

Historicizing European Philosophies and Diplomatic Initiatives in Africa, 1500-1960: The Nigerian Experience.

By

Osaih Rufus, PhD

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.

Email: rufydaddy@gmail.com

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Maekae Job, PhD

Tel: 08036620128

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies

**Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, P.M.B. 5047. Port
Harcourt**

Abstract

The article analyses European philosophies and mythologies against Africans which provided the basis for the justification of European diplomatic initiatives, viz.: slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism and multinational corporations in Africa. Academic historians and Africanists used oral sources as a critical vantage point and history as a revolutionary launching pad for the deconstruction of the pathological imperial construct that denigrated Africanness and undermined African revered achievements that stood tall in the annals of history. The work juxtaposed the paradigm of eurocentric and afrocentric approach in the reconstruction of diplomatic initiatives in Africa. We employed interdisciplinary approach to data collection which weaved together relevant disciplines, perspectives and effective utilization of secondary sources for the reconstruction of historical realities. Though, Africans succeeded in the demythologization of European stereotypes about African past but western diplomatic initiatives saw Africa as a treasure trove of resource exploitation for the benefits of European and their industries which led to the development of underdevelopment.

Keywords: Historicize, European, Philosophy, Diplomatic, initiatives.

Introduction

Prior to the pre-European contact, Africa had viable and superlative socio-cultural, economic, political, military, philosophic, religious and diplomatic structures that were able to meet individual and communal needs. These institutions were denigrated by European scholars and metropolitan initiatives led to the creation of slave trade, legitimate commerce, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism as a solution to their perennial poverty. Diplomatic initiative is the application of relevant forces for change and development for those who originated the thought while for those who lacked the power of thinking, it has become a curse. European diplomatic initiatives in Nigeria was the movement of people (labour), ideas/knowledge (technology), goods (manufactures) and money (capital) across international borders for the purpose of profit.

Eurocentric and Afrocentric Encounters

Eurocentric History: It is an imperial genre of history which posited that pre-European Africa was of no historical consequences and that Africa history could only be studied from its contact with Europe. Change has been enforced from outside, which is a theory of diffusion. Eurocentric conceptualization and offensive histories of Africa was internationalized to justify European philosophy of imperialism in Africa. Imperialism was justified on the false philosophy that the Negroes were people without history and that Africans were children without mother, who needs the powerful guidance of Europeans who had wealth of accumulated knowledge, technology, and experience. The second reason was to perpetrate the myth and philosophy of racial superiority over Africans. One of the archangels of British imperialism in Africa, Sir Arthur Richards, said that “the African has had self-government. Until about fifty years ago, he had it for countless centuries and all it brought him was blood-stained chaos, a brief, insecure life, haunted by fear, in which evil tradition and custom held him enslaved to superstition, disease, squalor, and ruthless cruelty, even to his family and friends. For countless centuries, why all the pageant of history swept by, African remained unmoved-in primitive savagery”. Sir Arthur Kirby, Commissioner for British East Africa in London said in 1958, “in the last sixty years, East Africa has developed from a completely primitive country, in many ways more backward than the stone age”. The primitive perspective of Africa was because of the cultural arrogance of Europeans which was mainly based on

pseudo-scientific racism and the assumption of universal white man's burden, led Europeans to equate civilization to Europeanization. Within philosophical perspective, the champion of imperial history became the means and worthy stimuli for development in the world and anything consequential outside and inside, was European propelled. Basil Davidson in *Old Africa Rediscovered*, said that wherever anything remarkable or inexplicable was turned up in Africa, a whole array of non-African (or at any rate non-Negro) peoples were dragged in to explain Trevor Roper one of the bulwarks of imperial history said that any academic investigation into African studies before the coming of the Europeans was to pry into the "unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe".

Basing on this, they rolled out litanies of expose literature and historiography that saw Africa from the "outside in" instead of "inside out" (Crowder, 1968:10-15, Hopkins, 1973:9-10, Andah, 1988:10, Fage, 1981:25, Uya, 1974:1, Onwubiko, 1982:v, Enemugwem, 2012:7, Osaih, 2020: 207). This Eurocentric genre of imperial history was one of the diplomatic ploys of the European scholars that captured Africa with extraordinary strangeness, cynicism, derogation, primitivism, barbarity, darkness, and other scathing varied imaginaries of Africa in European historiography. This diplomatic initiative gave Africans the trauma of psychological pulverization and inferiority complex over European superiority. Eurocentric scholars like George W. Hegel, Hugh Trevor Roper, Arnold Toynbee, Charles Gabriel Seligman and many others propagated the historical backwardness of Africa. Classical exemplars that epitomized imperial history are stated below: Africa as "new caught, sullen peoples, half devil and half child". "They are beasts, headless dragons with eyes on their breast". George Hegel wrote that "Africa was no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit". Trevor Roper saw "Africa as darkness and that history cannot be created out of darkness". This was the reason behind the apocryphal of Trevor Roper who said that an academic investigations in African studies before the coming of the Europeans was to "pry into the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe". A. P. Newton wrote, history begins when men begin to write and without written record in Africa, it justifiably means that "Africa has no history" Gabriel Seligman said "the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites". Arnold Toynbee accepted the fact that Africa has

history but her history is colonial history because of no large polities and religion (Enemugwem, 2012:9). David Hume, a Scottish philosopher said, "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the white. There was never a civilized nation of neither any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst, no arts, no science" (Erim, 1997:332).

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Citing the numerous statements above is to demonstrate the gravity to which African history encountered the monumental distortions and ridicules of European scholars, colonial administrators, adventurers and racists. Theories like evolutionism, Marxism and diffusionism are metropolitan initiatives to justify all their heinous, diabolical and humanitarian disasters meted out to Africans. From the ideas of Charles Darwin, J. D. Morgan and Karl Marx maintained that societies organized within the framework of nation-state and industrial capitalism represented the most advanced form of human civilization (Sheldon, 1977:133). Apologists of this perspective opined that it was the God-ordained right of the higher civilization to salvage the Dark Continent in order to bring prosperity and progress to all parts of Africa. This intellectual snobbery was expressed in terms of "Whiteman's Burden" or what the French referred to as "Civilizing Mission". These European absurdities, varied misconceptions and apocryphal over pristine African culture history warranted the presence of western human and capital resources in Africa as a deliberate response to redeem Africa from savagery and eternal damnation. Explorers, traders and missionaries became the prelude of slave trade, legitimate commerce, colonial imperialism and neo-colonialism. This European jingoism and diplomatic initiative presented Africa as a people without culture, history, ethics, religion, diplomacy, politics and socioeconomic lifestyles. This intellectual ignorance of African culture opened up all kinds of rationalization for savage exploitation that followed thereafter. This denigration invited whole lots of resistances and displays of African accomplishments, beginning from the revolutionary and pioneer academic discourse from the exasperated Kenneth Onwuka Dike, an erudite historian. Apart from pioneer academic work, African writers, intellectuals and some politicians including Nnamdi Azikiwe, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, Nelson Mandela and many others stepped into the protest by stepping back into the "era of purity" of Africa's past

(Achebe, 2012:54). Some of the works were glorification of African past, destitute of scholarly philosophy.

Afrocentric History: It is the history of Africa written from the perspectives of Africans. This type of writing of African past was centred on African history, culture, and philosophy; and scholarship became a valid and indispensable tool of unveiling African past. The concept of Afrocentricism is a revolutionary paradigm shift that asserted African ideals, values and culture as against imperial history. It was a time when African scholars took revolutionary step to rewrite African history by deemphasizing colonial historiography using oral sources and interdisciplinary approach to the study of society. According to Oshadare (2007) African history was seen and written in the context of the African perspective which incorporated Africanists views from Europe, America and other parts of the globe. Prominent among the revolutionary step taken by local historians to rewrite Africa history was Jacob U. Egharevba, *A. Short History of Benin* (1968), a chronicle of biographies of Benin rulers and European interference that ended the reign of *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. The work(s) of local historians and African nationalists were described as "historiography of self-assertion" or "drum and trumpet history". Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, a pioneer academic historian entered the scene with his path-breaking seminal work to counter the pernicious libel against Africa. His work, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (1956).

European Philosophies and Diplomatic Initiatives in Africa

In the 15th century, the Europeans diplomatically developed a trade in human cargoes called the Slave Trade that transported Africans to West Indies to work in European plantations for the benefit and profit of European class who originated and supervised the trade. These Africans worked from early morning till late in the evening with no rest and food and where they lived in poor, grotesque, insanitary and ill-fated huts. This transatlantic slave trade saw the forcible export of about fifteen million able-bodied men of Africans from 1450 to 1900. This inhuman commerce and labour exerted in the European colonies of the New World helped Europe to industrialize leading to the famous Industrial Revolution of 1777. This period of savage exploitation by the slave racketeers created huge wealth for the European class but for the Africans, they were relegated to the

background developmentally. According to Osaih (2020:216), emanating from the genre of radical history, “slave trade was a time Africa lost an inestimable value and vibrant manpower to the Europeans. A nation without manpower is outside the gamut of development. Since Africa lost this vitally important resource, a great watershed and gap was created. This gap has not been filled ever. This inhuman trade marked a specific historical period when Africa dropped and lost out of the race of development and headed to underdevelopment”. Rodney (1972:94) opined that the exploitation of Africa and African labour continued to be a source for the accumulation of capital to be re-invested in Western Europe. This was African contributions to the overall development of Europe and the underdevelopment of Africa. The exchange of African slaves for European goods was lopsided, un-altruistic and confectionaries like mirrors, liquors, caps, walking sticks, arms etc. Liquor and its horrendous effects have not really left Africans till date. After greater consumption of liquor by African capitalist class that served as the middlemen to Europeans, their warriors raided communities for slaves, this instigated inter-ethnic wars. The rampart nature of lethal weapons in contemporary Africa that has permeated into the political economy of Africa is a retrospection of arms race in Africa during the slave trade era. Asuk (2018:89-107) historicized the phenomenon and impacts of arm race in the Niger Delta. When the campaign for the abolition of slave trade mounted, the humanitarians and the evangelicals resorted to diplomacy and the use of force to abolish the inhuman cargoes (Orugbani, 2005:40). With regard to diplomatic initiative, the British, pioneer of abolition negotiated treaties banning slave commerce with recalcitrant countries which had complied with the verdict. Spain, Portugal, Brazil and other countries that continued to trade in slaves with the Niger Delta middlemen were jealous of the British naval and industrial powers and had inkling of the British humanitarian intentions as a subterfuge for British economic self-interest These treaties were also entered into with the Delta rulers and payment of subsidies would be reciprocated if the Niger Delta rulers complied with Anti-Slave Campaign. King Dappa Pepple , Obi Ossai of Aboh and Calabar people signed the treaty. In spite of the diplomatic initiative of treaty making, the Delta rulers still continued to raid and sell slaves to those European who were willing to buy. As regards to atavism, Britain stationed a detachment of the Royal Navy (West African or Preventive Squadron) to checkmate and seize ships engaged in slave trade (ibid:41-42). The tripartite effect of British pressure, gunboat diplomacy and

subsidies to Delta rulers made the Niger Delta city-states to switch to legitimate commerce, another diplomatic initiative for tropical raw materials. This legitimate commerce led to communal conflicts and ultimately wars among the city-states and their hinterland neighbour (Kalabari-Engenni War 1864). The industrialization of Britain and other European countries needed raw materials which only Africa can supply. This was the root of all international diplomatic and military configuration led by Britain, the premier industrialized nation to institute the legitimate trade in agricultural produce. The Europeans were more interested in securing raw materials for their emerging industries and whooping outlets for their manufactured goods and also to invest surplus capital for the repatriation of the profit to their countries. This led to diplomatic encouragement for Africans to remain in Africa to organize them to supply the European factories with raw inputs they needed and to consume more and more of the products of these factories. This trade according to African scholars, it was lopsided, exploitative, and unequal designed to satisfy the needs of Europe and to impoverish Africa (Rodney, 1972, Ake, 1981, Njoku, 1996, Okorobia, 1999, Banigo, 2006, Jaja, 2004, Ibulubo, 2007, Epele, 2010, Orugbani, 2010, Alapiki, 2015, Naanen, 2015, Ekekwe, 2019, Osaih, 2020). This era culminated to the eventual colonization of the Niger Delta which added to another untold plunder and looting, the economics of exploitation.

Colonialism was another international diplomatic initiative that consolidated unequal exchange in various and more sophisticated ways of exploitation and profiteering. The amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914, which was mainly done to craft the Nigerian state for administrative convenience and also to continue European economic exploitation in Africa. This large edifice of a “geographically lopsided, ethnically incongruous and administrative absurd” became a great challenge for Lord Lugard. How to fix an effective political control to facilitate economic exploitation of its multiple economic potentials and without an effective political suzerainty, it would be practically impossible for Britain to maximize its capitalist bid. The British arch-colonizer, Lord Lugard, an agent of the colonial bourgeoisie class had the responsibility to fix this imperial mission of economic exploitation in the country. Lord Lugard in his bid for excessive ambition and power, refused the British government the diplomatic initiative to send battery of colonial officers to assist in

the imperial mission, but Lord Lugard declined and informed London of an effective indigenous pattern of rulership that was cost effective, adaptable to colonial administration and self-financing called the indirect rule, a system which used the pre-existing political institution to govern the people with the white serving as watchdogs. This effective administration which transcended the former politically autonomous village worked in the North because of its sophisticated centralized authority exercised by the Islamic rulers. In the Yoruba axis, indirect rule recorded meager success because of its semi-centralized government that had the measures of checks and balances while in the Igbo; it was an abysmal fiasco because of its highly amorphous, sophisticated acephalous society (Osaih, 2007: 38-39). The essence of establishing effective political administration was to maintain social stability and peace as anything contrary to making use of local administration was considered to causing mayhem, thereby obstructing their exploitative doctrinaire tendencies (ibid, 2007:40). The creation of warrant chiefs was a diplomatic ploy that served as a conduit pipe for exploitation and it also helped in the accomplishment of capitalist design. This was the reason why the warrant chief wielded arbitrary powers, became tyrannical and unpopular. It was these unpopular chiefs that introduced taxation and other stringent measures that generated the inappropriate epitomization of Aba Women Riot, the “toast of Nigeria social history”. Lord Lugard, an adherent to the Victorian notion of taxation said in 1906, “there is no civilized state in the world that where (direct) taxation has not been found to be a necessity and African communities which aspire to be regarded as civilized must share the common burden of civilization”. Lord Lugard saw taxation as a triple-edged weapon, viz: as a stimulus to production, source of revenue for colonial administration and effective development of indirect rule system (Crowder, 1968:206). This revenue generation through taxation, would provide the needed development in the colony and diplomatically implied that the nationalists seeing for independence, that without tax, there can be no treasury and without treasury no eventual measure of self-rule. Nigeria was created for British trade not for nation-building and the establishment of a modern economy (Naanen, 2015:26). This avowed doctrinaire aim of exploitation led to the reluctance to develop the industrial sector of Nigeria, mainly for two reasons, viz: to ensure that Nigeria remained a source of raw materials to feed their emerged factories at the metropolis and secondly to ensure that Nigerian colony provided a ready market for the sale of British industrial

output (Banigo, 2006:94, Okorobia, 1999:198). Lawal (1987:114) aptly asserted as follows: “to the British, industrialization would defeat the principal objectives of colonialism and imperialism and it was better to preserve Nigeria as a large market for the progress of their trade and various colonial policies were introduced and enforced to encourage increased consumption of British manufactures”. Colonial policy on industrialization hampered local industries. Ake (1981:49) said that colonialism, an European diplomatic initiative ruined African artisan. Rodney (1972:114) succinctly put that the flooding of African markets with cheap European manufactures made the African producers to be cut off from their technological creativity. Walter Rodney, the radical scholar called it “technological arrest, stagnation and regression”, as Africans forgot the simple techniques of their forefathers. Okorobia (1999:199) opined that local distilleries and salt industries suffered under colonial rule and were deface and weakened the indigenous industries, some products were “illicit- a dangerous drug”. Boahen called it “total neglect of industrialization”. Force labour was used for military purpose and construction of infrastructures like roads, railways, harbours, local public works, government rest houses and European quarters and without commensurate ways for the huge labour exerted. According to Alapiki (2015:27) force labour was another form of state repression employed by the colonial state. The forced labour was used to create an uneven distribution of development (enclave development) and they were done to link areas with economic potentials for cash crops and with mineral deposits to the sea (Boahen, 1987:101). These minimal infrastructures were meant to facilitate the exploitation of the natural resources instead of an overall development in Nigeria. This was a major stumbling block in the way of nation-building. Orugbani (2005:43) critiqued that the minimal development was necessary to facilitate the process of accumulation. Educationally, the British committed some public funds in the establishment and running of missionary schools and the church was used to create few clerks, interpreters and administrative staff needed for the exploitation of the people and their resources. The colonialists saw education as a ready bait to entrap people to colonial churches. Some of those local adherents to education were fully indoctrinated in quasi-imperialism. Western education indoctrinated the colonized into the European culture and created a small class of brainwashed followers. This brainwashed Nigerians were the inheritor of nominal independence without economic independence.

Diplomatically, the Nigerian state was politically decolonized but the economy was not decolonized; meaning the Nigerian economy was still tied to the vortex of British imperialist design and the small class of the political elites at the centre of leadership was pro-west. The nationalists, who were people-oriented, egalitarian and distributive in the pursuit of self-rule, became jinxed for economic power and used the state as a veneer to remedy the economic powerlessness. This quest for warped materialism led to intra-class tussle amongst the ruling political elites, who leveraged on tribal and ethno-religious sentiments to cling to power and their idiosyncratic commitment to the west was done to achieve their national interest instead of the peoples' interest. This economic diplomacy of being pro-west developed capitalism in Nigeria that tightened the grip of the economy to the apron string of the metropolis.

Neo-colonialism was another diplomatic initiative of western institutionalization of clientele sovereignty with the concealed intention of making the liberated country a client-state and controlling effectively by means other than political. According to Nkrumah (1996:1), "neo-colonialism is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibilities and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress". Neo-colonialism is more insidious, complex and dangerous than the old colonialism. It not only prevented its victims from developing their economic potentials for their own use, but it controls the politics of the country and supports the indigenous bourgeoisie in perpetuating the oppression and exploitation of the masses. The centre of neo-colonialism is the transnational corporations, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, that have the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of 1980s brought Nigeria's economy into comatose. Aids kept recapitulating and the huge debt burden and trap and other debilitating factors brought Nigeria's economy to the height of depression and state of near collapse.

Globalization was another diplomatic initiative that encompasses the development of world-wide market for the free circulation of goods and services unhindered by national frontiers and driven by information and communication technology. Globalization was used as a means to overcome poverty as existing barriers to markets would be removed and production would climax, providing job opportunities and making many rich (Naanen, 2015:24). The economic

diplomacy of Nigeria that was highly pro-west, applied all the measures of globalization ranging from import substitution, industrialization, export-based industrialization, international capital borrowing, SAP, with unimaginable conditionalities such as removal of subsidies, reduction and removal of trade tariffs, liberalization, currency devaluation and liberal democracy as the panacea to poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria. All these measures applied by the political class have not only aggravated hardship but dependency and economic confusion (Osaih, 2011:vi). Baran (1968:6) declared that western penetration of backward and colonial areas that was supposed to spread the blessings of western civilization into every nooks and cranny of the globe spelled ruthless oppression and exploitation of the subjugated nations. Zeleza (1993:4) buttressed further that Africa's incorporation into the world capitalist system with the onset of Atlantic slave trade has frozen the third world countries into an unrelenting saga of deepening underdevelopment.

Conclusion

Diplomatic initiative is actually the tactfulness employed to provide solution to issues of life and nation. It is primarily the act of looking for what one need in outside one's territory using the application of intelligence and wisdom. Whether what one needs is safety, food, security, knowledge, greener pasture and glory, the truth is that it can be gotten either through the use of intelligent quotient, tricks, atavism, negotiation, cooperation and diplomacy. Diplomatic initiative is suggestive of the fact that human minds and thinking have developed sophisticatedly so that out of man's interaction with God, gods, nature and human beings, there emerged innovations and technological breakthrough. Diplomatic initiative has been a blessing to Europe and to those who thinks. Wealth is essentially a product of man's capacity to think. In spite of the moral evil associated with slave trade and the exploitative and racketeering nature of colonial imperialism, European diplomatic initiative was a great plus to the development of Europe.

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