



## Underdevelopment of Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of The Colonial Masters and Nigerian Rulers

**Odisu Terry –Andrews**

School of Marine Technology, Burutu, Delta State Nigeria.

### ABSTRACT

The paper looks at the activities of the colonial masters before Independence and Nigeria rulers after Independence and identifies the era during which the country was underdeveloped. Using descriptive method of data gathering, the paper reveals that Nigerians lived a better life during colonial rule than what is obtainable now. There was orderliness, there was security of lives and property, there was good standard of education, and the infrastructures were not dilapidated. But after taking over the political leadership of the country by Nigerian politicians, things went terribly bad, especially from 1979 till date. The reason for this is not farfetched: unhealthy urge for primitive accumulation of wealth and mismanagement of the national resources by corrupt and prodigal public office holders. It is recommended that the present regime should understudy some Asian countries to know how they fight against corruption and also amend our archaic laws that impede the effort.

**KEY WORDS:** Underdevelopment; Corruption; Metropole Imperialism; Colonial Masters; Prodigal; Nigerian Rulers.

### INTRODUCTION

Several autonomous kingdoms were annexed and merged together to form Nigeria by the British Government. The colonial masters ruled Nigeria till 1960 when Nigeria was granted Independence. Before oil was discovered, the country was known for the production of cocoa, groundnut, rubber and palm oil as well as other solid minerals. The wealth generated from these resources was judiciously applied for the benefit of Nigerians, though some parts went to Britain. Many radical writers were of the opinion that Nigeria is underdeveloped because of her contact with imperialism. They accused Britain of making Nigeria a producer of only raw materials and receiver of manufactured goods at prices determined by the former. How much money did the colonial masters remove from Nigeria? They brought civilization and western education. They built infrastructures. Was Nigeria the only country colonized? Was America not colonized? Was Nigeria richer in terms of natural resources during the colonial era than now? What has Nigeria achieved after Independence?

Nigeria was using the British Pound Sterling during the colonial era. Many Nigerians who went to Britain for studies returned home after graduation because life was abundant then. The value of the Nigerian Currency was then higher than the US dollar. The University College, Ibadan, was established by the colonial masters in 1948 which had produced several notable figures. But today, the University of Ibadan, as it is now known, cannot appear on the list of the best twenty universities in Africa. In a valedictory speech on his forced retirement from the university, Professor Niyi Osundare said that 'the ivory has gone out of the tower' in reference to the fallen standard and infrastructural decay in the university under the watch of Nigerian rulers (Reuben Abati, Nigeria Village Square, Nov 22, 2008)

If we agree that Nigeria wealth was stolen by the British to develop Britain, where did the Nigerian rulers who took over the reins of power after Independence take the wealth to? Are they colonial masters from another country? Oil was discovered several years ago and nothing to show for it except the ecological disaster in the oil bearing communities. What has been happening to the oil wealth in Nigeria? So the theses of writers like Walter Rodney and Frantz Fanon that suggest that Africa was underdeveloped because of colonialism cannot hold water anymore. Nigeria

has been underdeveloped by Nigerians. A critical look at the nation's pre-independence and post-independence eras would assist in supporting the assumption that Nigeria is being underdeveloped by its reckless and prodigious rulers.

## **NIGERIA UNDER COLONIAL RULE**

As noted earlier, some writers are of the view that the whole of Africa remains underdeveloped because of colonialism. These writers belong to the Marxian School of Thought. They include Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, etc. This is now terribly misleading. They even recommend the delinking of the region from the center nations or the metropole. In Nigeria, there are legacies of colonial rule. Many Research Institutes were established by the colonial masters: Moor Plantation, Ibadan; Nigeria Institute of Oil Palm Research, Benin; National Root Crops Research, Umudike; National Rice Research Station, Badeji; National Veterinary Research Institute, Vom near Jos; and the Trypanosomiasis Research in Kaduna. These were meant to improve agriculture which was then the main source of revenue. A regime with anti-development agenda would not do all these.

Between 1895 and 1900, a railway was constructed running from Lagos to Ibadan. The line was extended to Oshogbo 62 miles away and to Zungeru and Minna in 1908. The line was later extended to Kano. A railway line was also built in Abeokuta (Wikipedia). Between 1946 and 1956, the capital expenditure was 55 million pounds, out of which 25% went to water supply and health services. Before Independence, the capital investment rose to 330 million pounds, out of which 38.7% went to the transport sector (Olaloku, et al 1980). Some banks were established: British Bank of West Africa, now First Bank and Barclays Bank, now Union Bank. The Central Bank of Nigeria was established in 1958 to regulate development in the financial sector.

The foundation for federalism was laid by the colonial masters. It furnished the country with its first Written Constitution. Roads that linked the hinterland to the coastal areas were constructed as well as the Sea Ports in Port Harcourt, Lagos and Burutu. Schools, hospitals and churches were also built. Lagos, Port Harcourt Calabar and Jos were given the looks of modern global cities with various architectural master-pieces (Onuoha, 1971 )

The colonial regime showed interest in getting Nigerians educated. This led to the establishment of the Yaba Technical College which later became Yaba College of Technology. The University College, Ibadan was also established. It was initially affiliated to the University of London. These schools have produced notable Nigerians that have excelled in their chosen professions. How did all these contribute to underdevelopment of Nigeria? The University of Ibadan, like many other premier universities, has been run aground by successive Nigerian governments, thereby falling the standard of education and making some graduates unemployable. This was why President Musa Yar Adua called the University of Ibadan that has produced African literary giants like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, a local champion during its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Reuben Abati). Who, then, can we say has underdeveloped Nigeria? The British or the bad Nigerian rulers?

## **NIGERIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

The modernization theory by W.W. Rostow is very useful in discussing the underdevelopment of Nigeria. A country is said to be underdeveloped if, despite natural endowment, it is unable to provide basic infrastructure and amenities for the citizens because of poor leadership and lack of entrepreneurial ability. Nigeria has abundant natural resources but life is not interesting except the few predatory politicians. Many Nigerians are making waves across the continents. More are looking for visas to jet out. The poor leadership problem started in the second republic. This was when public office holders were throwing parties to celebrate their dexterity in looting public funds. This prompted the military to intervene. Many politicians were thrown into jail. There was a failed attempt to crate a run-away politician from the UK to the country to face justice.

Nigeria has not had true representatives as leaders. The country has been in the hands of selfish, corrupt and brutish politicians whose ambition is to acquire political power and wealth without the necessary pedigree. They have no thoughtful reflections on the Nigeria condition. Politics is meaningless if it does not tackle the problems facing the society and improve the quality of life. Politics in Nigeria is not concerned with solving problems and raising the quality of life. This is why Nigerians are jetting out in droves to the US and Europe for greener pasture. Reverend Matthew Kukah observed that Nigeria, in its 50 years of nationhood, was bedeviled with politics without principle, pleasure without conscience, wealth without work (NBF News, May 27, 2010).

The colonial masters were not in the country when the oil booms were looted. Are they behind the looting, mismanagement of the oil wealth in Nigeria now? The oil theft or illegal bunkering has depleted the national resources over the years, which could have funded several capital projects. There is a tenable argument for illegal oil bunkering in the country. As the rulers are stealing and mismanaging the national wealth, those outside the corridors of power would want to have their share of the cake, and the only way to achieve that is to break or burst the pipelines. This is the most lucrative business now as some very powerful and well placed Nigerians are unbelievably involved. The volume of stolen crude oil is so high such that some countries regarded as oil producing nations cannot even produce such quantity daily. And for this volume to be stolen, vessels, tankers and barges must be deployed, not jerry cans,

drums and canoe. So, where are the security forces on the waterways? Corruption.

25% of the national budget is gulped by the national assembly because the members are the highest paid in the world according to Professor Itse Sagay. He condemned the prodigious and reckless attitude of the lawmakers as a breach of public trust (Vanguard Newspapers, July 27, 2010). In his 2011 Nigeria Independence Lecture, titled *Nigeria in Transformation*, Richard Dowden of the Royal African Society, London, said that political leaders in Nigeria are the highest paid salary earners in the world and begged them to abridge the wide gap between them and the poor. How can Nigeria be developed when scarce resources that should be meant for capital projects are squandered with impunity.

The few projects, like road construction, are not well executed because the construction firms are forced to remit some percentage to the powers that be. In most cases, such projects are abandoned and nothing would happen because of parochial political consideration as most projects are awarded for political patronage. Despite the oil wealth, many oil bearing communities have no good roads, clinics, electricity and pipe-borne water. Oil was first discovered and exploited at Oloibiri, in present day Bayelsa State. Today, the place is a ghost town as there are no national monuments such as skyscrapers to show for it. The only sign of oil exploration and exploitation in these communities, as noted earlier, is the mindless pollution of the environment: corroded roofing sheets due to acid rain from unholy gas flaring; agricultural land degradation due to oil spillages, and pollution-induced ailments. The only government presence in such areas is the security forces, the Joint Task Force (Odisu, 2015). Were the colonial masters still responsible for all these?

The size of government is too bloated in Nigeria. Over forty ministers and a retinue of idle special advisers and assistants at the federal level. Over twenty commissioners and numerous aides for a state governor. There are 409 legislators in the bi-cameral national assembly. There are 36 houses of assembly for the states. As the Nigerian political office holders are the highest paid in the world, given the unnecessary and morally outrageous allowances, such as the N506,600 for federal lawmakers' wardrobe as if they were naked before the election, the recurrent expenditure has always dwarfed the capital investment, and this also accounts for why the country remains perpetually underdeveloped. Another very serious militating factor against the infrastructural growth of Nigeria is the childish and senseless competition among the rulers in acquiring jets. Almost all the 36 state governors have private jets. These are governors that cannot pay salaries of civil servants. Most of them went to the Bond Market to borrow money for unnecessary investments. Of what use is renovating or building a new government house or buying new SUVs for officials even when the old vehicles are in serviceable condition? Some incurred debt of more than N100 billion before leaving office. How can the nation develop with this fiscal indiscipline and irresponsible public investment?

The immediate past regime at the federal level acquired 11 jets for the presidential air fleet (PAF). Some commercial airlines do not have more than 13 jets. The cost of a jet can transform two or more communities. It is a pity that the nation is being ruled like a conquered territory. Development is, therefore, an illusion, courtesy of Nigerian rulers, not colonial masters. As observed by former Commonwealth Secretary General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, political leadership in Nigeria over the years has failed abysmally in finding ways to give the country the full benefits of its abundant resources (Daily Champion Newspapers, Oct 12, 2011) This view is corroborated by Jebbin Maclean et al (2011) who noted that the nation's underdevelopment was as a result of failure of leadership.

The new president who took over an empty treasury with debt of several millions of dollars, has ordered the sale of nine of these ostentatious jets. He said that what happened in the second republic had been replicated, and even worse, especially the atrocities committed by the immediate past regime with the excess crude oil account since 2011 (Vanguard Newspapers, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015). This corroborates the views held by former World Bank Vice President, Obiageli Ozekwesili, who alerted Nigerians of how the government had frittered away the nation's \$67 billion in foreign reserves left behind by the Obasanjo administration. (Thisday Newspapers, January 25, 2013). Many people erroneously thought that her criticism at that time was partisan, not knowing that she was rendering a selfless service to her fatherland.

The fuel subsidy, the difference between the landing cost of an imported litre of fuel and its regulated pump price, has also drained trillions of naira that should have funded developmental and transformational projects in Nigeria. In 2014, the nation spent N914 billion on subsidy payment which could have funded new refineries (Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI), Vanguard Newspapers, June 23, 2015) The national assembly conducted a belated probe on the management of the subsidy and revealed earth quaking fraud. In the first place, why should the nation, with four refineries, import petroleum products? Were the colonial masters responsible for its inability to refine fuel? How can the nation be developed if the rulers continue to fritter away our resources? The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) which is saddled with the duty of collecting oil rents and remitting same to the Federation Account, sat on some of the funds and this triggered an alarm by the former CBN governor, Lamido Sanusi. He accused the NNPC of not remitting over \$20 billion to the federal government. This led to his removal from office as his employers saw him as a member of the opposition political party. The forensic audit has vindicated him. What the US sent to rebuild Europe after the second world war under the Marshall Plan was not more than the unremitted fund.

The nation has wasted too much money for elections. For instance, the federal government allegedly disbursed over N2

trillion to canvass for votes. This is outside the funds legally allocated to the nation's electoral body. Some governors and top politicians were given several billions to deliver their states. Some traditional rulers were allegedly paid in dollars. It was also alleged that some pastors benefitted from the largesse. Some of the beneficiaries diverted the funds to buy choice houses in Nigeria and abroad, one of the reasons why the then ruling party lost the presidential election ( Punch Newspapers, April 19, 2015) No country can develop with this type of madness.

The privatization policy of the government also accounts for the underdevelopment of Nigeria. Very critical industries like the steel and power were sold for people who were not ready for investment. These are sectors that are very key for economic growth and development. Now, there is no power supply in Nigeria. People power their homes with generators that pollute the environment. Many industries, tired of buying diesel to power their machines, have relocated to another country and their premises taken over by churches. Dunlop and Michelin had left for Ghana. The policy was fraught with corruption, as some of the government companies were undervalued and sold to cronies of government officials. A good example is the Delta Steel Company, Ovwian-Aladja in Delta State. The company is now comatose, many of the staff were thrown into hardship, marriages broken up, and many of them have died(Odisu T. A. 2015). Who should be blamed for this?

The courses offered in the tertiary schools in Nigeria contribute to its underdevelopment. A country in need of development should encourage its tertiary institutions to run courses that could be of help to it. Nigeria is unable to refine fuel, supply power and tie its roads. So how would courses such as Psychology, Philosophy, Home Economics/Catering, Christian/Islamic Studies, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, History, Fine Arts etc., help to refine our crude oil or ensure steady supply of power or help build our roads? The government should remove these courses from the universities and polytechnics and ensure that only courses like Electrical Engineering, Petrochemical Engineering, Petroleum Engineering, Geology, Solar Power Engineering, Nuclear Power Engineering Civil and Mechanical Engineering, Telecommunication, Computer science/Engineering as well as Law, English Language, Mass Communication, Political Science, and Management (Economics/Accounting) are offered in the universities and polytechnics. The curriculum must be designed to suit our needs.

The nation wastes billions of naira yearly for the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Students who have successfully completed their degree or HND courses are posted to different parts of the country other than their state of origin for a one year national service. It was established in 1973 to foster unity among Nigerians. The scheme has been pitifully defeated, as Nigerians are now more disunited. The federal and state governments spend several millions of naira annually on religious pilgrimages. This is unnecessary. Any Christian or Moslem who wants to embark on such a trip should foot the bill.

A country that refuses to diversify its economy is not ready for development. Nigeria is a monocultural economy. Oil is the only source of the terribly mismanaged revenue. The national wealth has started dwindling. This is occasioned by falling oil prices. Critical infrastructures were not built during oil boom, can we now build them during the doom? The major crude oil buyers are now moving away from fossil fuel to cleaner source of energy. Nigeria is in trouble.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is very clear that Nigeria is underdeveloped not because of imperialism but due to the visionless and corrupt rulers who took over power from the colonial masters. The rot began in the second republic till today. These rulers had failed to use politics to solve problems confronting the country, hence they are not referred to as leaders. They have destroyed the nation. They have been ruling Nigeria like a conquered territory that is why issues of fiscal rascality or indiscipline and irresponsible public investment have been the order of the day. Why are the rulers competing for the acquisition of airplanes? These mafias are enemies of development.

The real leaders of Nigeria were the colonial masters whose legacies the visionless successors could not sustain and improve. If a referendum or a plebiscite were to be conducted on whether Nigeria be recolonized or not, 90% of the population would vote for the recolonization of Nigeria to live a better life. Only the predatory elite class that has wreaked havoc on the nation would vote differently to maintain the status quo of evil social stratification.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The penalty for corrupt practices be reviewed from what it is now to either life imprisonment or death sentence.
- One or two of the Asian countries be understudied to learn the skill with which they are fighting corruption, and our archaic laws that impede our efforts to prosecute corruption be amended.
- A referendum to decide how many federal and state lawmakers should Nigeria have and how much should be their salaries be conducted. This will bring down the recurrent expenditure.
- The emolument and remunerations in public offices be pruned down to reduce the waste of resources.

- The bloated size of government be reduced to manageable level to prevent corruption and waste.
- Public officials should be taken to mortuaries for sight-seeing as part of orientation. The gory sight of poorly kept corpses could checkmate the urge for primitive accumulation.
- The immunity clause that gives leverage to some public office holders to carry out mindless looting of the treasury be deleted from the Nigerian Constitution.
- The call for reparation be stopped. If there should be any reparation, it should be from the Nigerian rulers to the masses.
- State governors should be disallowed from borrowing from the Bond Market except for the purpose of building critical infrastructural projects that would create wealth and generate employment. The Securities and Exchange Commission to enforce this.
- The privatization of critical sectors such as Power and Steel be revoked and given to investors that are ready for business, not the briefcase businessmen.
- The educational curriculum be drawn in such a way that useless courses are removed from the tertiary schools in favour of courses that are very key to the nation's development.
- The NYSC scheme be scrapped to prevent unnecessary waste of resources.
- The federal and state governments should stop sponsoring religious pilgrimages.
- Nigerian rulers should learn how the Asian States became Asian Tigers, especially Singapore.

## REFERENCES

- Abati R, *Niyi Osundare's Valedictory Speech and UI being a Local Champion*. Nigeria Village Square, Nov 22, 2008.
- Emeka Anyaoku, *Nigerian political leadership has failed*. Daily Champion Newspapers, October 12, 2011.
- Itse Sagay, *Legislating for The Common Good: Contemporary Issues and Perspectives*. Vanguard Newspapers, July 27, 2010
- Jebbin Maclean, Good Wilson, *The Underdevelopment of Nigeria: Who is to blame?* Journal of Contemporary Research, Vol 8, No 3, 2011.
- Kukah M, *Politics Without Principle, Wealth Without Work*. NBF News, May 27, 2010.
- Muhamadu Buhari, *Atrocities Committed with Excess Crude Account*. Vanguard Newspapers, June 23, 2015.
- NEITI, *Subsidy Payment can Fund New Refineries*. Vanguard Newspapers, June 23, 2015.
- Odisu T.A, *The Nigerian State, Oil Multinationals and the Environment: A Case Study of SPDC*, JPAPR Vol. 7, No 2, 2015.
- Odisu T.A, *Corruption and Insecurity in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of Civilian and Military Regimes*, JSPS Vol. 3, No 1, 2015.
- Olaloku F.A, et al, *The Structure of Nigeria Economy*. New York, St Martins Press, 1980.
- Oby Ezekweseli, *\$67 billion in Cash Reserves frittered Away*. This day Newspapers, Jan 25, 2013.
- Richard Dowden, *Nigeria in Transformation*. Vanguard Newspapers, June 21 2015.
- Rostow W, *Stages of Economic Growth*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1960.
- Unuoha F, *Colonialism: Structures, Administration and Legacies in Nigeria*. 1971, Internet..
- Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Tanzania Publishing House, Dar –Es Salam, 1973.
- Two Trillion Naira spent to Canvass for Votes*. Punch Newspapers, April 19, 2015.