



## POSTCOLONIALISM: RESPONSES FROM AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

*The British Empire covered a significant part of the globe, Africa being one of its major colonies. The emergent postcolonial agenda in African intellectual thinking is being reflected by the colonial legacies that have shaped Africa's subjectivities and societal structures. The study of the continent today has been drawn by the 'idea of Africa' mostly drawn from colonial writings. This paper attempts to examine the nature of post colonialism and its effects on Africa, its culture, society and foreign policy. It attempts to explain the colonial hangovers which continue in African society at large and how penetrative it has been. This paper further seeks to explain the atrocities done by the British during the colonial era and the continuation of it in terms of neo colonialism. Post colonial theory attempts to be sympathetic to the aspirations of the oppressed and give voice to the silenced. With this thought in mind one of the most important discussions of post colonialism comes from the British colonies, namely, Africa and India. As a plethora of articles have been written on India, this paper attempts to focus more on Africa and its experiences with it being a post colonial nation. Africa is a resource rich nation and yet suffers at the hands of the developed world. Many a times unstable government is also to be blamed for the abysmal predicament of the natives. Referring to papers on post colonialism this paper attempts to understand and explain how the natives being free from the clutches of imperialism can innovate their own standards of oppression.*

## **INTRODUCING POSTCOLONIALISM**

Post colonialism might have become a pejorative term for the colonizers but has been a ventriloquist for many erstwhile colonies who have attempted to use it in order to provide a correct picture of their society and culture. Edward Said revolutionised the term ‘post colonialism’ in his celebrated book *Orientalism* published in 1978. Foucauldian notion “Knowledge is not innocent, it is operated by power” summarizes the concept of post colonialism. In simple terms post colonial theory is a critical theory that deals with literary and cultural studies of the colonised countries. To the dismay of the European colonisers, proponents of the post colonial theory attempts to celebrate the cultural identities of the oppressed, examines the authorship of the colonial powers who to justified colonialism by taking the onus of civilising the Orient and thus consolidating the culture of the Occident as superior, focuses primarily on the way in which the literature of the colonizing agency have distorted the realities and experiences, language and images of the colonised.

Noting the importance of the concept Dennis Walder has elaborated that “Postcolonial theory is needed because it has a subversive posture towards the canon, in celebrating the neglected or marginalized, bringing with it a particular politics, history and geography”. Bill Ashcroft, G.Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have elaborated the meaning of the term in their book titled *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* as “Post colonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing response to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post independence nations and communities”. Post colonial critique must never be reduced to identity politics, nativism, or unexamined multiculturalism (Birla 2010). With this thought in mind, I would explain the post colonial experiences of Africa in general.

## **WHAT’S IN A NAME**

To begin with, Africa is considered to be a ‘dark continent’. Pandit Nehru rightly had quoted once ‘Probably no people in the world have suffered so much, and been exploited so much in the past as the people of Africa’ (Young 2001). Several intellectual African scholars of freedom struggle days had written profusely about anti-colonialism like C.L.R. Jammes

*History of Negro Revolt 1938*, Rotberg and Mazrui, James Horton *Wet African Countries and Peoples: A V indication of the African Race 1868*, Casely Hayford *Ethiopia Unbound 1911*. One important feature of postcolonial African studies has been the concept of Pan Africanism. Pan- Africanism is nothing but cooperation and solidarity among African countries and societies to end racial discrimination against the African Diaspora. The 20<sup>th</sup> century is witnessing the emergence of Pan Africanism in the establishment of the African Union. According to Ramon Grosfoguel at the apex of this truncated and 'Eurocentric universalism' and global social order is the USA and the rest of the western world, and at the subaltern level is the global South in general and Africa in particular (Gatsheni 2014). The 'Berlin consensus' of 1884 projected Africa as a dark continent which had to be penetrated and civilised by the whites. Adekeye Adebajo talks about the 'curse of Berlin' that continues to shape African's contemporary status (Adebajo 2010). One can actually analyse the abysmal situation in which most African nations continue to live. Africa is vulnerable to the largest number of HIV AIDS and many tropical diseases. Somehow the world has not done enough justice with Africa. We as citizens of the world have onus towards each other. This lack of concern is reflected in the absence of confabulations about Africa in international politics and therefore the need to set up agencies for Africa which has been rightly summed up by Tim Murithi's idea of Pan Africanism in terms of what he called 'stages in the institutionalization of Pan Africanism' (Gatsheni 2001). The Organisation of the African Unity (OAU) formed in 1963 represented the wishes of Pan Africanism. Under it Ghana under Nkrumah favoured a radical approach towards institutionalisation of Pan-Africanism including the establishment of a strong African unity. The Cold War put hindrances to this dream. However, OAU was successful in its political and economic orientation to some length.

The African Union was formed in July 2002, was indeed a follow up after OAU. The organisation has a more practical bent of mind. It stressed on the needs to create institutions that would work for the development of Africa and its people, raise its voice in the global North about its onus towards uplifting Africa from a dilapidated condition, and make bilateral and multilateral ties that could ensure economic prosperity. A plethora of institutions emerged as a result of this namely Pan –African Parliament (PAP), Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the Union Government for Africa. These institutions were created as a result of unequal encounters between Africa and Europe. It was a postcolonial

response from Africa to Europe mirroring the atrocities done on Africa and how Europe can actually help these agencies build a healthy nation.

### **AFRICAN LIBERATION AN INTERCONTINENTAL MOVEMENT, ISN'T IT?**

All of us are aware about the national liberation movement that took place in most of the British colonies after World War II. India, Maldives, Africa to name few. However, one interesting aspect of the African liberation struggle was that it's nature was not limited to the African continent per say. Its synonymous implications were seen in other continents of the world mainly Europe and the United States. History does not allow us to divide postcolonial diaspora and indigenous African politics today. Nkrumah rightly observes 'The Black Power Movement in the USA, and the struggles of people of African descent in the Caribbean, South America, form an integral part of the African politico-military struggle' (Young 2001). The influence was such that resident of other countries empathized with African liberation movement. Marcus Garvey of Caribbean origin established the first African homeland for African Americans in Liberia. Carvey's Black Nationalism was an instant hit with the people of African origin. Mussolini's actions became an urgent issue in Africa. The invasion of Abyssinia had an a radicalization effect on the African community (Young 2001). Not to forget US President Abraham Lincoln annihilated slavery and bonded labour. This brought respite to millions of African slaves and bountiful blessings for President Lincoln. Today many successful singers, actors, and of course Nobel Laureate erstwhile U.S. President Barack Obama owe their origins to Africa. The postcolonial response of African generation today can be felt worldwide by acknowledging the fact that how people from African origin have shaped the world politics and culture at large. He will be dearly missed world over.

### **DEMAND FOR A SECOND INDEPENDENCE!**

If we compare India with Africa and the process after decolonisation one can certainly conclude that India has progressed and is a mature democracy today, comparatively more peaceful than Africa. The process of decolonisation was not an easy affair in Africa. To our dismay the colonial boundaries were naturally and legitimately accepted by the colonised. These boundaries have become a bone of contention not only in Africa but also in India, China and Pakistan. The ethno regional strife in the Sudan, Nigeria, the Congo have created hostile situations not only for the Africans residing their but for residents of other nations too. Operation Sankat Mochan was deftly carried out by the Indian soldiers to rescue Indians in South Sudan in 2015. The immaturity and lack of adept knowledge to deal with boundary

issues at that point in time by our national leaders have continued to disrupt peace in many colonised nations. In the 1950s many African territories were not expected to become states even by their indigenous elites. The future of Francophone Africa appeared to lie in large federations within the French Union; the Portuguese were incorporating their African territories into Greater Portugal, the British bounded the colonies of Nyasaland and the Northern Rhodesia (Waites 2012).

Yet another aspect of absence of peace is due to the lack of mature leaders and absence of democracy. Dictatorship, military rule, civil war, ethnic violence, and genocide is the rule of the day. This has been a colonial hangover. The case of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria reflect the colonial hangover and this has created a hostile environment for Africans. The Izala Movement in Nigeria pledged for bringing civil peace in the country by rejecting the Constitution of the day. The 2007 Nigerian election was flawed due to lack of transparency and fraud according to the Human Rights Watch (Waites 2012). Similarly, in Zaire in the 1980s Mobutu became dictatorial and run monopoly shops, propagated smuggling of coffee from Uganda in exchange for vehicles. The transition to democracy was arbitrary and corrupt and yet there was no relief. In Congo, Joseph Kabila and his chief rival Jean Pierre Bemba maintained their own military troops. Kabila who won the 2001 elections built an authoritarian presidency which was unsustainable in the longer run. Ethnic violence in Rwanda and Burundi are another area of concern. The fight between the Hutu and the Tutsi tribe in Burundi and the genocide in Rwanda clearly indicates lack of a mature government there calling the attention of the United Nation several times. ‘Tutsi’ means a person rich in cattle ‘Hutu’ means a subordinate person. When Europeans came the two tribes lived a normal life where Tutsi employed the Hutus. Hutus simultaneously were allowed to enter the Christian missionary schools along with the Tutsis which was unacceptable by the latter. This step towards creating equality actually distanced the two groups further and continues till date. Macamo (2005) argues how the people of Mozambique explored Christianity as put forth by the Europeans and distanced themselves from their own tribal culture. Seeing these problems which are colonial hangovers one cannot deny the fact that African people need a fresh lease of life. They have to be freed from the various disputes related to borders, ethnicity, dictatorship, civil strife and their demand for independence from these atrocities is well justified.

## **AND THE SOLUTION COULD BE**

Firstly, help in terms of economic aid has to come from the western world. Yet another colonial aspect was the Structural Assessment Programmes where financial aid was given in lieu of democracy. This must be done away with. The western world particularly Europe and the U.S.A. have to understand that they and only they are responsible for the abysmal predicament of Africa and they must come out with plans to help Africa come out of this situation. Second, the developing nations like India can have more projects related to IT, medicine, and education in Africa. The 2015 Africa India Summit was successful but its full potential can be realized only if practical solutions are discussed for the development of Africa. Third, African citizens must show maturity in electing their leaders, discuss concept like Right to Information which is vogue in India to tackle corrupt officials, engage in mature and issue centric polemical debates.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, I would say that the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the Millennium Development Goals of a hunger and poverty free world, food security, women empowerment cannot be complete if Africa is ignored. A majority of African population suffers from life threatening diseases and this can be helped by providing free medical aid, economic aid, nutrition supplements to the poor and needy. However, the silver lining in the cloud is that a many programmes have been launched by the United Nations in Africa to deal with situation. Similarly many African students find their education destination in India, USA and Europe. The wonderful news is that a special educational centre for African studies has come up in various universities across the world (Delhi University, JNU have centres for African studies). Post colonialism has given a way out to many thinkers and scholars' world over to see reality from a different light. As Africa progresses the world too will progress in a better capacity where all can mutually and above all respectfully coexist.

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