“Interrogating Fallacies, Stereotypes and Denigrations of Africa in Eurocentric Discourse”

By

Alex Igho Ovie-D’Leone
“Interrogating Fallacies, Stereotypes and Denigrations of Africa in Eurocentric Discourse”

Alex Igho Ovie-D’Leone
Department of Political Sciences, Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.
Email: alex_anderson27@yahoo.com or alexovied’leone@uniosun.edu.ng

ABSTRACT
Africa is one continent that has suffered some of the worst forms of physical and psychological bashing in the hands of European explorers, Colonists and historians alike. Compared to other locations in the world, the rich annals of the continent have also been seemingly twisted out of rhythm with the intent to justify long years of exploitations and stereotyping of the people and their cultures cast in the imageries of barbarians and cannibals. Such a ‘paradise lost’ is also presented as a social abnormality that defies any form of redemption. This paper interrogates the logic of such bland Eurocentric misconceptions/stereotypes with a view to highlighting how such skewed imageries invariably have contributed adversely to the ‘development of underdevelopment’ across Africa over the years. The paper concludes that, there is now a dire need for the European interlopers to genuinely begin to partner with Africans with a view to correcting such skewed imageries that have thus far brought Africa to the precipice of imminent systemic collapse.

Keywords: Afro-centricism, Euro-centricism, Liberalism, Consociationalism, Stereotypes.

Sundry media reports about Africa in the contemporary time readily invoke grim imageries of a continent forsaken by God and man – some sort of a ‘paradise lost’ or a dark continent where nothing good ever works. Academic perspectives on trends across Africa, also paint even a gloomier picture – of a continent that fits hard into all known theoretical postulations or worse still, a location where everything ‘good’ ironically works in the converse instead of optimally like elsewhere across the world. The general stereotype is that Africans are lazy, not rationally focused and worse still, are too attached to their primordial/traditional origins and sentimentalities to be fully committed to imbibe the ethics of rationalism/modernity now spreading like bushfires across the world under the incumbent globalizing trends. Another image-cast also represents Africa as a region replete with failing state structures that give rise to other assertive competing shadow state structures (Reno, 1955). One other extreme view also recasts a gross imagery of a continent that ‘embodies an inbuilt bias in favour of greater disorder’ (Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

Such generalized views, I argue, grossly misrepresent and lopsidedly paint only one side of the picture about Africa. I will also contend here that, such skewed externalized imageries about Africa tend to act counterproductive on the long haul and have been at the very roots of the growing international neglects and general foreboding that currently underlie the growing underdevelopment indices across the continent.

The larger implication of such stereotypes and misconceptions is that, there is now a dire need by African scholars to balance/equilibrate such skewed pictures/image cast by critically highlighting what actually constitute the other real essences of the African social picture. To this effect, the image recasts I present here portend to invoke/recount some of the ugly memories of long years of European imperialistic thefts, unbridled exploitations/expropriations of the vast human and material resources of the continent. These are foreign plunderers who came in the casts of Colonists and now masquerading also as neo-Colonists/neo-imperialists. The current parlous state of affairs across Africa, I contend further, is the result of such greed and callous expropriations by the European interlopers in Africa.

As it were, to critically tackle such Eurocentric misconceptions/stereotypes about and their implications for Africa, there is need to unravel the logic of such lopsided image casts. First, there is ‘a logical premise aimed at diminishing the real extent/scope of the injustices perpetrated by European colonists against Africans during that ignoble European imperial era’. The intent here, as evidenced by prevailing Eurocentric sentimentalities and utterances, is to rationalize European intervention in Africa in the light of portraying it as an expedient messianic civilizing mission-mandate from God to redeem pagans, cannibals and atheists in the continent.

The second logic explores utilities of stereotyping ‘Africans as a bunch of generally lazy, inept people that generally lack mental capacities to devise indigenous coherent pathways for their sustainable economic growth and
political development’. Such stereotypes are tantamount not only to wilfully rationalize the unbridled balkanization of the continent and its resources by the Europeans interlopers, but it is also attempt to abdicate direct responsibilities/culpabilities for the far reaching implications of such rude interruptions on the overall wellbeing of Africans in the contemporary time.

No one can rationally dispute the fact that, such exogenous interruptions have had far reaching and strategic adverse implications that invariably impinge grossly on the incumbent capacities of Africans/their states to recover and catch up with the pace of overall personal/collective growth and development already sustained by the rest of the world.

Matters have even been made worse by these kinds of the recent presumptuous prescriptions proffered by Eurocentric pundits and scholars alike. This is pertaining to how Africans can and should adopt Eurocentric prescriptions and begin to carefully retrace their steps out of the doldrums in which they have been mired in after long years of European imperial/colonial domination and exploitation. I argue that such prescriptions are presumptuous and indeed they grossly offend the sensibilities of Africans generally. This is because, they have neither been made in good faith, nor do their outcomes portend to alleviate the plights of Africans in any tangible ways or means on the long haul – as evinced by trends witnessed across the continent recently.

**Genres of Scholarly Focus on Africa**

In the domain of global discourse about Africa, there exist two dominant schools of thought – spanning from the compound of: 1) the Liberal school that embraces such frames of analyses like the ‘modernization theory’ and the ‘political policy theory’ on one hand, and 2) the Critical school that embraces other frames of analyses like ‘dependency theory’ and ‘Marxist theory’. In the two categories, Eurocentric idealisms have been quite dominant and have also flourished richly over time. This is possibly because of the close contacts Europeans have had with Africa generally over time. I propose to critically interrogate these broad postulations in each category about Africa as enunciated in the foregoing analogy.

First, I will tackle this task from the point of view of ascertaining how we can objectively balance any discernible lopsided Eurocentric imagery about the unfolding social dramas across Africa. And second, I will move a step further to the threshold of objectively critiquing any presumptuous remedies/pathways proposed by Eurocentric pundits and scholars alike in the light of the quest for a veritable pathway out of Africa’s social, political and economic malaises. This paper is divided into two sections: the first section interrogates African discourse in the Liberal tradition, while the second section is premised on a critique of African discourse in the Critical tradition.

**Interrogating African Discourse in the Eurocentric Liberal Tradition**

The Liberal tradition has deep roots in European idealisms of rationalism, individualism, free market enterprise and liberal democracy which have spread far and wide across the world over time like bush fires. Their predominance on the world stage was due largely to Europe’s phenomena rise to a position of global pre-eminence following long years of unbridled imperial/colonial domination and exploitations of new territories conquered in far flung locations across the world in the recent past.

**a) The Modernization Theorists**

The first frame of analysis in the Liberal tradition that attempts to grossly conflate the history of Africa is the postulations by a group of scholars referred to generally as the ‘modernization theorists’. The central focus of this school of thought is premised on the assumption that Africa currently lags behind in growth and development indices because its leaders and people have failed to transit from their primordial mentalities/sentimentalities. This is further highlighted by their continued attachments to their alleged archaic atheist traditions/irrational ways of life premised on sentimental attachments to magic/voodoo and a series of rudimentary modes of production and property acquisitions.

A cardinal prescription by this school therefore is that, ‘for African states to become more viable, there is the need for the leaders and indeed the people, to imbib the rational ethics of free market economies and liberal democracies that aptly ape Western European models. The assumption here is that all civilized nations must eventually evolve through the same so-called Rostow (1960) ‘stages of growth’ thesis spanning from backward agrarian societies to modern industrialized economies (Rostow, 1960).

Such a view also resonates loudly in Euro-centric Marxist prescriptions about Africa in the critical tradition. This latter view also attempts to rationalize European Colonialism as ‘brutal but necessary’ vehicle needed to forcefully co-opt Africa into such so-called generic universal ‘stages of growth’ – spanning from primitive agrarian
modes of production to modern industrial modes of production and acquisitions. These are pathways dependent on the dynamics of a so-called ‘rate of modernization’ process (Avineri, 1968:129).

According to this claimant, the so-called ‘rate of modernization’ can be measured in terms of the growth in a nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The larger implications of such a panacea are quite manifold and are indeed very instructive for the analysis here: first, it invokes a dire necessity for Africans to always carefully tread such Eurocentric path-dependent routes as the only way to attain the strategic emancipation of their states (Rostow, 1960; Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997). Any alternate pathway is effectively foreclosed to them.

Second, such a prescription also directly imposes an austere obligation on Africans to replace their traditional/primitive ways of thinking and imbibe the more so-called rational Western social thought system premised on utilities of empiricisms (Rothchild, 1977). The rationale here is anchored on the assumption that, sentimental attachments to such primordial ideation factors like ethnicity/tribalism tend to create deep inter-group divisions which tend to generate internecine conflicts and act to also foster pervasive political instabilities that stunt overall national economic growth and development.

Such an argument establishes a direct linkage between ethnic conflicts and underdevelopment. And one way in which this could be tackled, it is generally argued, is for Africans not only to imbibe Eurocentric rational ethics, devise workable incentives for inter-ethnic co-habitation, but they must also strive as a necessity to migrate to the urban areas – possibly to escape the adverse entrapments of primordial sentimentalities.

This is also to enable them to be able to become actively engaged in factories/work places where they can also imbibe a culture of critical/rational civic discourse than can be enhanced by their personal dedication to mass media patronage. From either a psychological or a sociological point of view, Africans are obliged one way or the other to radically transform their rural life styles and their domiciliation in conformity to more modern urbane conditionalities preset by such austere Eurocentric contextual prescriptions for social/economic growth and development.

In response to such prescriptions, I contend that, there cannot be any such radical transformation in people’s mentalities as suggested here by these scholars, save in the context of an evolving continental-wide social revolution. And we all know that, the anomalous characters of the African Colonial states– devoid of proper class social stratifications, readily foreclose any trajectory towards such social revolutions. At best, only social changes championed by the neo-imperial agents within the state (the African military) that can suffice in such locations as the veritable vehicles for social change. Invariably, I argue further that, such changes that are presumptuously said to be open to Africans only serve to profit the elite ‘class’ in battle fatigues/civilian garbs and to the detriments of the masses. The logic of all known successful revolutions worldwide evokes imageries of a close symbiosis between the ideals of the revolutionaries and the grass roots masses on whose backs most successful revolutions ride on to victory. Thus, given the wide gulf between the ideals of the elites (supposedly the leaders of any revolution) and those of the masses (supposedly the ‘horse-backs’ upon which revolutionaries ride to success), it would seem obviously an uphill task for us to quickly attain such uniformity and spread of radical shifts from primordial to modern mentalities/sentimentalities anywhere in Africa any time soon. Such a prescription therefore falter on its own weak/irrational structural logic and presumptuous conception.

It is also a fact that, Western liberal ideals were fomented against the cultural backgrounds of the evolving European ethics of individualism that underpinned and grew out from the numerous social revolutions that occurred across the European continent in the not too distant past. This is to say, they are ideally culture and region specific. To then apply such ideals to other locations across the world in their undiluted frames without any re-phrasal or re-adaptations. I contend, portend to create desperate outcomes that abstract sharply from the same desired outcomes as recorded in their places of origins.

As trends in other non-European locations have shown in the recent time – democratization in Africa in particular, it is obvious that such differential outcomes recorded in the course of its implementations, have been at the root causes of the pervasive social and political instabilities and societal disjuncture witnessed in the recent time (Huntington, 1979). The larger implication is that, any attempts to universalize such Eurocentric region/culture specific ideals, is tantamount to universalizing social chaos in the non-European regions across the world like in Africa.

Therefore, the lopsided prescription that Africans should ape European mentalities and social institutional constructs is obviously self-defeating and would certainly act counter-productive to the prospects of sustainable growth and development of the states in the continent. The way I see it, there is a dire need to first restructure these states to make them much more consensual/communal before applying such prescriptions. Africans are traditionally known to be communal in their orientations and they owe no one an apology for such predispositions. In this context, any workable compact with such Eurocentric ideals ought to be social constructs that acknowledge first that sacrosanct traditional African communitarian ethos with intent to re-adapting such prescribed alien ideals to suit/conform with the prevailing cultural predilections in all state/cultural instances across the continent and not the other way around.
Democracy for instance, cannot always be liberal in scope and content in the African settings. Some elements of Consociationalism ought to be infused one way or the other into such a social construct (Lijphart, 1979). In place of the zero-sum ethics of individualism, we can also begin to conceptualize/implement power sharing/rotations as is embedded in the ethics of communalism as a counterpoise. This is just like in place of the obnoxious exploitations that come with a ‘free market economic system’ we can envisage the ethics of ‘communal market equity’ that invokes the not too distant imageries of an elaborate regime of ‘trade by barter’ acting as guide for market regulations.

The third prescription of modernization theory has two political dimensions. First, there is the suggestion that there should be wider ambi for the growth in the number of eligible electorates across Africa. Second, it is also suggested that, there should be an increase in the degree of specialization in the functions of government agencies. Both antidotes are said to be ways needed to grow the national political processes much faster into maturity (Almond and Coleman, 1960).

The rationale here in these postulations is that, with increase in the numbers of a national electorate, the political processes would become all embracing and much more competitive/dynamic in character. This readily exalts the utilities of multiparty systems in the political processes as better recipes for political growth and stabilities–also adjudged as pre-conditions for growth in industrialization in these states. This adds up to the claimant that, routine performances of specialized functions by government agencies over long periods of time, portends to make them to become even more efficient over time (Almond and Coleman, 1960).

I however contend here that, since it is a widely known fact that, corruption, nepotism/favouratism and ineptitude in Africa’s public space are dominant themes that collectively act to distort the operational rhythm of government agencies, it will be quite difficult to make any meaningful progress in this stead. Resultantly, there can be no real gains made from routine performance of functions by government agencies when square pegs are often/routinely placed and re-circled into round holes. There is also the culture of policy discontinuities that usually trail every such change in civic administration. This trend fosters a rude break with the past and the loss of very experienced hands in such widespread changes when new regimes come on board.

As it were, the statures of agencies of civic governance across Africa are currently premised on very weak operating logics. This is further aggravated by a pervasive inauspicious national culture of public space corruption that acts largely to diminish any real gains that could stem from such routine performance of civic functions over time. What is then needed first is the adoption of a very austere formula for elite recruitments and discipline with a view to screening out bad eggs from ever entering into positions of authority in civic governance. Such a formulation should also genuinely create a large ambience needed to co-opt and actively engage popular participation in civic governance from the point of view of increased demands for public accountability and transparency in the conduct of civic functions by the electorates. This can also be greatly enhanced by a dedicated program of compulsory civic education for the masses in each state instance across Africa.

A fourth prescription of the modernization postulation is premised on the utilities of the liberal zero-sum game formulation in the national political processes. What this implies is that, liberal political competition is expected to be conducted always as a ‘winner-takes-all’ outcome – a standard practice in most European liberal settings.

To counter such a prescription from a logical point of view, it can be argued that Africans act generally – not as atomistic individuals, but as compact ethnic group members with respect to determinations of national political matters. I argue therefore that, application of a ‘winner-takes-all’ formula is an existential venture that tends to create an inauspicious environment for winners to annihilate members of other ethnics who loose in the national political contests. This also readily invokes a necessity for a life-long perpetuity of a numerically major group’s dominance over others in the national public space.

It is also obvious that the primary ethnics, from whom Africans ascribe workable individual social identities (because they subscribe to its ancestral membership) and with whom they conflate their existential aspirations, actually holds better strategic import for them than membership status of the larger bogus nation-state constructs. In the political space therefore, Africans tend to act tandem with the strategic aspirations/goals of their primary ethnics – making them act and think like masses of loyalists always poised to support their ethnic group’s elites with self-appointed missions to champion the collective group’s political aspirations at the national level.

Therefore, in a context where the zero-sum game becomes a dominant working formula for distribution of state resources and power, this is evidently a call to social chaos and anarchy in the African state any day. The impracticability of such a social construct resonates richly in Whitaker (1970), who argues that, even in the graduation towards modernity, there cannot be a clean break with the past (Africa’s tradition that extols utilities of ethnicity).

As a counterpoise therefore, I argue further and in consonance with Whitaker that, the future of Africa can best be assured if dedicated efforts are made to further strengthen those useful traditional sentimentalities sacrosanct to members of the primary ethnics as well as those strategic social institutions that best define their individual identities and to which they willingly pledge their continued loyalties to as ethnic group members. The
utilities of ethnicity/tribalism should then be widely explored further with a view to cementing the filial bond existing between Africans and the civic institutions right through the ages operating in the public space.

A fifth prescription of modernization postulations for Africa is that, democratic consolidation is to be considered a necessary end-product of the modernization process - which these scholars argue, can best be achieved through implementation of multiparty systems (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). What is prescribed here is for states in the region to jettison all traditional authoritarian systems of civic administration that are premised on the logic of the rule by monarchies, theocracies, sultanates and other forms of traditional civic regime structures not derived from popular consent and periodic elections. The preference here – as argued by them, is for Africans to subscribe to more rational/modern forms of liberal democratic systems premised on the ethics of popular consents/periodic legitimation through civic elections and public accountability/probity.

The fact here is, the structures of the standard African Colonial state are ideally tainted by a series of faulty colonial logics that readily breed all sorts of inter-group social conflicts/competitions and that tends to inhibit socio-economic and political development on the long haul (Herbst, 2000). However, one vital property missing in the incumbent character of the standard African state is the general absence of a ‘working consensus’ that could lead to sustainable collaborations between the composite ethnics in each state instance. One can vividly recall the utilities of consensual agreements acting as cementing factors and undercurrents in the unique characters of European modern state formation. This is succinctly attested to by the likes of Tilly (1975) in his seminal account of nation building in Europe.

In his narratives, Tilly extols the utilities of war in those processes of European nation-building as captured in his memorable dictum: ‘The European state made war and war made the European state’. The larger picture is that, at the end of each war/conquest, agreements were usually consummated between the victor and the vanquished - and these became the building blocks for nation-state formations and the re-cartography of international frontiers across Europe at the time. Also, in places like Romania (Treaty of Alba Iulia 1917), three regions – Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia, consummated an historical agreement leading to the formation of that state – obviously in response to the threats posed by the ubiquitous spread/influences of the Austria-Hungarian Empire at the time. Thus, whether as the end-result of wars or such mutual consensus, civic agreements between the composite groups within an evolving modern polity has was always being a standard pre-requisite for state formation in Europe.

Thus, in so far as nothing of the sort (modern state building wars and consensual agreements) ever took place any where across Africa, the political space across the continent will ever be a highly contested terrain any day. And to apply a zero-sum game formulation as a bench mark for national politics, grossly acts to aggravate the already intensely competitive situation even the more – any the wonder why democratic transitions/state consolidations in Africa have ever remained problematic over time (Huntington, 1968).

In this context therefore, to project democratic consolidation as an end-result in the modernization process, portends to create the kinds of immense political instabilities witnessed recently across Africa. Therefore, given these types of ugly trends, such a formulation is evidently self-defeating the way it seems. I argue therefore that ‘social consolidation’ premised on social equity (that positions the composite ethnos on a consensual national pedestal) ought to precede ‘democratic/civic consolidation’ as the major thrust of any modernization process in Africa. This is to say that, the transition processes ought to begin by re-tracing and identifying/rectifying the European fault-lines for state creation inherent in the formulas adopted for social integration of composite groups in each state instance in Africa. This ought to be made as an end in that process of genuine social re-construction that is now urgently required in Africa.

A sixth prescription of the modernization theorists is the notion that there should be capacity building in respect to the need to enhance the roles and profiles of national militaries, bureaucracies and imposition of one political party systems - which could act to generate the kinds of auspicious environments needed for sustainable political stabilities in the African state (Zolberg, 1966).

The rationale here is that, in the face of such failing capacities by democratically elected elites to sustain peace and order in each of their states, it is these kinds of un-conventional means prescribed here by these groups of scholars, that are needed to foist a credible civic authority over the citizenry – and if necessary by force. As it were, the standard argument advanced by these scholars is that, such an unconventional boost in the legitimation of civic authority – as proposed here can come in different ways and manners. First, it can come from a projection through reliance on the coercive force of the nation’s military (where the civilian elites enter into compact with the juntas and allow the military to intervene constantly in the political process).

It can also come from a projection through enthronement of a ubiquitous national bureaucracy (where the civilian politicians enter into compacts with the civil servants who are in turn given overriding administrative oversights over implementation of government policies and programs). Another pathway can be through adoption/imposition of a one-party system that forecloses all forms of alternative views in the national political space in strict deference to those of a ‘supremo’ national political figure head.
We all know that such un-conventional pathways to legitimation of civic authority to rule act to negate the very essence of liberal democracy originally prescribed by other scholars in the liberal tradition. And as it were, any form of social order not premised on the mutual consents of the people and composite ethnos, promises to be short-lived and would produce unfavourable outcomes that would further widen the existing gaps of social cleavages between the composite groups. This scenario is even made most critical when viewed against the backdrop of the eventuality that such lopsided dominance by one group over the others would always be interpreted by the other groups from the point of view of the pervasive primordial ethnic sentimentalities usually attached to any potential existential threats.

In my views, such an outcome portends to perpetually boil up the national political barometer. The ugly trends witnessed not too long ago in Cote D’Ivoire after demise of Houphet Boigny, in Kenya after Julius Nyrere, in Togo after Gnassingbe Eyadema, in Zaire after Mobutu Sesse Seko, in Senegal after Leopold Senghor and in Guinea after Sekou Toure – all attest to the faulty logic of overreliance on the coercive potentials/utilities of using state institutions as means to brutalize/terrorize a nation’s citizenry and their primary ethnos into civic acquiescence.

A seventh prescription by modernization theorists is that the civil society should be given a prominent role to play in the modernization/democratization processes (Harbeson., Rothchild., and Chazan, 1994). The assumption here is that, a vibrant civil society acts generally to energize the political process given the claimant that it allows a wide ambit for incorporation of other diverse alternative political views in the public space.

Again, we all know that, a general trend across Africa in the recent time vividly shows that civil societies are not fully representative of the peoples’ aspiration as they only tend to promote their own sectional interests often in conflict with the general aspirations of the citizenry. This is besides the fact that, the methodologies and operating logics of civil societies are anything but democratic anywhere in contemporary Africa.

One then wonders how civil society institutions in their present gross characterizations as authoritarian and dictatorial entities can be the primary promoters of democratic ideals in the African modern state as they are presently constituted. I argue instead in favour of a reliance only on the utilities of the other religious/cultural/ethnic group institutions to which the citizens presently willingly ascribe more strategic identities/sentimental attachments to as the most useful vehicles that ought to be exalted instead as the primary promoters of democratic ideals in Africa. Though, as argued in the foregoing, implementation of democracy anywhere across Africa, ought not to conform to the generic/straightjacket universalisms of Eurocentric idealisms if it were to succeed or flourish richly.

Another prescription of the modernization theorists is premised on the need to equilibrate the pervasive gender imbalances in Africa (Tripps, 2000). These scholars claim that the gross exclusion or marginalization of women from positions of authority in the public space, are the root-causes of the institutional decay and economic stagnations witnessed across Africa over time (Tripp, 2000; Tamale, 1999).

The assumptions here is that, women have innate characters to be overtly peaceable and a keen sense of dedication to duties which generally act as a plus for the quest for drastic reductions in social tensions in the polity. The logic here in this argument then is that, when more women are allowed to hold strategic positions of civic authority in the state, the economy grows exponentially because the political barometer tends to cool down appreciably on the long haul. This assumption links auspicious conditions of peaceability to the remote and immediate trajectories for sustainable national economic/political growth and development.

It is also a known fact that African women have been grossly marginalized institutionally in most state instances across Africa. Be that as it may, it is also true that, many African women have also recently successfully broken through to top positions of authority in their national affairs where they have been known to wield immense political power and authority - yet such states are still mired in poverty, corruption and institutional stagnation.

The fact is, no real changes have occurred even in those domains where women already exercise civic authority in the public space. As it seems, such an Eurocentric assumption here tends to conflate issues in Africa. For instance, there is no empirical proof that women have better edge over men in basic management/administrative skills. I argue instead that, rather the focus on women’s marginalization should be tackled from the point of view of how we can co-opt such valuable manpower resources (now willfully marginalized in the periphery) into the mainstream quest for sustainable national socio-economic emancipation/development of the modern African state.

It is true that, no state can afford to under-utilize its overall manpower/material potentials in its overall developmental drive. Be that as it may, even if we equilibrate the numbers of men and women in public positions of authority in Africa, without the cognate radical departures from such pervasive social cultures of public sphere corruption, theft of public funds and nepotism, no meaningful development can occur anywhere in Africa. Ideally speaking therefore, such a prescription portends to presumptuously also suggest that men are generically more corrupt than women in Africa – as recent trends have shown, this is far from the truth.

However, in this context, what is needed is a ‘social revolution’ in the general social orientations/mentality of Africans that seek to enthrone a rational work ethics and a peaceable modus of sociability between all composite group members in the state. And this should go beyond the ambience/strictures of the intense intergroup competitions that usually catalyze the corruption syndrome into the public space on the slightest excuse.
b) **Policy Relevance Theorists**  

Another variant of the Liberal school of thought on African discourse is ‘the policy relevance theory’ which has two sub-sects: the ‘political economy’ approach and the ‘public policy analysis’ approach. The political economy approach prescribes that, there is a dire need for African leaders to develop the mental capacities needed to rightly mix workable economic and political policies so as to be able to fully harness and indeed sustain any meaningful gains in civic governance processes (Bayart., Ellis., and Hibou, 1998).

The kinds of mix between economic and political policies that can work, from this perspective, are those in which leaders are able to make useable trade-offs between competing incentives/gains in the context of attaining rational/utilitarian outcomes (in political policy outcomes) and the best cost-effective choices/preferences (in economic policy) (Bayart, et al, 1998). The other sub-sect focuses on utilities of adopting useful formulas for ascertaining the interface between policy costs and benefits so as to enable African leaders to be in better stead to ‘rationally’ prosecute policies that portend to bear better dividends on the long haul for the state. I however argue that, a leader can only have liberty to act rationally when he has all operating variables in view and under his/her control. Africa is currently constricted by a series of vexatious externalities impinging on the leaders’ capacities/will to act. Therefore, in the presence of such externalities outside a leader’s civic authority/control, he tends to act irrationally – especially with a view to securing first his precarious grip on national power/authority. Therefore, such a methodological postulation seemingly assumes that African leaders can and would always act in isolation of other externalities that act adversely to constrict their liberties to determine their own policy formulation/implementation choices as well as been able to clearly predict their own policy outcomes. It is a fact that most African leaders, besides being self-centered/selfish, they are also known to be in some form of covert compacts with agents of global capitalism intent on manipulating affairs of the states in Africa to their own selfish benefits.

This scenario profits the external agents more as it act to guarantee them covert grip/control on civic authority in Africa since they also offer regime security in return. Bates (1981) and Van de Walle (2000) lucidly highlight such dilemma of decision making faced by African leaders in the post-Colonial era. I argue therefore that, save there is a radical overhaul of the structure of global capitalism that creates such obnoxious externalities, or at best, save African leaders find veritable ways and means to extract their states from the incumbent global capitalist arrangement, outcomes of their national policies would continue to be dependent on the general moods and sentimentalities of the hegemonic states in the capitalist core. As it were, because multiple externalities grossly impinge adversely on the domestic dynamics of the standard African state, policy outcomes have always not successfully tackled the medleys of deep seethed socio-economic and political problems in Africa overtime.

However, in the context of the second frame of analysis highlighted under the ‘policy relevance’ school – that is, scholars’ whose arguments are tied to the ‘policy analysis’ methodology, the general claimant here is that, African leaders should develop personal capacities to be able to successfully wade through the rigours of a cost-benefit analysis pertaining to their public policies with a view to ascertaining what policy choices could produce desired policy outcomes that best benefit or promote the long term goals of the government and the aspirations of the citizenry (Rothchild and Curry, 1979; Bayart., Ellis., and Hibou, 1998).

To achieve successes in these activities, this school postulates further that, there is a dire need for the elites to work out a feasible formula for the state to productively engage the various composite groups within the state and to also enable it to act in consonant with a state’s international collaborators/friends in the processes of formulating and implementing successful public policies (Rothchild and Olorunsola, 1986).

We ideally know that, a state can only act decisively in the ways and manners suggested here if a workable compact already exist between the elites and the people. From a critical point of view, we can recall vividly that, the logic of the post-Colonial African state is premised on the colonial permutations of ‘divide and rule’ which has helped to generate the kinds of immense inter-group/inter-class mistrusts witnessed in these locations over time. In the Anglophone zones, mutual contacts between the different ethnics were kept to the barest minimums by the Colonists – as they claimed at the time, this was for purposes of administrative expediencies. Some form of arbitrary/oppressive social class divisions were also enforced under colonial rule resulting in a great gulf between the masses and the elites even long after independence.

In the Lusophone and Francophone zones, the policy of ‘assimilados’/’assimilation’ respectively, have also acted to create deep cleavages between the Western educated elite class and the traditionalists. All these distrusts have been carried over to the post-colonial era and it would require a radical shift in the operating logic binding such groups together within each state instance. This would require outright consensual negotiations of all fundamental props of these states between the groups across the board - otherwise, any idea of such evolving compact promises to be a mere mirage. This is like belling the cart before the horse.
Interrogating African Discourse In The Critical Tradition

a) Marxist Internationalism

Generally speaking, the ideals of Karl Marx have fundamental influences in fomenting academic discourses on Africa in the critical tradition. A central theme of the critical tradition has been an attempt to devalue utilities of Western liberal idealism often promoted as veritable universal vehicles for the emancipation of African states from long years of European domination and exploitations. This group however accepts universalism of the Western liberal notion of the ‘stages of growth’ as been critical for Africans to mimic. The assumption here is that, Africa can be best positioned to recover if only leaders in the continent can collectively decide instead, to ape other radical European mentalities that abstract sharply from the earlier mentalities prescribed by scholars in the liberal tradition.

Such an alternate view assumes that, for development to be total in Africa, all states on the continent must act collectively to uproot all vestiges of Western colonialism/imperialism in each state instance. And to achieve these objectives, scholars in this tradition also suggest that, instead of mimicking Western liberal institutions and idealisms, Africans should look eastwards for useful inspirations from the rich arrays of socialist ideals and institutions hitherto implemented in places like Russia, China and Cuba. As it were, the general claimant here is that, African states should also be subjected to the same generic economic ‘growth stages’ charted by the West – as the argument goes here.

In addition, the critical school of thought also highlights adversities of the multiple externalities that impinge adversely on the growth and development prospects of African states. Two views of such externalities are dominant here: first, one view invokes the implications of perpetuity of global dominance and exploitations of the South by the North in the intricately woven web of global capitalism into which Africa has been seemingly inextricably trapped courtesy of prolonged European Colonial rule. Second, the other view tries to narrate the implications of the perpetuity of external manipulations and destabilizing interferences by the North in the internal affairs of the South long after attainment of political independence. There are however, three dominant frames of analysis in the critical tradition on the discourse of Africa that highlights the dualisms of such externalities. These are: a) the dependency theory, b) the Neo-Marxist theory, and c) the Neo-Colonial theory.

In the context of the critical tradition on African discourse, Rodney (1972) is best known for capturing in lucid terms the far reaching implications of the unbridled European exploitations on the overall developmental prospects of the African states. This is made in the context of his postulations of the dependency theory and how it relates to trends across post-colonial Africa. Other frames of analyses highlighting some other critical aspects of the postulations of the mainframe dependency theory are also captured by Arghiri (1972) and Wallerstein (1979; 1980).

However, the general conclusion drawn here by dependency theorists is that, Africa’s pathetic poor state of economic growth and development, owe deep roots in the strategic location of Africa in the global capitalist periphery where it is condemned to suffer perpetual exploitation and domination at the hands of states in the core and semi-periphery. Europe – in this context, is then made complicit in the ‘development of underdevelopment’ in Africa as one of the many formulas needed to profit the core at the expense of the peripheral states.

To emancipate Africa, dependency theorists propose that, there is an urgent need for African states to break free from the apron strings of the global capitalist system. This is a move that portends to totally eliminate their undue dependence on the North for their survival. This is however premised on the logic that, states in the South would have to first subscribe to the ideals of socialism as a working state ideology and they are then to take a collective action that would eventually lead to the overthrow of the global capitalist system.

In as much as one can concur here that, there is a dire need to urgently alter the precarious position of Africa at the fringes of the global capitalist system, one needs to also acknowledge the fact that implementation of such a broad based collective actions by all states in the periphery portends to create logistic problems. For one, not all states in the periphery will be so predisposed to buy easily and at the same time into such socialist idealisms without adequate incentives and disincentives (for non-conformity) that can be offered by a hegemonic power in the socialist realm.

Besides, no such power has emerged yet anywhere in the socialist world with the de facto material capacities needed to project such broad-based global benevolence required to dispense the kinds of attractive incentives/disincentives that will predispose all states in the African region – for instance, to conform to such socialist idealisms as required. In addition, coordination of state actions in this area would also prove problematic any day as there are really no credible continental-wide institutional bases to achieve this yet – the African Union currently has no matured teeth yet to bite yet.

This situation is again aggravated by the fact that, states on the continent – owing to a series of European disparate colonial legacies and hangs-over, tend to differ strategically and have also tended to pursue disparate national interests often conflicting on the international stage. In addition, pervasive European colonial legacies/sentimentalities have also created deep political/cultural cleavages notably at the roots of the incumbent
state of policy inertias suffered currently by the continental body – the African Union. Such a broad-based consensus would therefore be hard to attain in Africa any time soon, even though this is not totally impossible to achieve.

**b) Neo-Marxist Scholars**

Markovitz (1977) also captures in clear terms the neo-Marxist postulations about Africa. This view out-rightly rejects the postulation of a ‘development of underdevelopment’ thesis as proposed by the dependency theorists. His argument instead is premised on the notion that, even though capitalist exploitations have been very profound in the South, its effects have not been that permanent in the South as currently being portrays by some mainstream Marxist scholars. Neo-Marxists therefore make allusions to recent changes in the semi-periphery where such states like China, India, Indonesia and Brazil – hitherto in the peripheral region, have successfully toed independent pathways of growth and development inside the global capitalist system resulting in their phenomena graduation closer inward towards the core of global capitalism as emerging industrial nations.

In this context, the proposition is that, states in the periphery should likewise explore other indigenous ways and means needed to enhance their capacities to become principal modulators of the ensuing social exchanges consummated across their borders between the dominant interests groups in the domestic and international settings. And one way of doing this, it is suggested here, could entail a scenario where the ruling elites can be positioned strategically to negotiate workable compacts between themselves and the local classes as a way to buoy the strategic profile of their states internationally. This is with a view to empowering the state to counter more effectively antics of the exploitative interests of the multiple groups waiting on the wings to exploit/dominant Africa at the international level (Leys, 1974).

To me, it would seem, postulations of the neo-Marxists seemingly assume presumptuously also that, the African states are ideally homogenous constructs that can easily begin to ape the trends prescribe by them to buttress their arguments. But this is far from the truth. China for instance has been held down as a unified state under long years of an authoritarian communist system that has thus far been able to mitigate effects of such externalities in its internal dynamics. The state in this context, have acted successfully as a unitary agent in the international system because of its hard line communist political ideological leanings.

India has also thrived in some unique way as a compact/unitary state actor on the foreign scene because it has successfully been able to unite all shades of religious and ethnic cleavages under the incumbent autonomous social arrangements as enhanced by its rich democratic experience spanning over long periods of time. Indonesia on its own, also boasts of a rich culture of inter-group/racial social co-existence that empowers the state to act decisively as and when it want. This is however, in spite of recent emergence of some shades of religious discontents in some minority regions in the state.

However, in each of these instances, the state is presented as a compact construct that credibly project ideals of the state as a unitary actor on the world stage. This is in addition to the national governments that are cast in the lights of having capacities to project their authority as and when desired credibly across their vast sovereign territories as well as on the world stage. Such solid state statuses stem from the fact that, the elites have been able to subsume their differences and have been able to harness their competing aspirations into collective/consensual national constructs that are effectively projected as the overall state’s strategic ‘national interests’ on the international plane.

In the converse, I argue that the present state structures and the ever widening gap of social cleavages existing between the ethnic elites in the African states, act to diminish any prospects of state capacity building needed to present such similar formidable counterpoises to the exploitative antics of the agents of capitalism on the global stage. Besides, it is a fact too that, most African states are already tottering on the verge of systemic collapse due to effects of long-term aping of Eurocentric ideals in grossly inauspicious/incompatible social milieus. Consequently, all sorts of shadow state structures have propped up within these states and have since posed stiff challenges to the de jure sovereign authority of the state. Thus, by prosecuting such a prescription in the African context, this portends to also be very problematic save the foundational props of these states are urgently renegotiated with a view to enthroning a consensually evolved compacts between elites of the composite ethnos in each state instance on one hand and between them and their people on the other hand.

**c) Neo-Colonial Theorists**

Neo-colonialism is another domain of the academic discourse on Africa in the critical tradition. Amin (1973; 1990) presents vividly the postulations of the Neo-colonial school of thought in the critical tradition. In doing so, he derides postulations advanced by Dependency, Marxist and the World Systems theories and blandly dismisses them as too abstract to be of any useful import in the quest to effectively tackle Africa’s medley of socio-economic and political problems.
In his postulations, he highlights the fact that, during Colonial rule, the European Colonists deliberately foisted on the African states mono-product national economies that now act during the post-independence era to hinder prospects for and the need to broaden the base of national economic growth and developments into other facets of national endeavours. This is highlighted by a general failure of most African economies to diversify their strategic national economic bases with proceeds earned from such dominant mono-product activities many years after attainment of political independence.

The larger picture painted here is that, the quest for national industrialization in this region - for instance, has become effectively foreclosed by such lopsided Colonial economic arrangements. In addition, such arrangements - scholars in this domain claim further, act also to create perpetual mentalities of external dependency (for foreign loans and investments) which invariably mitigate the overall drive towards sustainable national economic growth and development through a dedicated drive towards domestic industrialization.

A veritable way out of such a quagmire would then require that, African leaders should initiate and prosecute what these scholars termed ‘auto-centric or self-reliant pathways’ to national growth and development like China, Brazil and India did recently. This will require them to begin to pull out at different stages from the global capitalist economy. Such a prescription is made incidental on the assumptions that, there are ideally many other auspicious pathways of economic growth and development that could obligate African leaders to re-construct indigenous systems or modes of economic production and social acquisition that can be made to run parallel with the existing global capitalist paradigms.

The way I see it, postulations of this school assume that all African leaders will always be highly literate and knowledgeable in the basics of macro-economic designs that would invariably allow them the liberties/intellectual capacities to chart fool-proof novel pathways for their own national economic growth and development. This prescription tends to also trivialize the embedded nature of such externalities in the fabrics of the standard African states. Even if given the fact that such hard tasks of social economic re-construction are often delegated to domestic experts, where the elites in power generally lack the intellectual capacities to initiate - talk less of being able to comprehend them, such strategic novelties cannot create any tangle gains no matter how hard we may try.

All across Africa, incidences of emergence of half-literate elites on the national political stage have become quite rife in the recent time. The far reaching implications of such trends are further highlighted by the high incidents of failures in public sphere policies that owe deep roots in the awry manners of their conceptions/formulation and implementations. This is further compounded by the fact that the African states have been inextricably covenanted to a seeming perpetuity of servitude to originators of such externalities.

In conclusion here, I argue that, given the foregoing narratives, it is obvious that Africa has been misrepresented over time by scholars and pundits alike who have notably tendentiously painted a grim, gloomy and lopsided picture of Africa that is cast in the molds of a series of derogatory imageries with the intent to generally scare away genuine external partners/investors alike from doing businesses in the continent. When you scare foreign investors away like this with such spurious misconceptions/denigrations/stereotypes/fallacies, you invariably tendentiously attack the foundations of a state’s national economic development and its innate potentials for an eventual quest for national industrialization.

The inauspicious fixations of the incumbent exploitative global capitalist arrangements, acting as constraining externalities and as they currently impinge adversely on Africa’s growth and development potentials, can be tackled from many perspectives. First, African states need to be structurally reformatted with civic consensus as the basic undercurrents. Second, we can explore ways and means to compel the erstwhile European colonists to begin to take full responsibilities and become directly accountable for their long drawn affront on the continent, its peoples and its vast natural resources during the elongated periods of slave trade and Colonialism.

Devising legal teeth to extract compliance could suffice here with evolution of relevant international conventions on ‘the adversities of slave trade, colonialism as adjuncts to gross crimes against humanity’. Third, a blanket cancellation of the multiples of odious national/sovereign debts impinging harshly on the overall economic wellbeing of these states on the continent, should be implemented as a veritable starter in this process of reparation of the ‘paradise lost’ in Africa owing to long years of slavery and colonial exploitations. Fourth and in the extreme case scenario, the European interlopers should be made to offer official apologies and compensate Africans morally and materially for their rude interruptions on the continent. All these measures, I argue here, constitute veritable ways and means needed to create a level playing field for Africa/Africans to re-assert itself/themselves to their rightful place on the world stage as the cradle of human civilization and the pristine bastion of human posterity.

REFERENCES


Avineri, Shlomo. (1968). karl Marx On Colonialism And Modernization: His Disputes And Other Writings on China, India, Mexico, the Middle East, and North Africa, New York: Doublesday.


