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AFRICA'S POLITICAL UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Neville L. M. D'Cunha, HDP, PhD

**Assistant Professor, Department of Civics & Ethical Studies, Adigrat University,
P.O. Box 50, Adigrat, Ethiopia, N.E. Africa, Email: nevillelam@gmail.com**

Abstract

With the incessant political ferment in majority of African countries deeply connected with underdevelopment – issues which are directly related to the continent's past – especially its conflictual relationship with Europe. Employing a mix of historical analysis, contemporary discourses and lamentations of leading African voices, I address the issues of Africa's subjectivity, political agency, and strategies in relation to the historical causes of political underdevelopment of nations across the most ancient continent. Based on qualitative data, I argue that the ruthless exploitation by Western European nations for five hundred years; first through slavery and secondly through colonialism has left the massive continent shrunken. This dark legacy will continue to negatively influence for a long time as the African leaderships battles on many fronts to bring about sustainable political development.

Keywords: Africa – Europe relationship, Slavery, Colonialism, Africa's Political Underdevelopment

Introduction

The purpose of this brief enquiry into African politics and political society is to depict in broad strokes the complexities and diversities of the African *states* and to investigate new paths of understanding its intricate dynamics. Besides offering an initial acquaintance with contemporary Africa, I seek to provide a basic knowledge of past political events and closer comprehension of major problems, processes and trends. I delve into the past only because otherwise it would be impossible to understand how the present came into being and what the trends are for the coming future. By suggesting different ways of looking at issues, I raise a range of explanations for roots of political underdevelopment linked to past occurrences and possible directions for the future of this continent. This article, therefore, constitutes a preliminary exploration into the multiple forces that has shaped the contours of the political map of present-day Africa.

The continent of Africa is the second largest continent in the world after Asia. The total size of the continent is approximately 11.60 million square miles with a population of 900 million people. It is a region characterized by immense geographical, cultural, linguistic, historical, ethnic, and religious diversity on one hand, and vast similarities on the other. Politics in the region involves a complex and persistent pattern of interaction among those forces in varying configurations and with varying results. It is just too vast a place for any generalizations about it to hold good. One African woman journalist flatly states: "... *Africa is not one country*. The idea that Africa is one country is the biggest mistake Europeans ... usually make."ⁱ Africa encompasses a rich mosaic of peoples, cultures, ecological settings and historical experiences.

In fact, the continent of Africa has fifty-four different *states* recognized by the United Nations. African countries are certainly all different, with their own story to tell, their own resources and abilities and unique historical, cultural and human assets. These fifty-four countries contain many ethnic groups, each of which has its own language and culture. As an example of the societal profile of a single country, Nigeria, the most populous country, is composed of *more than 250 ethnic groups*.ⁱⁱ Another African newswoman aptly holds: "A continent as large as our own should never be expected to speak with one voice, but rather with unified voices."ⁱⁱⁱ

At the moment, the reputations of each African country are created by the image of the continent, which is generally negative. From strictly socio-political perspectives African countries faces challenging times, to say the least. Many of them produce little that can be traded. Economically, all are saddled

with gigantic, entrenched corruption, concrete-bound bureaucracies that serve no useful purpose whatsoever, but do stop anything productive from happening. Politically, they're all basically authoritarian, one-party states. The system depends on fear and intimidation of the masses. Sociologically, they're all highly traditional, conservative and outside major cities, tribal or ethnic. Technologically, there is zero innovation, leadership, or guts; practically everything more recent than 18th-century products either is imported or made under license and with foreign capital.^{iv} This is also endorsed by African Union in their official message:

Since the beginning of the 1990s Africa has suffered more than ever from economic marginalization and alarming increases in poverty, coupled with an enlargement of the lower classes and a shrinking middle class. In several countries, national enterprises went bankrupt and many sectors such as health, education, transport, water and sanitation failed.^v

Unfortunately, none of these things are a sound foundation for a positive image this most ancient continent aspires. Hence, the inextricable bond linking the negative continental reputation and the cause of this stigma with dark historical legacies need to be recognized.

1. Europe's conspiracy in the African Slavery Saga

This negative reputation began with the advent of the Europeans to the continent with nefarious motives. In many places in Africa, multiplicity of ethnicities was seized upon by foreigners to manipulate whole peoples to serve their own selfish commercial interests. This became particularly pronounced during the Atlantic Slave Trade, during which it was the usual habit of European slavers and their African collaborators to go and lie about one ethnic group to another. These lies concerned alleged purchase of arms by one ethnic group or the other, *from the slavers, in preparation for attack on their neighbours*. These lies were manufactured to get ethnic groups to fight against one another and thereby obtain war captives, whom they would sell to the slavers to export to North America and the Caribbean, where they would be used as slaves. As one commentator notes:

“The Europeans organized the system, the brutality and horrors they visited on the victims of slavery. ...those enslaved victims [] suffered and died on the plantations, whose labour was provided free for hundreds of years, and who were denied basic rights.”^{vi}

This horrible system deprived Africa of its inhabitants year after year for five-hundred years! It both robbed Africa of its political and social stability and its economic development in as much as the slaves

kidnapped were the engines of growth of their countries' economies. Two eminent women political scientists explain this transatlantic slave trade in a nutshell:

Unique in terms of the enormity of human devastation it caused, the transatlantic slave trade lasted for nearly 500 years. Although it began on a small scale in the 1400s, by the seventeenth century, labour shortages in the Americas greatly increased the demand for slaves. At its height, thousands of men and women in their most productive years were stripped from their communities on an annual basis and taken across the Atlantic on the harrowing trip known as "the Middle Passage." Because so many died along the way, the total number of people enslaved is still unknown, although most historians estimate that at least 12 million people served as human cargo in this trade.^{vii}

But worse, there were some African states and empires that fed the diabolical trade. The opportunity presented by European slave dealers became the major stimulus for a great deal of social violence between African communities and within any given community. It took the form more of raiding and kidnapping than of regular warfare, and that fact increased the element of fear and uncertainty. This sowed seeds of distrust, and even hatred, among communities, which many African countries have still not been able to eradicate to this day. While proclaiming 2010 as the Year of Peace, African political leaders stressed the fact that,

...no single internal factor has contributed more to the socio-economic problems of the continent than the scourge of conflicts within and between our countries. They have brought about death and human suffering, engendered hate and divided nations and families. Conflicts have forced millions of our people into becoming refugees and internally displaced persons. They have been deprived of their means of livelihood, human dignity and hope. Conflicts have gobbled up scarce resources, and undermined the ability of our countries to address the many compelling needs of our people.^{viii}

The violence is still raging unabated throughout the continent. Africans have barely begun to scratch the surface of the crimes committed on the continent and to name the guilty. Naming actually will enable the concerned to better understand tensions that currently exist in so many African countries between people who have been conquered and enslaved by others, and their conquerors who continue to look down on them. Let me quote an African newsman to summarize the tragic consequences of slavery:

"All over Africa similar dynamics are alive and continue to shape behavior. It has colored and shaped our perceptions of human rights – can those you formerly dominated be allowed to rule over you, is their vote worth the same as yours? We can pretend otherwise, but slavery and its repercussions are a big factor in Africa. Up to 1990, it was the defining issue of the previous 400 years on our continent (dominating the economy and trade, poisoning human relations, providing the pretext and excuse for

European colonization, etc.). It is the reason why Africans are scattered around the globe and why many in those global diasporas continue to live in humiliation and abject poverty.”^{ix}

The apparently endless conflicts in Africa – are all in some way legacies of Europe’s irruption into the continent during that time. Yet with end of slavery it was not all over, there was more to come.

2. Europe’s complexity in the African Colonial Saga

After the slave trade was abolished, the slavers came back to Africa to enslave Africans in their own countries. They called it colonization. One British document defines colonialism as “the direct political control of a people by a foreign state; often maintained by military and economic power.”^x Colonialism has a long pedigree. One group has been moving in on the territory of another since time immemorial. The Aztec, Greek, Roman and Chinese empires are familiar examples of this. But the current world order is largely a product of more recent colonial expansions, particularly those carried out by European states over the last five-hundred years.

Under this system, large chunks of Africa were systematically allotted to themselves by the imperialistic powers of Europe, at the Berlin Conference of 1884. Some of the numerous ethnic groups were arbitrarily divided and spread across different “countries” to suit the purposes and convenience of the colonizers. Kinsmen who spoke the same language as others and shared the same culture as them, found them dispersed into different countries. Some of these “countries” were officially administered by the Europeans with a different European language and administrative system, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the close relations that had existed for centuries, when there were no rigid borders in Africa.

Geopolitically, the European powers drew the map of the continent according to their own motives, creating what would eventually become the present-day states in the region. In the process, they did not appear to follow a particular formula based on the local facts on the ground. The outcome was a state system in the region, but it was plagued by problems. Boundaries were drawn artificially, sometimes cutting through a clan’s territory and dividing families among different colonies (different independent States today). At other times when boundaries were drawn, little attention was paid to cultural differences, and different ethnic groups — some of which never got along — were gathered into a single state.

The pertinent question that arises: what prompted this insatiable desire on the part of the various European powers – Portugal and Belgium, Britain and France, Germany, Italy and Spain – to establish colonies in Africa? It is interesting to consider some quotations from influential people of that time:

There are 40 millions of people beyond the gateway of the Congo...and the ministers of Christ are zealous to bring them, the poor benighted heathen, into the Christian fold.

Henry Stanley, British Explorer, 1870

We come amongst them as members of a superior race and servants of a government that desires to elevate the more degraded portions of the human family.

David Livingstone, Scottish Missionary (died 1873)

Colonization is for France a question of life or death; whether France will become a great African power or remain no more than a European power.

French national 1882.^{xi}

Above all, the most significant gains for the European colonialists were economic. This was endorsed by the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain in 1895 when he told a West African Railways' deputation that progress and prosperity in Britain depended upon developing the empire.^{xii} They came from looting royal coffers in South America, the slave trade, the development of mines and farms in Africa and Asia. The colonies also provided markets for goods produced in Europe. These riches in large measure financed the rapid industrialization of Britain, and later of other European powers, while totally devastating the colonies. And the Apartheid regime of South Africa, the last, and most recalcitrant, remnant of an internal colonial presence in contemporary Africa reminds anyone who leaves the shores of Cape Town to Robben Island (where the greatest living African Nelson Mandela prisoner number: 46664 was imprisoned for twenty seven years!), one of the world's greatest examples of human's inhumanity to human.

Before considering the impact of colonialism, let's remember that the imperial powers were not taking over virgin territory or disorganized peoples. There was a wealth of highly developed societies indigenous to the "newly discovered" lands. Many had complex political and social structures and produced artistic and technological artifacts beyond what Europeans possessed at the time. Colonialism had a huge and lasting impact on the societies, politics and economics of the colonies. The VSO document gives an important insight: "The colonizers' belief in their natural social superiority, coupled with their political power, encouraged perceptions of superiority and inferiority which persists to this day."^{xiii} Let me illustrate the point with a contemporary African writer's outburst:

“...I grew up knowing that European has dubbed Africa ‘The Dark Continent.’ My emotional response was to wish that the description referred exclusively to the pigmentation of the skin of the majority of its peoples. It did not. I am not a psychologist or a psychoanalyst. However, I do not know that it has not been easy living with that burden.

That expression was first used in the 19th century. Since then its ugly odour has clung to Africa, all things African, Africans and people of African descent everywhere, and has not faded yet. Any time we were confronted with it, we felt like we were carrying the proverbial sack-full of salt, to which a steady trickle of water was being added. Was it any wonder that some of us hoped that a new century would usher in a new beginnings all round?”^{xiv}

This had far-reaching negative consequences for the development of nations and power relations between them. In many African societies, ethnic groups were divided by vertical lines and incorporated into European-created states that lumped societies together with those who had been their enemies in the not-too-distant past. In West Africa, the divided peoples include the Akan (who live partly in Ghana, partly in Cote d’Ivoire [Ivory Coast]) and the Ewe (who live partly in Ghana and partly in Togo); the Yoruba (partly in Nigeria and partly in Benin); the Hausa (partly in Nigeria and partly in Niger); the Mandara, who live astride the Nigerian-Cameroon border. There are too many examples of these divided Africans to enumerate here, but a very interesting book has been written about the evil system, entitled *Partitioned Africans* edited by A. I. Asiwaju. It gives full details of where the divided people are, and how the divisions inflicted upon them by the insensitive colonialists have affected their lives.

Behaving as if human beings were cardboard figures who didn’t matter or pieces on a chessboard, the colonizers drew lines on the map of Africa and allotted territories to themselves without regard to the peoples who lived there. Without any consideration for native wisdom, new systems of governance and education were introduced. These often challenged or overturned traditional lines of authority. The political map of Africa captures the complexity that is the essence of the continent. Africa’s fifty-four states are the product of conquest and separation, amalgamation and continuity.

So we see already, what a complex cauldron of potential chaos many African countries sit upon, as the framework for their so-called nationhood? Add to that, the fact that many African economies were constructed by their colonizers as a mere appendage to their own economies, without any consideration to the actual needs of the people who live in Africa? In offering the view that colonialism was negative, the aim is to draw attention to the way that previous African development was blunted, halted and

turned down. In place of that interruption and blockade, nothing of compensatory value was introduced. It is to be agreed in conclusion that colonialism had a negative impact on Africa's development.

3. Africa's Political Underdevelopment: The Aftermath of the Dark Legacy

While slavery lasted for nearly five-hundred years, the colonization of Africa lasted for just over seventy-years in most parts of the continent. That is an extremely long period within the context of universal development; the decisiveness of this long period of slavery and colonialism and its negative consequences for Africa spring mainly from the fact that Africa lost power. Power is the ultimate determinant in human society, being basic to the relations within any group and between groups. It implies the ability to defend one's interests and if necessary to impose one's will by any means available. In relations between peoples, the question of power determines maneuverability in bargaining, the extent to which one people respect the interests of another, and eventually the extent to which a people survive as a physical and cultural entity. When one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society that in itself is a form of underdevelopment.^{xv}

Political development has an important place in the globalizing world. The concept of political development may be understood easily if we take it as associated with the development of democratic system of the Anglo-American model. Expressing the political development aspiration of every African country, the African Union boldly asserts that it wants to build "a peaceful, democratic, prosperous and united Africa."^{xvi} In a general sense, political development is a very comprehensive term that involves within itself anything like consolidation of the democratic system, political stability or orderly change, nation-building and state-building, political modernization, political change, administrative and legal development, political mobilization and participation and above all, anything having its place in the multi-dimensional development of a country.^{xvii} Therefore, it suggests the establishment and consolidation of the entire paraphernalia of the democratic system as growing participation of the people in the political process of the country, rule of law, independence of judiciary and press, free and fair elections, political stability, peaceful change and the like.

A deeper study of the case of political development in the context of the colonial countries has led to the emergence of the ideal of political underdevelopment. In other words, it may be taken as a study of 'neo-colonialism' that covers the whole of the poor and backward countries of the Third World, especially Africa. In realistic terms, it implies a condition of 'double exploitation' of the people of these countries – exploitation of the native working class directly by the foreign colonists and indirectly by the native *elites*.

The pattern of arrest of African political development has some features which can only be appreciated after careful scrutiny and the taking away of the blinkers which the colonizers put on the eyes of their subjects. All of the large states of nineteenth century Africa were multi-ethnic, and their expansion was continually making anything like 'tribal' loyalty a thing of the past, by substituting in its place national and class ties. In the first place, colonialism blocked the further evolution of national solidarity, because it destroyed the particular African states which were the principal agents for achieving the liquidation of fragmented loyalties. In the second place, the colonial powers sometimes saw the value of stimulating the internal 'tribal' jealousies so as to keep the colonized from dealing with their principal contradiction because of the Europeans classic technique of "divide and rule."^{xviii}

The negative impact of colonialism in political terms was quite dramatic. Overnight, African political states lost their power, independence and meaning – irrespective of whether they were big empires or small polities. Certain traditional rulers were kept in office, and the formal structure of some kingdoms was partially retained, but the substance of political life was quite different. Political power had passed into the hands of foreign overlords. Of course, numerous African states in previous centuries had passed through the cycle of growth and decline. But colonial rule was different. So long as it lasted, not a single African state could flourish.

Colonialism went much further than trade. It meant a tendency towards appropriation by Europeans of the social institutions within Africa. Africans ceased to set indigenous cultural goals and standards, and lost full command of training young members of the society. The present president of South Africa laments, "...Africa has been marginalized for decades. African economies need to develop their manufacturing capacity. Nonetheless, there are systemic challenges. Unemployment remains stubbornly high, in part because of our narrow skills base."^{xix} Those were undoubtedly major steps backwards. The Tunisian, Albert Memmi, also puts forward the following proposition:

"The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community. Colonization usurps any free role in either war or peace, every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility."^{xx}

Sweeping as that statement may initially appear, it is entirely true. The removal from history follows logically from the loss of power which colonialism represented. The power to act independently is the guarantee to participate actively and *consciously* in history. To be colonized is to be removed from history, except in the most passive sense. Colonialism determined that Africans were no more makers of

history than were beetles – objects to be looked at under a microscope and examined for unusual features.

One can go as far as to say that colonial rule meant the effective eradication of African political power throughout the continent, since Liberia and Ethiopia could no longer function as independent states within the continent-wide colonialism. Liberia in particular had to bow before foreign political, economic and military pressures in a way that no genuinely independent state could have accepted; and although Ethiopia held firm until 1936, most European colonizing nations were not inclined to treat Ethiopia as a sovereign state, primarily because it was African, and Africans were supposed to be colonial subjects.

Perhaps more than any other force, colonialism stands out as the most important in shaping contemporary Africa, whether for good or for bad. No area of African society was left untouched by the forces of colonialism. The colonial period in these countries represents a framework for political stagnation, for archaic technology, and for social backwardness. A leading political scholar informs that: “The chief cause of political underdevelopment should be traced not only in the fact of ‘satellite colonization’ of the poor and the backward countries of the world but also in the existence of feudal and bourgeois classes at whose hands the native proletariat suffers exploitation. It may be described as a case of ‘double exploitation.’ While the feudal aristocracy exploits the urban working class. Thus, the feudal and bourgeois elements are combined and they acquire political power to perpetuate their hold. But contradictions develop within their ranks and, in order to remove them, the exploiters adopt tactics that leads to the vulgarization and criminalization of politics. It also happens that the disgruntled sections of the community take to the ways of violence as a result of which events of terrorism occur frequently to bring about structural changes in the social and economic system of the country.”^{xxi}

Finally, in a way, underdevelopment is a paradox. Many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor and parts that are not so well off in wealth of natural resources and agriculture are enjoying the highest standards of living. One African woman’s indignation is pertinent here:

“I think we Africans on the continent sometimes mix our priorities because the only people that owe us anything are the colonizers who tried to take everything away – our strongest men and women, our history, our culture, our spirituality, our food, our music, our science and philosophy, our artifacts etc. These people owe us because they stole what belonged to us!”^{xxii}

Hence, modern Europe used the colonies as a way of extracting inputs and strengthening its greatest achievements in science, arts, culture and technology. The aftermath, completely destroying the colonized people and nations and the worst affected was undoubtedly the continent of Africa.

4. Africa Triumphant over the Dark Legacy: Mission Impossible

After fifty years of colonial era end, predicting Africa's future should have been easier. Yet Africa's future is as uncertain as ever. Ethical governance has not yet taken off in Africa to the extent as desired by its fast exploding politically conscious populations. Again, new state leaders headed political parties which had to be transformed from parties of revolt into parties of rule. They also inherited bureaucracies whose strength and experience for undertaking the immense tasks which confronted them was questionable.^{xxiii} There is a great need to link traditional systems of governance in Africa and the demands of modern democracy. There are innumerable instances of all forms of misappropriation of power by the current holder, whether it is patrimonial, ethnic or regional. This is partly because decisions in African countries depend on the leader's will and on the barely decipherable relationships within the political establishment, rather than on institutions such as the parliaments or the courts. And partly because whatever decisions the leader makes do not always translate into actions: many of them get bogged down in a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy.

By all accounts, in the past few decades' corruption has become worse, the economies have become more dependent on foreign aid and the barely existing basic infrastructure is cracking. The Ethiopian newspaper *Capital* in its editorial paints a gloomy picture of Africa saying, that it is hostage to "corruption, inequality, cronyism, rigged elections and all kind of injustices."^{xxiv} More worryingly, the violence in the Continent is spreading from North to South and West to East. Reports of killings and explosions come daily not only from Egypt, Libya, Congo, Somalia and Sudan, but from practically all parts of the Continent. There have been many political assassinations and murders in the post-independence Africa. Some of the prominent names are Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Steve Biko, Carlos Cardoso, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, among many others and they:

"...are a painful but necessary reminder that speaking truth to power comes at a very high price. In studying their fates you will become aware that Africa's destiny has for too long been controlled by malignant external forces and their internal compradors that preach human rights and justice while committing the most heinous crimes against humanity with impunity."^{xxv}

Hitting the last nail on the coffin, one leading European magazine bluntly stated, that Africa is nothing but "*The Hopeless Continent*."^{xxvi} Well, both slavery and colonialism has gone, but the

hopeless continent is not showing much signs of becoming a *hopeful continent*. The causes of the African dilemma are many and varied. Some can be ascribed to poor government policies: neglect of agriculture, inefficient state-owned enterprises, lack of concern with promoting growth.^{xxvii}

For, Africa is today the continent full of political fiascos and economic disasters, hunger and starvation, dictatorship and corruption. Across the continent there are serious allegations against governments of mass corruption, nepotism and mismanagement of public resources. Citing Gambia's example, a leading commentator notes: "On the minus side, the poverty situation in the country has worsened under [president Yahya] Jammeh's government. And not only that, there has been rampant corruption, the persecution of journalists and human rights violations."^{xxviii} The present dereliction of the states is further aggravated throughout as a result of the traditional politics of Africa in the modern context of a continent that is sustained by outside aid:

"Apart from the image problems, what I've seen in a few African countries over the years is governments completely reconfigured as distributors of foreign largesse and no longer equipped to build their countries; local entrepreneurs driven out of business because they simply can't compete against free money and free products; and in a few cases I've seen the moral climate change from one of honest ambition and the desire to build and to better oneself, to an angry sense of entitlement."^{xxix}

It is foreign assistance that makes it possible for the political elites to use the state in such a patrimonial fashion so as to stay in power. Further, there are all too frequent attempts by those in power endangering the attempts to bring sanity to body-politic of Africa. Hence, the Ivory Coast Electoral Commissioner Youssouf Bakayoko in an interview pleads: "Democracy is beginning to emerge on our continent, so let us with the necessary single-mindedness, support this perpetual movement for the liberation of our peoples."^{xxx}

According to Africa watchers, a difficult period lies ahead for sub-Saharan Africa. On the positive side, many African countries were beginning to stem the decline in the early years of this century, and some were beginning to show accelerating growth. However, famine affected southern Africa and countries such as Ethiopia. If development is going to succeed, Africa will be its severest test case. If it fails, not only will the 700 million Africans south of Sahara be its victims, but directly and indirectly the wealthy nations of the industrialized world will have to bear a major responsibility for this failure, as well as share its health and environmental consequences.^{xxxi}

In recent years, international concern over extreme poverty has moved near to the top of the world agenda for the first time since the 1970s – and this has focused attention on the plight of Africa.

Although most of the developing world registered significant development progress after 1990, the sad exception is sub-Saharan Africa. There, the “lost decade of the 1990s” has been added to the preceding “lost decade of the 1980s.” There have been recent successes in Africa – Mauritius and Botswana but they are the best performers among the rare exceptions.^{xxxii} At the heart of the African dilemma is a long economic decline, a drop in per capita incomes, rapid increases in population, the destruction of fragile ecosystem, war and civil strife, and the inability of many countries to feed their people and meet other basic human needs.^{xxxiii}

If development is to succeed, everything hinges on education. Whatever we discuss about human affairs is either a symptom or a consequence of education. If Africa continue to invest in education – its culture or its governance one studies – will accelerate, and the continent will continue to overcome the dark past. But four eminent Africa specialists give a pessimistic scenario:

Faced with increasing budgetary problems..., most governments found it necessary to curtail expenditure on education. Under pressure from...the World Bank, governments in many countries have reintroduced primary-school fees. ...Unless some means are found to reduce the costs of education and to sustain educational expenditures in a period of structural adjustment, the major achievements made by African countries in this field since independence will be in danger of being reversed.^{xxxiv}

In addition, Africa has its own unique challenges and perspectives. In an interview, an independent policy adviser to African countries advises:

“What is needed now is a more equal form of partnership between the rich and poor countries. As the old African proverb says, “The hand that receives is always beneath the hand that gives.” Rich countries and the countries they support need to find ways of learning from each other, and pooling their skills, wisdom and resources for mutual benefit.”^{xxxv}

This is easy said than done. In the new era of globalization, the continent of Africa’s integration into the global world political system is challenged as new regional groupings began to form and older groupings are strengthened. This hard reality is acknowledged by the African Union in their vision of the Millennium Partnership (MAP) for the African Recovery Program. It states:

“...MAP was anchored on the determination of Africans to extricate themselves and the continent from the malaise of underdevelopment and exclusion in a globalizing world.”^{xxxvi}

This new discourse on Africa was sealed in the two key documents of the turn of the century: NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) – one the mirror image of the other. The subtext was clear: help yourself and the world will help you. The new

dispensation directed African action would, with the help of the outside world, bring forth greater political accountability, more development and a reduction in poverty. Africa's rise depends on whether it can do the impossible. Sadly, two leading contemporary scholars paint a very dark picture:

Unfortunately...Africa remains in extreme crisis... For example, in some countries such as Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Mali, Niger, and Sierra Leone, more than one-fifth of all children die before age 5 from preventable causes. Life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa is only 47 years. ...many Africans suffer from poor health, including malaria, tuberculosis, and parasites in addition to HIV/AIDS. A quarter of a million African women die each year from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Well over 40% of the people in sub-Saharan Africa still live on less than \$1 a day. Some 40 million children are still not in school. In a dozen or more African countries, a child is more likely to die before age 5 than to attend secondary school.^{xxxvii}

So in the new millennium the continent stands battered from all sides. But of all the African nations, Somalia is the one that has been reduced the most since 1960. Somalia is not alone; it sits alongside battered Ethiopia, battered Congo, battered Sudan, battered Egypt, battered Libya, so on. They are far below the global standards in practically all dimensions of political development and they are no match to the European Union, or countries like China, India or perhaps Brazil. Handling the politics of relative decline is never easy. And alarmist politicians and doomster academics may, in pointing to the state of decay, miss a continent's continuing strengths and attractions, which have to be weighed against its problems and worries. Changing or transforming this situation is almost *mission impossible*, but one can't just sit down and die!

Conclusion: Africa's Future Prospects

In this article, unlike others on African politics, I concentrated on the period before independence spanning nearly five hundred years of Africa - Europe relationship in order to expose existing problems in greater detail and to explore the possibilities that emanate from the need to confront these difficult realities. The politics of contemporary Africa are but a sad reflection of what the Europeans meted out to this ancient continent deliberately and viciously with "the brutalities of slavery, of subjugation, of deprivation and humiliation, when whole civilizations were crushed in order to serve the imperialists interests of the West"^{xxxviii} without carrying a damn for the consequences that would befall nearly a billion people in the third millennium.

Africa is much shrunken since the last colonial European left. At present, however, it looks battered: a rather shabby, marginalized continent in the power dynamics of geopolitics played by major *states* out

to dominate the globalizing world. It would be tempting to blame Europe, and more generally the colonial powers for the various regional and socio-political-economical components. But that would miss a larger and most interesting point: that almost all African *states* are having multiple political problems. Since independence, the new *states* are trying to comprehend what happened to them which were not of their own making. This brings about monumental challenges that defy conventional wisdom into this often confusing, constantly challenging, always fascinating, and ultimately questioning world.

As Africans look ahead to the future they should pause to remember the five-hundred years of European *slavery* and *colonialism* and how it has affected the psyche of the political leaderships and institutions of every African state. A specter will haunt Africa in the twenty-first century in the twin forms of slavery and colonialism. "Our future course must be guided dialectically. If by looking into the past we have known the present, to know the future we must look into the past and the present. Our action must be related to our concrete experience."^{xxix} How they can overcome or reconcile with that dark legacy to achieve political development in tune with the globalizing African peoples aspirations is the greatest challenge of our times. Politicians and governments now contending for political power might be advised to assimilate the dark past. They would not be wasting their time.

Notes

ⁱ Cameron Duodu, "Africa @50: Riding ourselves of colonial mentality," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 22-25, here p. 23. For further details see www.africasia.com.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.* p. 24.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carina Ray, "To The Beautiful One Not Yet Born," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 70-71, here p. 71.

^{iv} See Kebour Ghenna, "Comment," *Capital*, February 6, 2011, p.2. www.capitalethiopia.com

^v See "NEPAD: A blueprint for Africa's development in the 21st century," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, p. 34-35, here p. 34.

^{vi} Onyekachi Wambu, "Africans and slavery," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, p. 106.

^{vii} December Green and Laura Luehrmann, *Comparative Politics of the Third World: Linking Concepts and Cases*, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2004, p.41.

^{viii} See www.makepeacehappen.net [Accessed on 18 July 2012].

^{ix} Wambu, "Africans and slavery," p. 106.

^x See *Global Development: An Introduction*, UK: VSO, January 2008. www.vso.org.uk

^{xi} *Ibid.* p. 4.

^{xii} See William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa*, 3d ed. London: MacMillan Press, 1997. p. 30.

^{xiii} *Ibid.* p. 6.

^{xiv} Ama Ata Aidoo cited by Dudou, "Africa @50: Riding ourselves of colonial mentality," pp. 22-23.

^{xv} Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London & Dar-es-Salaam: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications and Tanzania Publishing House, 1980, p.245.

^{xvi} See [www. makepeacehappen.net](http://www.makepeacehappen.net)

^{xvii} Lucian W. Pye cited in J. C. Johari, *Principles of Modern Political Science*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2005, p. 284.

^{xviii} See Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, pp. 246-250

^{xix} For complete details, See Jacob Zuma, "The world's eyes on Africa," *The Economist: The World in 2010*, dated 2009, ISBN 978-0-86218-212-0.

^{xx} Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, p.246.

^{xxi} Johari, *Principles of Modern Political Science*, p. 285.

^{xxii} Akua Djanie, "What do Diasporan Africans owe Africa?" *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 78-79, here p.78.

^{xxiii} See Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa*, p. 45.

^{xxiv} See Editorial "Get Real," *Capital*, February 6, 2011, p. 2.

^{xxv} Ray, "To The Beautiful One Not Yet Born," p. 71.

^{xxvi} This headline was on the cover of *The Economist*. Cited in Duodu, "Africa @50: Riding ourselves of colonial mentality," pp. 22 and 23.

^{xxvii} See Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development*, 10th edition, England: Addison-Wesley, 2009, p. 804.

^{xxviii} Bubaccar Sowe, "Gambia: Sixteen years of Yahya Jammeh," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 36-39, here p. 38.

^{xxix} *New African*, no. 498, Aug/Sept. 2010, p. 95.

^{xxx} See "Helping democracy to emerge," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 46-48, here p. 48.

^{xxxi} Todaro and Smith, *Economic Development*, p. 807.

^{xxxii} See *Ibid.*, p. 805.

^{xxxiii} See *Ibid.*, p.805.

^{xxxiv} See Naomi Chazan, Robert Mortimer, John Ravenhill and Donald Rothchild, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, 2nd ed. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992, p. 244.

^{xxxv} Simon Anholt. For full interview, see Sean Carey, "What aid does to a country's image," *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 94-95, here p. 95.

^{xxxvi} African Union Message, *New African*, no.498, Aug/Sept. 2010, pp. 34-35, here p. 34.

^{xxxvii} Todaro and Smith, *Economic Development*, p. 806.

^{xxxviii} A.M. Babu, former Minister in the Tanzanian Government, cited by Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, p. 316

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