

Theoretical Approaches to the Understanding of Africa's Politics and the Challenges of Development

OBAH-AKPOWOGHAHA Nelson Goldpin

Department of Political Science
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
P.O BOX 2006 OAU ILE-IFE

ABSTRACT: *The paper discusses conceptual and theoretical approaches to Africa politics such as the Modernization School; Marxian School; and the Statist School of thought vis-à-vis development and underdevelopment paradigm. The paper uncovers critical argument in various schools of thought, the variables that have caused relative development and severe-underdevelopment in Africa society at present and in the past respectively. Using Nigeria as a point of departure and melting-point, it will critically and objectively identify the problems and challenges of development in Africa and offer suggestions that will move Africa further along the path of development. The paper is aim to write-off the general belief that contemporary Africa countries are poor or underdeveloped due to neo-colonialism or imperialism that has been advance by Marxian scholars and Africa-nationalist in different underdeveloped literature. It has been a contending issue whether formal colonised Africa states can develop? Consequently, the paper concluded with statist school of thought attributing underdevelopment (poverty, unemployment, communal clashes, the rise of ethnic militia and militancy and so no) due to the problem of corruption and failure of governmental policies implementation in Africa created by Africa's leaders. However, the paper is limited to issues of development and underdevelopment within colonised Africa states and in achieving the above objectives, the paper rely on secondary data. Moreover, Nigeria was adopted as a reference of analyses due to her population placement in the continent of Africa and one of the key players in international politics.*

KEYWORDS: Development, Underdevelopment, Modernization, Marxian, Statist and Corruption.

INTRODUCTION

The issues of underdevelopment and development have gained a specific and dramatic focus from a context that includes the demise of classic European imperialism, and the conflicting claims of rival socio-economic systems. As at 1950s, issues on development and underdevelopment in the less development states attracted series of research work that engendered two major schools of thought (Liberal school and the Marxian school of thought). These were informed by several challenges of political development such as the challenges of identity, legitimacy, participation, penetration, distribution and integration. However, the ascendancy of Western-European countries in the area of industrialization, economic growth and

development of democratic ethos at this period gave them the veritable ground to plant “the theory of modernization” into Latin American and other less developed countries popularly called third world countries as a way out of underdevelopment crises (Batta, 2011). Consequently, the woeful failure of modernization concept in Latin American and other third world countries sparked serious debates in the mind of nationalists and scholars in the third world countries, the Marxian school of thought unfolded which tends to attribute underdevelopment as a result of asymmetric relations that engulfed countries in the world (Boyd, 2011). Consequently most contemporary Africa leaders and literature on underdevelopment have criticised Western and European powers, that Africa countries are poor or underdevelopment due to ne-colonisation and by extension imperialism Mowlana (cited in Smith 2013). Moreover, the paper is to verify whether neo-colonisation is still alive in Africa and what is stance of the Africa leaders.

However, this paper explores these schools of thought, how valid and consistence are these theories in our present politics in Africa and particularly how attainable are these theories vis-à-vis underdevelopment and challenges of development in Africa. On the other hand, using Nigeria as the scope of analyses, it will critically and objectively identify the problems and challenges of development in Africa and offer suggestions that will move Africa further along the path of development. Based on the issue of underdevelopment, Oko (2008) observed that Africans’ thirst for genuine development is at present unslaked and perhaps unslakeable under the current circumstances in Africa. Development is off kilter in Nigeria, and indeed, most parts of Africa and appears to be spiralling over the edge into dictatorship, and perhaps even social disorder, fatally assaulted by political elites whose moral equipoise have been disarranged by narcissism and corruption . He furthered explained that available evidence provides a disturbing hint that Africans are losing confidence in the democratic process. The opportunities presented by democratic transitions have been squandered by the cocktail of hubris, arrogance, and corruption --- the trademark of Africa’s political elites. Elected officials upon assuming office tend to emulate the military despots they denounced and replaced. The spectres of the past --- corruption, human rights abuses and economic mismanagement remain for the most part unsolved and unaddressed. This notion of leadership attitudinal pattern of administration justified statist paradigm.

However, the statist theory emphasizes the pattern and style of administration adopted by Africa leaders. This theory attributed the problem of underdevelopment on Africa leaders due to their orientation anchored on private and primitive accumulation of wealth against public interest. This theory describes current dilemma that African States are facing especially implementation of public policies and private wealth accumulation. Scholars have attempted to treat these issues mainly from underdevelopment and modernization view-points given little attention to statist theory (Boyd, 2011; Mohan and Power, 2009). However, in addressing these challenges of development in African, we begin with modernisation (liberal) school of thought, follow by the Marxian thinking and finally we end it with statist intellectual analyses.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The Concept of Development and Underdevelopment: The Liberal Perspective.

Most classical and contemporary liberal scholars described development as an increase or raise in gross national product through proliferation of industries aim to the reduction of poverty/inequality, unemployment in a country (Little, 1982; Todaro, 1979; Meier, 1989; Shultz, 1961 and Hag, 1971 cited in Okereke and Ekpe, 2002) and (Ogun, 2010). One of the facts that underlined Little's (1982) concept (cit. Okereke and Ekpe, 2002) is on the issue of price mechanism. For him, all industries should be owned by private individuals that this would create development, in other words, the activities of the market should be control by the forces of demand and supply. For most liberal scholars, development connotes the capacity of a country's national economy, whose initial economic condition has been more or less stable to generate and sustain annual rise in its gross national product at rates of 5 to 7% (Okereke and Ekpe, 2002). In search of more robust concept of development Okereke and Ekpe (2002) observe that "developmental economists see it as a device or instrumental process of overcoming persistent poverty, absorbing the surplus labour and reducing the gap between the rich and the poor".

Moreover, the United Nations and her agencies stressed on the issue of redistribution of growth and basic human needs. Conversely, Underdevelopment for them connote persistent or constant rise in poverty level, an increase in unemployment, low saving, high consumption level, high standard of living and decrease in gross national product (GNP) precipitated by deformed culture and tradition of a society, this can also be described as "vicious cycle of poverty". The concepts of underdevelopment by liberal scholars denote cultural deformity and disjointed-traditions inherent in the Africa societies (Boyd, 2011). The liberal school of thought believed that capitalism is antithetical with the operations of African traditions. In other words, underdevelopment is as result of the opposing nature of the Africa culture against capitalism. The term often used to refer to, economic development symptoms of which include lack of access to job opportunities, health care, drinkable water, food, education and housing. The general problem (ignorance) of the liberal postulations, it undermined extraneous variables and underscores the cultures of the African as a negative index. Although, there are some traditional patterns and norms in Africa that oppose development such as men that are poor but still give birth to plenty of children as a good sign of a hero and fertility; a man must give birth to a male child as a sign of not curse by the gods; women are second class fellow meant for certain domestic duties (like cooking, washing of husband's cloths); human rituals/sacrifice as way of pleasing some deities (like the sacrifice of a virgin and the birth of twin) and so on. However contemporary scholars also argued that development is a function of a nation's traditions and cultural values coexisting with other values, that is, development is meaningless without the promotion of a nation's cultural values. In other words, there is no development without the development of a nation's way of life.

The Concept of Development and Underdevelopment: The Marxian perspective.

The drawback and weakness of Modernization Theory in Latin America sparked the thinking of scholars in the less developed economies to offer a pathway for development in the less developed societies (Jhingan, 2005). Scholars such as Lenin, Key, Kwame Nkruman, Walter Rodney, Gunder Frank among others have criticized the modernization school of thought in view of its woeful failure, its ethnocentrism and incompatibility in Africa Societies and other developing economies. The convergent of these thought of radical scholars give birth to the Marxian philosophy. This new thinking and ideal prompted the believed that; there is asymmetrical relation that exist between countries in the world which has created stagnancy and retarded countries that ought to developed into perpetual underdevelopment situation. The genesis of this proposition is basically applauded and tied on the problem of slavery and colonisation of the African countries, the exploitation of the African States by the European countries (Boyd, 2011). Consequently the picture below showed the despicable nature of relationship between European explorers and the African people. Africans were seen as sub-humans and monkeys in the jungle been captured, killed and used as domestic animals for human labour during slavery.

Fig. 1. European explorers and the African enslavement

(Getty Image)

Source: http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2008/04/20/shackled_to_the_past/

The explanation for the origins of African severe underdevelopment is explained by history and much of Africa's poor performance can be characterised by over 400 years of slave raiding (Nunn, 2007). The impact of the issue of slave trade on underdevelopment of Africa cannot be dismissed with a wave of hand. During the period when African countries were colonized, slave trade was at high level. Many of the citizens were exported to the foreign countries then to develop their economies. Moreover, slavery has resulted in regional communities and many nations to be both politically and ethnically fragmented. Trade has caused political instability, meaning both political and social unrest leaving communities unfit for pursuing economic

development and planning for the future economy of the country. If the slave trade had not occurred, then 72% of the average income gap between Africa and the rest of the world would not exist today (Nunn, 2007). Slavery, according to historians, played an important role in African underdevelopment. It fostered ethnic fractionalisation and undermined effective states. The largest numbers of slaves were taken from areas that were the most underdeveloped politically at the end of the 19th century and are the most ethnically fragmented today. Historical evidence from case studies show how the slave trade caused political instability, weakened states, promoted political and social fragmentation, and resulted in a deterioration of domestic legal institutions. Extrapolating on the issue of slavery, Nathan Nunn (2007) observes that:

Between 1400 and 1900, the African continent experienced four simultaneous slave trades. The largest and most well-known is the trans-Atlantic slave trade where, beginning in the fifteenth century, slaves were shipped from West Africa, West Central Africa, and Eastern Africa to the European colonies in the New World. The three other slave trades -- the trans-Saharan, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean slave trades -- are much older and predate the trans-Atlantic slave trade. During the trans-Saharan slave trade, slaves were taken from south of the Saharan desert and shipped to Northern Africa. In the Red Sea slave trade, slaves were taken from inland of the Red Sea and shipped to the Middle East and India. In the Indian Ocean slave trade, slaves were taken from Eastern Africa and shipped either to the Middle East, India or to plantation islands in the Indian Ocean.

He further buttressed the argument that if slave trades are partly responsible for Africa's current underdevelopment, then looking across countries within Africa, one should observe that the parts of Africa that are the poorest today are also the areas from which the largest number of slaves were taken in the past. The countries from which the most slaves were taken (taking into account differences in country size) are today the poorest in Africa. An alternative explanation for the relationship is that the parts of Africa from which the largest number of slaves were taken were initially the most underdeveloped. Today, because these characteristics persist, these parts of Africa continue to be underdeveloped and poor.

By using instrumental variables to identify the causal effect of the slave trade on economic development, indentifying distance from each country to the locations of the demand for slaves as instruments to estimate the causal effect of the slave trades on economic development. His initial analysis of the data is consistent with historic accounts suggesting that the slave trades impeded the formation of broader ethnic groups, leading to ethnic fractionalisation, and that the slave trades resulted in a weakening and underdevelopment of political structures (Ibid). In his estimates of the impact of the slave trades on economic development, Nathan Nunn provides an estimate of how much more developed Africa would be if the slave trade had not taken place. The average per capita income level of the countries in Africa is \$1,834, measured in 2000. This is significantly lower than the income for the rest of the world (which is \$8,809), and it is even

much lower than the income of other developing countries (which is \$4,868). Corroborating the above analyses, Nunn (2007) concluded that:

If slave trade had not occurred, then 72% of the average income gap between Africa and the rest of the world would not exist today, and 99% of the income gap between Africa and the rest of the underdeveloped world would not exist. In terms of economic development, Africa would not look any different from the other developing countries in the world. This finding is striking. These results may not be the final and definitive explanation for the origins of Africa's severe underdevelopment, but they do provide very strong evidence that much of Africa's poor performance can be explained by its history, which is characterised by over 400 years of slave raiding.

Arising from the above conceptual analyses, the modernisation school sees underdevelopment as a result of inimical practices and deforms traditional values of the Third World countries which cannot coexist with the precepts of modernity and while the Marxian paradigm believed that underdevelopment is as result of slavery, colonisation, neo-colonisation and imperialism that have created an unequal socio-economy and political relation popularly called asymmetrical relation. To them, development can occurs when countries can break this unequal relations and also redefining her mode of production, overhauling the environment and investing in the development of human psychology. However, contemporary literature has engendered these issues through leadership failure and corrupt practices of African leaders (Aiyede, 2008; Batta, 2011). In order words, billions of naira met for capital and developmental projects have been diverted and used for personal projects. This current wave in African societies is what scholars have described as "corruption", although it is not exclusive in the African continent but it (corruption) has been a cog in the wheel of African pathway to development. For example, in Nigeria, approximately US\$ 200 billion was invested between 1973 and 1993, with very little development to show for it and the country has experienced unprecedented debt of #22.59 trillion as at march, 2012 (Aiyede, 2008). According to University of Massachusetts researchers (cit. Aiyede, 2008) estimated that from 1970 to 1996, Capital flight from 30 sub-Saharan African countries totalled \$187bn, exceeding those nations' external debts due to political corruption. This is the similar views of the statist school of thought.

The Concept of Development and Underdevelopment: Statist Theory

It central thrust of the statist school of thought is on the premise that underdevelopment of African states emerged due to bad administrative technique applied by the ruling elites, corruption, problem of good policy implementations, patron-client permutation and other variables that undermines modern innovations and democracy (Batta, 2011). In other words, embezzlement, misappropriations, mediocrity in place of meritocracy and among others are factors that have retarded development in the states in Africa. Leaders see corruption as a hobby and a way of life while the act has created a huge inequality and social vices that has become a

cog in the wheel of African developmental plan. These and among others are the variables that the statist theorists have highlighted as the cause of underdevelopment of the states in Africa.

Evidently, Sub-Sahara Africa states have been described as the most corrupt region in the world and this menace has erupted communal clashes, the rise of ethnic militia, insurgency of militancy, all these and among others have tainted the African states as Hobbes' state of nature where the security of life and property is absence. In Nigeria right from the onset of her independence, the country has experience heinous crises in various regions, ranging from the clash of political elites, the clash of power between and among the regions, civil war, communal clashes, the rise of ethnic militia, militancy and religious sect and coupled with the problem of corruption. These factors have created impediment for socio-economic and political development of the Nigerian state. A vivid case worth to be remember, over #5.8 trillion is missing in the ongoing democratic dispensation arising from corrupt politicians and debt profile increases every year. As at July 2012, the total debt profile of the country was #1.2 trillion (The Punch July 7, 2012). However, in a nation-wide survey on the perceptions of Nigerians regarding corruption and governance conducted in 2001 by a consortium of experts from Nigerian universities (cited in Aiyede, 2008) reveals that:

Over 80% of the sampled population regarded corruption as "serious." Respondents also ranked political parties among the most corrupt institutions in the country. The details of the findings from the survey listed the 30 top most corrupt institutions in Nigeria with the police as number one. In ranking government agencies and parastatals according to their levels of involvement in corrupt practices, the first and second most corrupt government agencies in Nigeria are the police and the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) (now Power Holding Company of Nigeria, PHCN), respectively. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth most corrupt institutions of government are political parties, the executive arm of federal, state and local governments, members of the national and state assemblies and the court. The Customs and Exercise Department, Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) offices of the Accountant-General at federal and state levels and Water Boards are also among the top ten corrupt governmental agencies.

However, the principal impediment to democratic consolidation in Africa is the attitude of leaders, especially their conflicting attitudes toward democracy and human right abuses. They laud, and indeed, relish the powers and authority of democracy and revel in its glory but loathe its restraints, especially fidelity to the rule of law, accountability and respect for citizen's rights. A work that was investigated by Christensen (cited in Adofu and Abula, 2010) finds out that domestic debt markets in these countries are generally small, highly short term and often have a narrow investors-base. He also discovered that domestic interest rate payment present a significant burdens to the budget, despite much smaller domestic debt than foreign indebtedness. Also Sanusi (cited in Adofu and Abula, 2010) in his study was of the view that faulty domestic policies which ranges from project financing mismatch, in appropriate monetary and fiscal

policies was responsible for domestic borrowing problem. He believes that some of the policies were of little significance because of the perceived temporary effect of the external shocks that led to stupendous macroeconomic fallout, which encourage import and discourage export production.

Ahmed (cited in Adofu and Abula, 2010) reflected the causes of debt problem as related to both the nature of the economy and the economic policies put in place by the government. He articulated that the developing economies are characterized by heavy dependence on one or few agricultural and mineral commodities and export trade is highly concentrated on the other. The manufacturing sector is mostly at the infant stage and relies heavily on imported inputs. To him, they are dependent on the developed countries for supply of other input and finance needed for economic development, which made them vulnerable to external shocks. James (cited in Adofu and Abula, 2010) opined that public debt has no significant effect on the growth of most African states economy because the fund borrowed were not channelled into productive ventures, but diverted into private purse. He suggested further, that, for the gains of the debt forgiveness to be realized the war against corruption should be fought to the highest. In view of the above analyses Adofu and Abula (2010) concluded that:

The rise in domestic debt profile in most African States is attributed to government extra budgetary activities, which most often are not used for the intended project. Commitment to budget should be encouraged for fiscal discipline on the part of the government and its agencies. The government and the Debt Management Office (DMO) should draw up guidelines to limit the growth of future domestic debt., debts service ratio must not exceed 40percent of allocation from the federation account. Effective mechanism should be put in place to ensure that any new borrowing is judiciously utilized to contribute to economic growth. The place of corruption in public debt in most Africa States is central. Most often, borrowed fund are either misapplied or embezzled.

Another factor that can be linked with under-development of contemporary African States is corruption. Most countries in Africa are today plagued by high-level of corruption in public and private sectors. This is worsen by the selfish and greediness of those in corridors of power. Today, many of the Africa leaders are operating foreign accounts, being serviced by looted money, which could have been better utilized for the development of African countries. Many of the Africa leaders are 'sit tight' leaders, having spent several years in power without appreciable progress; tenure elongation and agitation for second term have become a right once they are in leadership. Many of these leaders prefer to die in power rather that to be ousted from power (Oko, 2008).

Moreover, poor planning and failure of policy implementation also contribute to under-development of states in Africa. The role of planning in the achievement of objectives cannot be over emphasised. Unfortunately, planning efforts in Africa leave much to be desired. Most of the

plans in Africa countries are myopic, from obsolete data as well as faulty data gathering procedures, thus cannot stand the test of time (Boyd, 2011). However, the problem of free and fair elections, godfatherism and arson, ethnic superiority, inter/intra party crises, human right abuse, the problem of constitutionalism and among others have become issues and challenge to the development of states in Africa countries (Obah-Akpowoghaha, 2013; Oko, 2008). A study that was carryout by Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) concluded that the problem of conducting credible election has be an issue that threaten the survival of democratic values and other developmental variables. Corroborating the above view, Okechukwu, Oko (2008) a professor of Southern University Law Centre, Baton Rouge Louisiami USA carryout a study titled “The challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Africa, Nigeria as a Case Study” identified the following as the major challenges facing the African states: domestic challenges, organizing credible election, improving the condition of government, revamping public institutions, improving security, counteracting anti-democratic sentiments, citizen and leaders.

Extrapolating from the above studies carried out by Obah-Akpowoghaha (2013) and Oko (2008), the current problem of development in African is a function of bad leadership. The colonial masters left the soil of African over 30 years ago (most Africa countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and so no) and Africa is the one of the richest continent in the globe in the area of natural and human resources but ironically one of the poorest and less industrialised continent in the world. The point is derivable in the area of merciless corrupt practices perpetrated by public officials and corporate organisations in connection with outright embezzlement and inflicted-contract respectively. However, the statist theory failed to acknowledge external factors such as porous external boundaries, lack of technology and the interplay of globalisation, these and among others still influence and determine the decisions of African leaders.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Consequently, in this paper we have observe that colonialism has contributed to underdevelopment in Africa and the problem of contemporary Africa states is a function of bad leadership exercise by the ruling elites whose private interests override national interests. Moreover, the paper has attempted to write-off the general belief that contemporary Africa states is a function of neo-colonisation. However, corruption has been identified as a major problem in the bid for developmental goals and not Western and European interactions with Africa. What seems to be lacking is effective leadership to galvanize and channel the desires and energies toward productive ends. A word from Fareed Zarakı quoted by Oko (2008) explicit remarks that what Africa needs more urgently than democracy is good governance. Other problems in Africa will easily be addressed once leaders rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership. Good leadership in Africa will be necessary to orchestrate fundamental and paradigm shifting changes in the culture and ethos that impede democratic consolidation. Good governance will immeasurably enrich the condition and quality of lives in Africa, transform the continent and ultimately smoothen the path to the creation of a continent so eloquently predicted by Mentah (cited in Oko, 2008), genuine excitement would be generated worldwide by an Africa in which governments demonstrate respect for the constitution and laws, state officials at all levels responsibly execute the duties of their offices, public institutions make efficient use of funds provided, political violence and corruption are sharply reduced, the people’s needs are dutifully addressed by public and private services, elections are

fairly conducted, and the state once again becomes the collective property of its citizens. While none of these virtues are new in contemporary African context, they would be revolutionary and promote popular democracy.

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