

The History of Violence and Insecurity in Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial African States

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Abstract

Violence or conflict in any form constitutes a threat to peace and political stability in any society hence, this paper examined the history of violence and insecurity in pre-colonial and post-colonial African states. The study relied on secondary sources of data (materials from published textbooks, journals, records and publication from government and non-governmental organizations etc.) and the Marxian political economy approach and class analysis as its theoretical framework. In terms of methodology and scope, the study adopted the descriptive qualitative method while analysis was based on content analysis. Although the study focuses on Africa, emphasis was placed on the following African countries: Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, South-Africa, Kenya and Ivory Coast. Findings from the study show that pre-colonial and colonial policies and actions in Africa helped to promote violence, insecurity and economic exploitation in various African countries. These actions no doubt accounts for increased neo-colonial activities and external interference in the political development in most African states even after independence. To end all forms of colonial and neo-colonial actions in Africa, African states and its leaders must look inwards by devising indigenous solution to Africa's problems and challenges rather than depend on external sources for help.

Keywords: *Violence, Insecurity, Pre-colonial, Post-colonial, African states and Africa*

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Background to the Study

The prevalence and persistence of violence especially state sponsored violence throughout Africa has been a source of worry and debate among African scholars and researchers. While Afrocentric scholars express concern over this development, conservatives argued that violence and use of force in the state is necessary to ensure compliance and also maintain existing status-quo. However, violence and insecurity in pre-colonial Africa can be traced to the emergence of imperialism in Africa which was fuelled by capitalist industrialism and nationalism which in turn brought previously un-subjugated lands and territories in Africa under European control in the 19th century. This development led to the subtle invasion of Africa by European missionaries and their agents. After the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, the new imperialism in Africa shifted from economic and social issues to effective political control through military force/coercion.

Resistance to European invasion no doubt led to protests throughout the continent and in the process several African leaders and chiefs lost their sovereignty and territories to European powers and their allies. In what was termed a pacification by the French and British forces, Algeria was annexed in 1870, Tunisia in 1881, Lagos in 1861, Morocco in 1912, Madagascar in 1896. Scholars are unanimous that the purpose of colonialism in Africa, regardless of the system of government (indirect rule and Assimilation) was exploitative and violent, seeking to harness the resources of Africans for the benefit of the metropolis (European capitalists). Profits from the unequal and often brutally enforced economic relations were returned to Europe while African markets were created to consume European manufactured products. Social life of Africans were completely distorted as colonial laws imposed by force invaded people's lives, from their rights to work and live in certain places and travel freely including rights to read or speak their own languages or practice their traditional religion. These conditions led to confrontation which degenerated into arms struggle in different parts of Africa.

Thus, while justifying the rise of African nationalism as a direct response to imperialism, Amilcar Cabral and Archie Mafeje (1971), maintained that it was the historical experience of racial humiliation, economic exploitation, political oppression, and cultural domination under European and American slavery, colonialism, and imperialism that gave rise to the theory of "African personality" and "Negritude". At the centre of these theories was the question of liberation of the Blackman and his identity hence, it was a philosophical or moral justification for action, for a rebellion which further gave rise to African nationalism and independence. Regrettably, the joy of African nationalism which led to the independence of several African states faded away when post-independence African leaders drifted towards neo-liberal tendencies and actions by acting like lords without laying solid foundations for democratic leadership and succession in their respective countries. From Amilcar Cabral's Equatorial Guinea, Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe etc. the culture of violence, insecurity and impunity became the order of the day. It is in the light of these that this paper examined the history and logic of violence and insecurity in pre-colonial and post-colonial African states.

Methodology and Scope

This section of the paper provides a description of the sources of data used and the applicable methodology. Thus, the data used in this study were culled from secondary sources (published scholarly works in textbooks, journals and the internet) and descriptive analysis based on the qualitative method and content analysis. Although the study focuses on Africa, emphasis was placed on the following African countries: Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, South Africa, Kenya and Ivory Coast.

Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

The Marxian political economy approach and class analysis was applied in order to explain the relationship that existed between Africa and Europe. The basic tenet of the political economy mode of analysis is derived from the interconnection between the economy, political and other facets of the substructure hence, this approach recognizes the complementary relationship of all sphere of human existence but in which the economy plays a determinant role. The interaction between Africa and the European powers during and after the Berlin conference revealed that the invaders came subtly through trade and Christian missionary activities at the initial stage. This strategy later transformed into effective political occupation and control through the use of military force which equally led to unequal and often brutally enforced economic relations which altered the people's lives, culture and right to read, speak and practice the African religion. Advocates of this school of thought argue that political attitudes especially individual, group behaviour and character (political actions and policies) cannot be assessed in isolation hence, the Marxian political economy approach was applied in this study to explain the inter-relationship between the African economy and the policies introduced by the colonial imperialists. This relationship produced two classes of individuals which Karl Marx described as the international capitalist bourgeoisie (imperialists) and the privileged African elites (proletariats) who usually aid the imperialists to make super profits in their various colonies in Africa. The scramble and partitioning of Africa through the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 clearly shows that economic factors were the driving force behind imperialist actions and activities in Africa. In the same vein, the inconsistencies in colonial policies and actions coupled with the use of force and unequal terms of trade between the imperialists and the colonized territories further affirmed the validity and relevance of the Marxian political economy approach and class analysis as applied in the study.

Conceptual Analysis

Colonialism and its impact in Africa remains a source of debate among scholars and researchers. While some see nothing wrong in it, others think otherwise hence, the views expressed by scholars on the subject-matter, colonialism and endemic violence in Africa was examined in this section of the paper. Describing colonial administration in Africa as a source of economic exploitation, Walter Rodney in his book "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" state that in addition to private companies which served as tools of exploitation, the colonial state also engaged directly in the economic exploitation and impoverishment of Africa. According to him, the equivalent of the colonial office in each colonizing country worked hand in hand with their governors in Africa to carry out a number of functions: the principal ones being to:

- (a) Protect national interests against competition from other capitalists;
- (b) Arbitrate the conflicts between their own capitalists;
- (c) Guarantee optimum conditions under which private companies could exploit Africans.

In the words of Walter Rodney:

That is why colonial governments were repeatedly speaking about the maintenance of law and order, by which they meant the maintenance of conditions most favourable to the expansion of capitalism and the plunder of Africa... indeed taxes and custom duties were levied in the 19th century with the aim of allowing the colonial powers to recover the cost of the armed forces which they dispatched to conquer Africa (Rodney, 1972:p.179).

In his contribution to the subject-matter, Patrick F. Wilmot in his book “In Search of Nationhood: The Theory and Practice of Nationalism in Africa” argued that the structure of the colonial administration in Africa naturally gave rise to violence and insecurity in several African states. Citing Fanon (1968) he asserted that the necessity of violence stems from the nature of the colonial situation which according to him was unfriendly, harsh and hostile to Africans. He reiterated that this hostile relationship necessitated a violent response through anti-colonial violence aimed at ending colonial violence. In his words:

The encounter of colonized and colonizer was marked by violence and their existence together: that is to say the exploitation of the natives by the settlers was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons... it is blood curdling to see the soldiers returning with hands of slain, and to find the hands of young children amongst the bigger ones evidencing their bravery...(Fanon, 1968:p.110).

Fanon (1967) cited in Wilmot (2006) also argued that the nature and degree of exploitation in pre-colonial Africa made a high level of violence essential component of the colonial system. Amilcar Cabral however sees colonialism in terms of the destruction of the historical development of a people and the imposition of historical development of another. He arrived at basically the same conclusion as Fanon when he said:

We therefore see that both in colonialism and in neo-colonialism the essential characteristics of imperialist domination remain the same: the negation of the historical process of the dominated people by means of violent usurpation of the freedom of development of the national productive forces (Rodney, 2006:p.60).

The position of Fanon and Cabral as cited in Wilmot (2006) clearly revealed that the violence unleashed on the African people was collective and massive as all colonial governors usually meet to decide the nature and type of taxes to be imposed. While reiterating his earlier position, Wilmot (2006) in what he called the third perspective of violence in pre and post-colonial Africa maintains that if violence defines the colonial situation internationally, violence plays an essential role also in the external articulation of the colony to the colonizing power, and to the international system in which both play their parts. According to him, violence shapes the strategies and tactics of colonized and colonizer, and of the states outside

the colonial system which are articulated with either of the contestants or both. Citing Fanon's analysis on violence, Wilmot (2006) stressed that the revolutionary decolonizing upsurge which led to the creation of socialist states in China, North Korea and Vietnam, had forced the imperialist countries to modify the form, if not the content of colonial relations. Acknowledging the fact that violence was part of the instruments adopted by the colonial masters in Africa, Julius Nwalimu Nyerere stated that African nationalism was a direct response to colonial antics. In his words:

African nationalism is meaningless, is anachronistic, and is dangerous if it is not at the same time pan Africanism...pan Africanism essentially meant African unity. We have been reasonably successful in achieving the end of colonialism, but as far as uniting Africa is concerned, we have not succeeded. Nationalist leaders who took their independence seriously became the perennial target of imperial wrath. During this period, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated: Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown while Thomas Sankara was killed...

From the above analysis, it is obvious that violence enthroned by the colonial masters continued even after independence through neo-colonial policies and actions throughout Africa hence, this study examined why violence still persist in post-colonial African states.

Analysis showing the existence and persistence of endemic Violence in pre-colonial and post-colonial African States

In this section of the study, data was presented and analysed qualitatively through content analysis. The BBC English Dictionary defines violence as “a behaviour which is intended to hurt, injure or kill people through the use of force or energy”. If this definition is anything to go by then one is tempted to ask why the use of violence as a tool even after the attainment of independence in several African states? This paper will attempt to provide answers to the above question and also give theoretical and conceptual analysis to explain why the culture of violence has remained a tool in the hands of past and present African leaders. Sabelo J. Ndlvou-Gat-Sheni's work “the Logic of Violence in Africa” no doubt captured the views of several scholars on the subject-matter; this paper will, therefore, build on the foundations laid by Ndlvou-Gatsheni (2011) and others.

In what has been described as Frantz Fanon's coloniality of being and practices of violence, the concept of coloniality of being locates the roots of violence against Africans and other colonized people within the expansion of western modernity and captures the central question of the effects of coloniality on life experiences that were mediated by the master slaves/colonizer–colonized dialectics, where violence was naturalized and routinized as a form of colonial governmentality. This concept posits that the anarchic and traumatic moment of the constitution of the colonizer and colonized subjectivities within the colonial encounters created a new type of subject, framed by the coloniality of being. This concept was further analysed in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1968) and its ontology was also explored by Maldonado-Torres (2007). It is imperative to state that the coloniality of being as postulated by Fanon captures not only the depersonalization and dehumanization of black people under colonialism but also the constitution of Africans as racialized subjects whose life

were not valued. In the space of the colonized, death was no extraordinary affair but in constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects (Maldonado, 2007:p.351).

However, at the centre of coloniality of being is blackness as defining features of what Fanon (1968) referred to as the dammed (the condemned of the earth). From the perspective of Fanon, coloniality of being is meant to capture the hell that descended on the colonized people which became naturalized and routinized as the African way of life. This concept was further expanded by Maldonado Torres (2007) when he stated thus:

Hellish existence in the colonial world carried with its both the racial and the gendered aspects of the naturalization of the non-ethics of war. Indeed, coloniality of being primarily refers to the normalization for the extraordinary events that take place in war. While in war there is murder and rape, in the hell of the colonial world murder and rape become day to day occurrences and menaces. Kill ability and rape ability are inscribed into images of the colonial bodies. Lacking real authority, colonized men are permanently for minimized. Blackness in a colonial anti-black world is part of a larger context of meaning in which the non-ethics of war gradually becomes a constitutive part of an alleged normal world (Maldonado Torres, 2007:p.255).

In summary, Fanon's coloniality of being posits that the inhuman and harsh conditions introduced by the imperial powers in the respective territories naturally transformed the colonized people into violent men and women. This according to Fanon and Maldonado Torres accounts for the spread of violence in Africa even up to the present era when institutional violence is used to promote sit-tight leadership and tenure elongation in most African countries. The history of violence and insecurity in pre-colonial and post-colonial African states was also analysed from the realist school of thought. This school of thought posits that the anarchic nature of the international system and the desire by states to protect and promote its national interest makes conflict and violence among states and groups inevitable. Thus, when such goals and interests of states clash, other issues such as arms struggle, arms race and proliferation of weapons including production of weapons of mass destruction will be the order of the day. However, the establishment of the United Nations and its agencies and institutions are deliberate attempts to check the excesses of states and violation of human rights across the world. The ongoing political violence and conflict across Africa clearly shows that violence as a tool for control is a product of colonial and neo-colonial policy actions inherited by post-independence African leaders.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious to state that colonialism came into Africa deceitfully through trade and missionary activities but became institutional and violent after the Berlin conference of 1884-1885. The study also observed that colonial imperial rule in different African territories affected the culture, economy and life style of the people hence, attempts by the colonized people to question the system were faced with tougher sanctions and actions which further subjugated the African people. It was observed that African resistance and

struggles led to nationalism and the rise of Pan Africanism which in turn re-awakened the African consciousness and spirit. However, violence continued when the new found joy was replaced with a new movement called neo-liberalism. The paper however agree with the position of Frantz Fanon that the culture of violence is inbuilt in Africans due to long periods of inhuman treatment meted out to Africans by the colonial imperial powers. The paper argues that with mass education, re-orientation and re-insurrection of nationalism and the spirit of Pan-Africanism across Africa, the issue of violence, conflict and insecurity will be a thing of the past in the continent (Africa).

Recommendations

The following suggestions will no doubt help to check the spread of violence and insecurity in post-colonial African states:

1. There is need for post-colonial African states to build the leadership capacity of its citizens and also strengthen governmental institutions and agencies in order to formulate and implement coherent, coordinated and complementary development strategies. This is important because the poverty and illiteracy level in Africa is high and alarming.
2. There is need for more cooperation and unity among African states hence, the African Union, ECOWAS and other regional organization need to set the agenda for peace and economic development in the continent through regular meetings and interactions at various levels. This is one way through which post-independent African states can effectively disconnect from colonialism, neo-liberal tendencies and all forms of external interference.
3. Since violence is associated with undemocratic practices, there is need for post-independent African states and leaders to encourage and promote constitutional reforms, participatory democracy and good governance in their respective countries. It will be recalled that highly industrialized countries are experiencing rapid economic growth and development due to credible and transparent electoral processes.
4. Africa and its leaders must align itself to development partners and allies that can align partnerships and international development initiatives to Africa's interest. Thus, relations with unfriendly countries with harsh economic policies and programmes should be reviewed or cancelled.
5. Steps should be taken by African states, the African Union and the international community to sanction or remove from office, erring leaders who promote violence, insecurity, tenure elongation, sit-tight leadership and other undemocratic practices. This will no doubt put an end to all forms of violence and conflict in post-colonial African states.

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