control of their former rulers. As can be seen from the history of many African countries, the achievement of political or flag independence does not automatically lead to economic independence because, as Boateng rightly observed:

owing to the greatly superior economic and technological advantages which the developed nations enjoy, they are still in a position to determine or even to dictate to a large extent, the economic fortunes of the developing nations which depend on them for the very things, such as Capital goods, technical know-how and entrepreneurial skills, which they need in order to modernise and upgrade their fragile economies.¹

At the point of independence, some nations or countries came out of colonialism with clear estrangement while some have all the symptoms of total break from the imperialist world whereas they were still deeply sunk in the shackles of imperialism. Nations, which at the point of obtaining their freedom from the colonial masters merely took flag independence without all necessary economic independence turned out to be mere neo-colonies and consequently represent the neo-colonial states of the world. Unfortunately, so many of such countries reside in the African continent.

While a true colony is directly under the rule of the colonial masters and their direct representatives, a neo-colonial state is by the sons and daughters of the neo-colonies who take orders from the imperial masters and at the same time serve as stooges and means of siphoning the resources of the neo-colonies.

According to Nkrumah:

...the essence of neo-colonialism is that the nation 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...²

In some cases, the power exercising control over a neo-colonial state may be the state, which formerly ruled the territory in question, while in some other few cases, such an external control may not come directly from the former colonial masters.³ As Nkrumah further shows, it is possible that a consortium of financial interests, which are not specifically identifiable with any particular state, will exercise neo-colonial control. Such consortium of financial interests may be IMF, the Paris Club, World Bank, among others. The methods and form of this direction can take various shapes. According to Nkrumah, Cabral, Fanon, and other scholars, in an extreme case, the troops of the imperial power may garrison the territory of the neo-colonial state and control the government of it. More often, however, neo-colonialist control is exercised through economic or monetary means. The neo-colonial state may be obliged to take the manufactured products of the imperialist power to the exclusion of competing products from elsewhere. In fact, if the socio-political conditions occasioned by neo-colonialism cause a revolt the loyal neo-colonialist government can be sacrificed and another equally subservient one substituted in its place.⁴ Neo-colonial states are usually encouraged to rely on merchandising without production or technology. They are mostly encouraged to live under the illusion that foreign aids would always be at their disposals.

In other words, neo-colonial nations are nations, which, in spite of the apparent status of being independent, actually depend on the imperialist nation. Such nations may be seen to have mere flag independence without having the necessary economic and political independence to back it up and foster their independent development. Leaders of such nations are usually seen roving around the powerful nations and making globetrotting their primary assignment under the pretence that they occupy the same status as the leaders of such otherwise more powerful nations. While they go about the world with their caps in hand begging, they tell false stories to their own citizens that they are meeting with their colleagues in other parts of the world to fashion world global development.

As Frantz Fanon carefully stated in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, many of the rulers we have in Africa, never concerned themselves with what exactly to be done to move the nation forward when they acquire power. Rather you have them thinking of how they will play the roles of the colonial masters when they acquire the power of governance.⁵ Based on this, you hardly expect any tangible or time enduring development. Holders of public powers in neo-colonial nations are usually busy over revering their foreign masters and they serve as agents to help the foreign masters to exploit local resources at the expense of the citizens of the neo- colonial nations. Common to all neo-colonial states of the world is lack of development. The loss of the neo-colonial nations is the gain of the master nations.

Colonial Administration in Nigeria

History recorded that the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria since 1898.⁶ From the beginning, the British colonial government had determined it would use all the possibilities within its capacity to conquer and subdue the various ethnic nationalities now referred to as Nigeria. This struggle to subdue started from the various attempts to remove all visible efforts to oppose their clandestine moves to impose, expand, and consolidate their grips over the territory. By 1914, the year of amalgamation, Britain and its officials, has succeeded in amalgamating both the Northern and the Southern Nigeria to ease its becoming the new ruling power over the territory. It was able to do this through various diplomatic and military coercions to minimise or remove pockets of resistance from the indigenes.

According to some historical authorities:

To secure central direction of policy and pool economic resources, the British government from 1898 adopted the policy of gradually amalgamating its various administrative units in Nigeria...the government at the time did not seek the views of Nigerians...to ascertain whether or not they favoured such an amalgamation...The British officials involved in formulating and executing the policy of amalgamation were convinced that through it they would obtain a convenient and practical means of securing firm administration.⁷

It was clear from all indications that the desperation displayed by the British officials to coercively join the available provinces together without the consent of the people whose lives were deeply affected was consequent upon the economic interests in sourcing economic empowerment to enable easy funding of the northern protectorate. The amalgamation brought both the Northern and the Southern provinces under a common political head for easy central financial and political manipulation and exploitation. Without bringing the Southern provinces together with the Northern protectorate, the tendency was already coming to bear that the British government was heading for some financial embarrassments in financing the gargantuan project of Railway development in the north. This necessitated the serious need to have access to the sea. The amalgamation gave the British the required access to the Southern protectorate with the sea, a larger area, and a larger population. This access provided the British with the financial means to execute the projects of Railway construction as well as river dredging.⁸

The indirect system of governance in the British colonies as was practised in Nigeria was another idea to utilise the influence of the traditional rulers in the various provinces in the exploitation of the populace. Knowing full well that the indigenes would defer to their traditional rulers, the British government gave the traditional rulers a semblance of power to get the free consent of the citizenry.

The Emergence of the Nigerian Amalgam

Nigeria is a product of a history of slavery and colonialism. What is now referred to as the Nigerian state or nation-state is a contraption from several nations, which underwent a history of Trans-Sahara, and Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, and subsequently came under the imperialist hammer of colonialism. Before the arrival of the colonial masters, the present day Nigeria was not one single ethno-cultural nation. The colonialists came to meet several ethno-cultural nations, which though were with spatial contiguity, yet were several measures apart culturally and linguistically. For mere administrative convenience, the colonial master in 1914, the year of amalgamation, brought the different nationalities together under a system of indirect rule.

What emerged as the Nigerian state is a multinational state. Nigeria is no doubt, a typical African nation in the heterogeneity of its ethnic heritage.⁹ Researchers have observed that Nigeria can boast of an estimated two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Four of these ethnic groups have been in the forefront in the power-equation of Nigeria. These four are Yoruba in the West, Hausa and Fulani in the North, and Ibo in the South-East. These four are considered by researchers to constitute sixty percent of the population. There are several others among which are the kanuri, the Edo, the Ibibio, the Ijaw, the Tiv, the Nupe, the Efik, and so on. This diversity in ethnic lineage has constituted large bases of diversity in the politico-economic relation of the Nigeria nation-state.

The geographical and political region that was given the nomenclature Nigeria is a combination of different ethnic nationalities around River Niger. Given this hotchpotch arrangement, there is the problem of ethno-cultural pluralism upon which the amalgam is fragmented into different ethnic, communo-cultural, or local loyalties as well as different corresponding socio-cultural allegiance and commitments both during and after colonialism.

Nigerian Amalgam and the Continuing Agenda of Recolonization

An examination of the post independent neo-colonial history of Nigeria reveals several changes in class relations. There are also changes in the political institutions and ideological legitimations through which they are mediated. At the assumption of independence, the expatriates dominated the investment opportunities and sources of capital accumulation. This inhibited the accumulation and reinvestment of capital by the Nigerian investors who were not economically strong to compete with the foreign investors and multinational corporations. These inabilities to compete made the Nigerian investors to become mere intermediaries between the foreign entrepreneurs and the Nigerian state, or, were finally made to turn to the state as a source of capital. This results in an increased intervention of the state in investment and entrepreneurship, which in turn arrogates to the state and the members of the political class a huge advantage of monopoly over economic investments and highly profitable contracts.

Given the fact of this increased state intervention, “politics has become the primary source of capital accumulation by Nigerians”.¹⁰ This opportunistic access to, and accumulation of money raised some professionals and bureaucrats to have an advantage over the people and thus form a bourgeoisie in the neo-colonial Nigeria. As rightly observed by Williams Gavin:

The indigenous bourgeoisie has perpetuated the colonial administrative, salary, and tax structures, which are unrelated either to the needs of its citizens or to the resources of its economy, and are characterised by marked inequalities ...The incomes accruing to senior bureaucrats and their access to state resources and political influence facilitate their entry into business on favourable terms alongside politicians, merchants, army officers, and their respective wives, thereby assimilating them even further to the interests and objectives of the bourgeoisie as a whole¹¹

This point clearly captures the situation of the bourgeoisie in the Nigerian neo-colonial politico-economic structure. This members of the national bourgeoisie as Fanon once observed, are not creative and are intellectually unproductive. This makes them to be unable to know how to put the economy in motion towards the human and material development of the nation. This is vividly captured in his view that "... The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an under-developed middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace..."¹²

Consequent upon the failure of the national bourgeoisie to propel the neo-colonial Nigerian state forward economically, and their inability to engage either in production, or in invention but to merely take to the activities of the intermediary type, they resorted to the fractionalisation and ethnicisation of the Nigerian state.

The dependent character of the bourgeoisie restricts them to competing among themselves for the limited resources available within a neo-colonial political-economy. This competition tends to take the form of a zero-sum game, modified by cartel-type arrangements where the competitors (defining themselves in regional, ethnic, and state terms) all seek to protect their own areas of activity.¹³

This brings out the issue of ethnicism, which in essence is the politicization of ethnicity.¹⁴ Ethnicism as a serious social and political problem resulted from the conscious struggles from the national bourgeoisie to maximise the exploitation of the various region and ethnic groups in Nigeria to their various advantages. The lack of cohesion, which was a product of the fact that Nigerians were made not to see one another as Nigerians but as members of different ethnic nationalities, made the neo-colonial Nigerian state to be easily prone to exploitation from outside through the connivance of the opportunistic members of the national bourgeoisie. Thus, while Nigerians pretentiously mouth the 'One Nigeria' slogan, they have deep seated in them the idea that the resources should be distributed on ethnic bases. This is because;

...everywhere that national bourgeoisie has failed to break through to the people as a whole...everywhere that national bourgeoisie has shown itself incapable of extending its vision of the world sufficiently, we observe a falling back towards old tribal attitudes...¹⁵

Given this economic unproductively and the unnecessary emphases attached to ethnicity, the Nigerian populace are made to live in squalor and abject poverty. While this goes on, the national bourgeoisie that is not competent to harness the resources of the neo-colonial state fall back to the foreign nations for Aids and Assistance from the foreign imperialists and such organs as IMF, World Bank, and the Paris Club, among others. These foreign Aids are usually associated with some conditionality, which can only further weaken the debtor neo-colonial states. Although, the masses suffer the mismanagement that arises from the dependent nature of the Nigerian state on foreign governments and multinational organisations, the Nigerian national bourgeoisie smile to their banks every minute. The little that filters out from the reports of Economic and Finance Crime Commission has revealed how rulers dip their hands in the treasury of the country with a high level of impunity. The more the rulers impoverished the country and the people, the more the rulers have reasons to depend on the foreign nations for more funds and support to hold the power and maintain themselves in office.

Another very serious characteristic prominent among the rulers in Nigeria, a characteristic that is a product of sense of insecurity, is the fanning of the embers of differences in regions or ethnic nationalities. The emphases on difference can also be found in the areas of religion and party affiliations. The rulers do this to arouse the sentiments of the people with whom they share the same affiliations to enable the rulers to satisfy their personal and selfish interests in the sharing of the wealth of the Nigerian state, while the masses are only used as cannon fodders. This was clearly seen during the long period of military rule and it is getting more pronounced in the civilian replacement of the military. The rulers have so much impoverished and pauperised the masses that even many professionals are now willingly offering themselves as slaves through the Visa Lottery Programme to the foreign lands. This is another form of slavery and colonialism, although, this time voluntary.

Bearing in mind the Marxist view that those who have the economic power have the political power and also determines knowledge production, and the Foucaultian position that there is a great connection between truth, knowledge, and power,¹⁶ one cannot but describe the neo-colonial politico-economic structure as being dependent on the knowledge production of the foreign nations of the world. The economic dependence has yielded a political dependence, and both together culminated in an epistemic dependence of a sort. Presently, the Nigerian state does not have any political or economic principles of her own except the ones from the foreign lands, which are being mimicked by those who imposed on themselves the responsibility to steer the governance of the country. In the fields of science and culture, the rulers left the country and the citizens at the mercy of the foreign nations and organisations for recognition and recommendation. Any finding in the areas of knowledge that does not enjoy the support of the foreign authorities does not amount to knowledge.

The Nigerian State and the Challenge of Knowledge Production

The issue of knowledge production requires some discussion on what the Marxist would call mode of production¹⁷. Mode of production can be seen in terms of 'forces of production' and 'relations of production'. The forces of knowledge production can be divided into instruments of production, and the mental or physical labour that human beings put into the production. Knowledge production requires the space, equipments and instruments of production as well as human beings and their intellectual expertise.¹⁸ On the other hand, the relations of knowledge production include all the relationships, both human and institutional, which are necessary for the purpose of knowledge production.

Colonialism and other earlier European interventions in Nigeria destroyed the indigenous mode of knowledge production in the areas of economy, politics, moral, religion, culture, and so on. This destruction of the indigenous mode of knowledge production was followed by a transplantation of some foreign modes of knowledge production.¹⁹ Knowledge production in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole raises some questions about how much the Nigerian mode of knowledge production would bend to the dictates of the international economic and political relations. Based on the economic dependent nature of the Nigerian neo-colonial state, it would be interesting to see whether Africans, and Nigeria inclusive, are not actually marginalised and excluded from the global knowledge pool.²⁰

Given the subjugated status of the African states and consequently the Nigerian mode of knowledge production, the western capitalist world creates the agenda for knowledge production. It determines what constitutes the question whose solution represents the knowledge produced. A consequence of this is that, to be relevant in the world pool of knowledge, African researchers and scholars are not encouraged to embark on deep research that can solve the problems of their immediate environment, or to unveil the nature and root of some of the problems confronting their immediate environment. This struggle for European recognition for studies in or on Africa retards knowledge production in Africa. If knowledge produced in Africa is subject to the European approval, then the pace and the quality of knowledge in Africa is determined within the European epistemic paradigm. Adding to this ugly incidence is the growing reliance of African modes of knowledge production on multinational donor agencies and foundations who in turn dictate the tune of knowledge production. Multitude of existential problems, coupled with the problem of brain drain, is also leading to fast depletion and erosion of knowledge production in Nigeria.

Hence, the question now is how Nigeria can forge ahead in the midst of these economic, political, and intellectual contradictions. The resolution of this contradiction requires the abolition of the neo-colonial political economy, on which the indigenous bourgeoisie depends for its share in the expropriation of the surplus.

In other words, the political class in Nigeria should change the existing politico-economic structure that favours the perpetuation of the neo-colonial order. The rulers should wake up from their slumbers and stand up to erect a structure upon which the development of the nation can be built. Nigerian rulers should work towards concentrating on peculiar needs of their people and engage more on productive economic activities rather than merely aping the demands of their imperial masters. Efforts should be made to de-emphasise those facts of ethnic and religious affiliations that usually strongly becloud our senses of patriotism. The masses on their parts should realise that class antagonism is stronger than ethnic or religious difference and so should not make themselves ready instruments in the hands of the political elites who only use ethnic and religious differences to get what they want from the system without paying anything back to the system.

Neo-colonialism is a problem for knowledge production in Nigeria because it makes Africans not to be equal participants in global knowledge production. One way out for the Nigerian producers of knowledge is to critically analyse the social formation in which they operate. The social formation, which encourages this subjugated mode of knowledge production should be critically examined to reveal its weak structure and consider possible remedies for the prevailing situation.

Scholars in Nigeria cannot afford to pretend to engage in the global “disengaged academic recreations of faddish theorising”²¹ in the name of contributing to the global pool of knowledge. Nigerian scholars should direct their research to the immediate need and understanding of the world around them. This will enable them understand the environment and forge ahead in proffering solutions towards moving the African continent forward and raising it out of the present status of dependency. Nigerian scholars should apply the theories of their disciplines to the burning issues in their communities and the country as a whole.

African nations as underdeveloped nations impose some special tasks on African scholars and researchers. In view of this, Nigerian scholars should also be involved in “...tethering theoretical paradigms and scholarly activities to actual social forces and struggles...”²² They must be involved in social and economic struggles for the emancipation of their nations and, in the wider sense, the continent from global neo-colonial web. Knowledge production in Nigeria and indeed in Africa must be freed from the claws of the world capitalist multinational agencies like IMF, World Bank, and the Paris Club. At one point or the other, nations may render assistance to other nations within the global web, yet, “African states must be careful of erosion of their sovereignties through conditionality and the rolling back of their boundaries”²³.

The government of Nigeria should grant autonomy to the institutions of knowledge production to enable the producers and disseminators of knowledge to plan the structure and the procedure of knowledge production. This academic autonomy should be supported with adequate funding. Adequate funding of research and publications of research findings are required steps for Nigeria to make headway in the global hierarchical order.

Economic stability, institution building and structural reform are important for long-term development. Nigerian rulers should challenge the indigenous producers of knowledge to formulate policies and blueprints that can be used to propel the development of the nation. The rulers should also be ready to implement good policies from the relevant professional bodies and institutions. The rulers should implement policies, which focus on country-owned strategies to reduce poverty by promoting pro-citizen policies that are properly budgeted. They should take a participatory approach, which includes consultations with civil society. If researches and publications are well funded, Nigerian scholars can regain their autonomy from the powerful politics associated with academic assessments and publishing. This will go a long way in setting a paradigm of knowledge that is not necessarily determined by the whim of the capitalist world. This may require a very strong fusion of theory and practice.

Conclusion

This paper examined neo-colonialism in its various aspects and emphasised the imperialist and hegemonic features of neo-colonialism. The paper observed that the question of the history of the Nigerian state is a question of a 'Third World' in an era that views the world as a 'global village'. The view that the present condition of the Nigerian state can be partly or mostly accounted for by the country's history of colonialism and subsequently that of neo-colonialism is canvassed in the paper. This paper examined the structure of the present amalgam as affected by the neo-colonial structure and practice. Finally, the paper recommended a mode of knowledge production that may free the amalgam from the present neo-colonial instruments of intellectual discourse.

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