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SCRAMBLING EFFECT ON AFRICAN ECONOMY AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS: A STUDY OF EUROPEAN NEOCOLONIALISM

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ABSTRACT:

Neocolonialism refers to the control over less developed countries by developed through indirect means. It is further understood as an extension of capitalism. Historically, the term was applied to European policies and schemes to maintain control of Africa and others. After World War II, European neocolonialism became the continuation of the practice of controlling former colonies and weaker countries by exerting indirect means such as investments of multinational corporations and trade policies of transnational corporations. Under the roof of neocolonialism, Europeans exploited the human and natural resources of poor and developing countries, portraying themselves as rich and industrially advanced countries. This paper aims to study the impact of European influence on Africa's geographical, political and cultural dynamics. This paper helps the readers understand the functioning of neocolonialism (expansion of capitalist ideas) in Africa. The paper will also briefly discuss The Scramble for Africa, referring to the period between 1884 and 1914, a conference organised by the Europeans in Berlin (1984-1985) to resolve territorial disputes among them and the allotment of African territories to institutionalise colonialism in Africa.

KEYWORDS:

NEOCOLONIALISM, WORLD WAR II, CAPITALISM, SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA, INSTITUTIONALISED COLONIALISM.

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'colonialism' reflects upon the practice of a powerful and advanced country over less developed and less powerful countries to exploit their resources, fulfilling its own wealth, power and interest. The colonisation of Africa began with the establishment of colonies, agreement to treaties, and, in some cases, military force was applied to make natives submit to colonial rule. Soon, with the colonisation, changes in the borders of the territories became evident, irrespective of the local political and cultural systems. The colonisers' only concern was the export of goods and resources. They introduced rail lines to transport resources from interiors to coastal parts. During this colonial era, countries rich in resources continued to be targeted by the rival powers. The gradual dependency upon exports led to political instability and long-lasting civil wars and catalysed political and cultural changes. This only added to the exploitation of human resources and natural resources of the poor and developing nations. To continue such exploitation, a direct rule, but through indirect means, was required. In the form of foreign investments, participation of multinational corporations, trade policies and false promises of protection to the natives Europeans establishes neocolonialism.

HISTORY

Till the fifteenth century, the African continent was largely unexplored by the Europeans. The Arabs controlled the trade routes through the vast Sahara desert extracting gold, ivory and slaves. The Europeans were very much interested in exploring trade routes to Asia, to be precise for silk and spices. During this time the Ottoman Empire was expanding and the Europeans were threatened with this expansion. Portugal soon began discovering sea routes to Asia. Portugal held the lead in this race by accelerating their exploration of the African coasts. Soon, in 1498, Vasco da Gama reached India resulting in rapid growth of the power of Portugals in the Indian Ocean. Spain, running in parallel to Portugal, already were focused towards the reign of South and North America according to the Treaty of Tordesillas. In 1580, Portugal lost its control to the King of Spain letting the Netherlands capture Portuguese colonies. By 1640, Portugal regained its control from Spain but now they were facing more challenges and competition from the new growing

European powers- Denmark, England, France and Prussia. The gradual establishment of trade routes encouraged slave trading and soon became one of the most profitable businesses. The slaves were being bought in Africa and were being sold in America in exchange for gold and other native products.

By the mid-eighteenth century, there we can find a decline in slave trading due to numerous anti-slavery movements. This resulted in the development of independent Liberia in 1847, for thousands of slaves freed from America. The inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869 marked a new and shorter way to the Asian market. This attracted more attention of the Europeans towards the arable land in Africa to grow and supply products suitable to the tastes and needs of the Europeans. Gradually, in the late nineteenth century, they found Africa to be extremely rich in resources. In the background of the Industrial Revolution, this exploration of rich resources suited the hunger of the Europeans.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

The Scramble for Africa refers to the period between 1884 to 1914. During the late nineteenth century, the Europeans realised that the African continent might serve as a great source of resources and profit. This realisation forced the European powers to claim most of the land. They soon found themselves competing among themselves. This increasing competition among the European nations ignites a fire between them. In order to check the growing resistance, a conference was organised in Berlin in 1884. Thirteen European nations and the United States met with each other at the Berlin conference. By then, the heart of the continent was little known and explored, yet King Leopold II of Belgium got the possession of the same. The UK gained Egypt, while others, like Germany, Spain, and Italy, gained possession over territories. For the rest of the remaining land, they came up with the idea to claim any land they physically occupied. Hence, they started a race engaging their superior military technologies to claim the largest possible territory by stealing and redistributing the lands of the locals to the European settlers. The natives were forced to pay taxes, encouraging forced labour to work in mines and fields, as they were left with no money.

Before the scramble, around only 10% of the land was under colonial impact. The meeting happened without the presence of any African nation aiming the split and distribution of Africa to the hands of Europeans. They made the Africans sign treaties which were written in European languages, not comprehensible to the Africans. Europeans started to export products like sugar, coffee and rubber extracted by the native Africans. The Scramble for Africa also adds to innovations like steamboats, steam engines and military weapons, however, not to be sold to Africans.

COLONIAL IMPACT ON THE AFRICAN CULTURE

Colonialism had a profound impact on Africa. Europeans attacked Africa not only politically and economically but also culturally. It did introduce Africa to new technologies and advanced infrastructures, but at the same time, it exploited African resources and culture. The impact could be felt in the form of artificial borders drawn long before by the European powers, regardless of the culture of the natives, which resulted in internal conflicts and instability, leading to the enslavement of the population. European powers started ruining the sovereignty and integrity of the African states by favouring one group over another.

Initially, Africa was exposed to the rest of the world without their internal strengths being developed. Drawing profits out of the continent, ignoring reinvestment for economic growth and development and concentrating towards specific areas for social necessities and urbanisation gave ground to inequality and differences among the natives due to the unfair treatment of the population. Each part of the continent was treated differently. Some regions were rich in minerals, particularly South Africa; others were marked for plantations suiting the needs of the Europeans. They categorised regions according to their use to fulfil specified objectives of the colonisers.

The introduction of the European education system was completely different from the roots of the African culture, which added nothing much to the advancement of the technological and industrialisation skills of the Africans. This soon started replacing the pre-existing indigenous skills of the Africans, like- carving, sculpting, weaving and others, pointing towards a lack of self-dependence and encouragement of one's own productivity. The Europeans held the technological development of the Africans and made them grow as a consumer of the West rather than to become a producer.

COLONIAL IMPACT ON THE AFRICAN ECONOMY

The change in the traditional way of life of the Africans made them vulnerable to exploitation, and they were forced to work according to the norms of the new economic system. Forcefully, they were made to work in colonial industries as a matter of their survival. Slavery was a major aspect of the colonial economy. The imposition of heavy taxes pushed the Africans to sell labour to Europeans to pay the taxes. The transatlantic slave trade became a lucrative business that added great wealth to Europeans. Compulsory labour rules were imposed on some regions, particularly South Africa, to extract the resources and meet the mining requirements. They never let the South Africans know about the taxation system, which might raise the issue of bargain, leaving them with no other option other than to work in the mines. Further, the Europeans introduced a taxation system in which they needed to pay the tax in colonial currency and neglecting tax would lead to severe penalties. The Africans were forced to produce raw materials suitable for the needs of the colonial powers, upholding the development of their industries. The prices of the exported raw materials were kept low, whereas prices of the manufactured goods imported from European powers kept high. Using this strategy, colonial powers made the Africans work harder to afford foreign goods. This

encouraged the idea of capitalism, that is to maximise profits with minimum investments adding to further exploitation of workers and the environment. The Africans gradually faced gunboat diplomacy, consular intervention, and trade intrigues, weakening the power of the native Africans.

All the new strategies and interventions aimed only at maintaining the direct control of Europeans over the African states. To continue their profit, European powers influenced and destabilised African countries, exploiting their labour and resources. Africa is said to have the planet's one-third mineral reserves, one-third of oil and two-thirds of diamonds, still being underdeveloped nation. This directly reflects the impact of colonialism on the African economy. This also suggests the intentions of the Europeans to keep the country so.

CONCLUSION

Studying the circumstances of the African continent during colonial rule, numerous policies and strategies have been found to directly affect the African culture, economy, and political stability. The Britishers chose indirect rule over direct rule to control the colonies. One of the references to such indirect rule is to rule through the natives under British supervision. This suggests the change from colonialism to neocolonialism. Africa got trapped in the web of exploitation and merely watched their resources being snatched by the European powers. They created class divisions to maintain control. The African nations are still under economic dependency, class divisions, and internal conflicts, making the elite class from the same population serve at the feet of the colonisers. This study discusses, in brief, the challenges faced by Africa and still stand strong before the neocolonialism of the European powers.

From a neocolonial perspective, there are several direct and indirect means through which Europeans are holding their control over developing Africa. They made Africa look towards the West for all the good, whether it is about civilisation, culture, economy, technologies or materialistic things. Even after gaining independence from colonial rule, Africa is still facing colonial-like exploitation in the form of unfair and unequal treaties and trade agreements, long-fueled local disputes, and cultural and regional instability resulting in inner conflicts. The formation of artificial boundaries at the Berlin conference directly impacted the African economy. The Europeans divided the African mountains, rivers, forests, and lands where they never have been. Gradually, this division strengthened as borders and stayed there even after the independence. The division could be stated as Europeans' unjust hunger and impatience to extract gold, silver, oil, rubber and other resources. Africa is still facing a landlocked economy due to neighboring conflicts among the nations, making it challenging to reach the international market. However, it was an intentionally added hurdle in the path of growth and development of Africa by the Europeans to continue their colonial-like exploitation, not in the form of slavery, rather than through indirect means. To check the neocolonial impacts on African economy and culture, Africans must look for ideological and economic justification.

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