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## African nations: a pathological system waiting for social work surgical intervention

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### ABSTRACT

*Africa, conceptually, geographically, politically, economically, religiously and socially is in bondage and this bondage is summarized as pathological condition. The pathological condition of Africa is the outcome of cumulative of the attacks by the empire builders, slave traders, colonialists and the neocolonialists. The attacks and their consequences on the African system have resulted to the continuous failure of the socioeconomic, political and institutional lives of the African system with such symptoms and social indicators like political dependence on the colonialists and neocolonialists, dependence on foreign economic aids and borrowing galore, social segregation and self-hatred among the African population, modern slavery by willingness, political instability, religious exploitation, etc. Over the years scholars, political elites and other categories among African population have tried to deal with the pathological condition of the African nations however, the situation seems to have defied every strategy. This defiance of the pathological condition of the African nations to almost every effort to reverse it lie in the way and manner the adventure of colonialism and neocolonialism was designed and implemented. Colonialism and neocolonialism were institutionalised and eventually sustained using the indigenous population. As such, decolonization can only be successful if it is institutionalised and operated by the elite class with deep knowledge of the problem and deep relationship with the African population. Hence, the social workers with their multidimensional discipline and profession as well as deep interaction with the population are strategically handy in mounting and sustaining decolonization agenda in the 21st century Africa. The aforementioned is the focus and interest of this paper.*

**KEY TERMS:** African system, colonialism, decolonization, neocolonialism, social pathology, social work

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the regions of the globe, Africa is such a peculiar region with existential difference in the midst of the multitude of nations, regions, races and what have you. This is evidence in the location of the continent, the uniqueness of the race, the natural resources as well as human capital, distinguishing the region across histories. By way of comparison, among the so called developing nations, it is only in Africa that the American and European imperialistic institutions have found reliable human capital for sustainable development throughout the era of initial contact, slavery and even the modern slavery, which is currently ravaging Africa in form of looking for greener pastures overseas through the hypocritical visa lottery, work permit, japa and all the likes. This is also applicable in the distribution of natural resources, which are mainly located across Africa but are being exploited with impunity by the American and European league of imperialists. This article explores these issues in the context of social work and development in Africa.

## AFRICA, AN OVERVIEW

Africa as a continent is home to more than 30% of the world mineral reserves, more than 8% of the world natural gas and more than 12% of world oil reserves. The continent has more than 40% of the global gold and 90% of chromium and platinum; 90% of the world cobalt, 60% of the world coffee, 70% of the world's cocoa, etc. According to Saifaddin Galal (2023), the population of Africa is clocking 1.4billion with majority of the population being youths who are potential labour force and human capital for sustainable development. According to the ILO (2023), Africa is the largest supplier of labour to America, Europe, China Canada, etc., via migration. This included in the health sector, financial sector, industrial sector as well as services sector. According to World Population Review (2023), Africa has the highest number of member nations in the United Nations.

Geographically, Africa is located within the tropic of cancer and that of Capricorn with moderate weather and structural base devoid of frequent natural disasters. In any case, Africa is naturally endowed for all round sustainability. However, the story about Africa on the intercontinental scene is totally opposite of its natural appearance. For instance, statistics shows that Africa has the largest chunk of the developing nations in the world, Africa is one of the continents permanently marked with poverty and backwardness, Africa is currently the destination of the majority of the global aid offering coming from Europe America and even other emerging economies from Asia, Latin America, Oceania and Caribbean (Lawson, Angemi & Kasirye, 2020; Dube, 2019; Nyarko, Mensah & Hamusokwe, 2020; Fuseini, Sulemana, Abdulai, Ibrahim & Azure, 2022).

Africa from the North to the South and from the East to the Central and the West is all characterized by corruption, political instability, conflicts and poverty even in the midst of multiple natural resources and the huge donations from overseas (Lawson, Angemi & Kasirye, 2020; Lewis, 2021; Mlambo, Mubecua, Mpanza & Mlambo, 2019; Okrah & Hajduk-Stelmachowicz, 2020; Dickens, 2018; Seid et al., 2021; Shumetie & Watabaji, 2019; Olanrewaju, Joshua & Olanrewaju, 2020). Although in the recent history, the world extant bodies have made some claims of liberating individuals, tribes, ethnic groups, race and nations from the domination and abuse by other superior individuals and groups, the African case is certainly different and most certainly, Africa seems to be out of such claims if at all it is obtainable anywhere in the world. The principle of the survival of the fittest and individualistic tendencies, which ravaged the European world and spilled over to America in the earlier centuries, seems to be holding down the global community especially after such found expression without challenge in the African continent via empire conquest, slavery merchandise, colonialism and the subsequent neocolonialism (Udofia, 1984; Jadesola et al., 2012; Okafor, 2020; 2022). The principle of the survival of the fittest and individualistic tendency, which found expression in the African continent through conquest for empire, slavery merchandise, colonialism and the current neocolonialism, eventually created a sustainable generational attack on the overall system of the African continent, leaving the system with a pathological abnormality (Tikly, 2019; Okafor, 2022). In Durkheim's parlance, which subsequently gained acceptance in the circle of social scientists and humanity studies, pathological society or system is marked by some characteristics of ill health in connection with the clinical terminologies of health (Neuhouser, 2022). This is identifiable through social indicators of abnormality in the social institutions of the society such as family, economy, education, religion, culture, politics/governance, and their ineffectiveness in dealing with the overall needs of the society itself and the members of the society (Okafor, 2016; 2019; Animashaun, 2009; Oludele, 2020).

Pathological system or society as can be observed currently in Africa is characterized by failure of the system to meet the needs of the human elements in the system, abnormal functioning of the components of the system, autoimmune crises such as human elements in the system becoming a tool to destroy the system itself, dependency instead of self-sustainability, degeneration instead of regeneration and other characteristics of ill health. Pathological condition is a symptom of pathogen attack on the system, which compromises the ability of the system to continue in a sustainable health. In the case of Africa, colonialism and neocolonialism have remained the major pathogens sustainably attacking the system and leaving the system in a pathological condition.

Over the years and following consistent observations, the case of Africa seems to have defied every cure and healing strategies attempted so far due to deep rooted infection and cross-infections through the institutionalised colonialism and neocolonialism, which have operated covertly over the years and evaded the comprehension of the African nations and their leaders. However, the growing interest by African indigenous researchers who appreciates home grown methodological approaches in the recent times has unveiled the possibilities of healing the African system through the customization of academic disciplines as well as other social institution as trajectory of institutionalizing decolonization for effective and innovative outcome (Okafor, 2020; 2022; Arukwe, 2010). As such, the possibility of healing Africa from her current pathological condition as a result of deep-rooted colonial and neocolonial infections is in sight with the promising power and engagement of African social scientists and social workers in particular who are more deeply involved in all aspects of social institutions and areas of life in African system. The aforementioned is the focus of this paper.

## AFRICAN PATHOLOGICAL CONDITION

Pathological condition in clinical terms is observable disposition of a living thing showing unhealthy condition as a result of infection and the consequent diseases and decay in health and wellbeing. In social scientific parlance, this is a social condition showing the malfunctioning of the social institutions resulting to the general decay of the system and underdevelopment, with daring impacts on the members of the society in question. Africa in history and the present historical epoch is in pathological condition and the symptoms of these conditions are observable in her different social institutions and socioeconomic life. According to World Bank (2019), Africa is the destination of global poverty with majority of the global poor living in African countries despite the arrays of natural and human resources. Africa is the destination of the countries with the poorest public institutions in terms of provision of basic services to her population despite supplying the world with labour in various sectors. This is visible in the health sector, the economic sector, educational sector, leadership and services sectors. Africa is the most underrepresented continent in the United Nations in terms of her interests and challenges in the current history despite having the highest number of membership in the organization. Across the global continents, Africa is the destination of the group of high ranking corrupt nations, political instability, religious crises, high capital flights to Europe, America and Asia as well as students and labour migration out of the continent.

Africa in the current historical epoch exhibits all the symptoms and characteristics of what Durkheim called a pathological society (Mawson, 1970). These ranges from the economy to the political system and the various public institutions established to manage the complex networks of human needs in the society. The symptoms of pathological condition of the African nations can be captured in the social indicators of the basic human needs, which are connected with the institutional structural existence of the states and regions. For instance, in the health sector, virtually all African nations cannot boast of sustainable healthcare for the citizens especially in connection with the basic human health needs and emerging health complications (Oleribe et al, 2019; Rukema, 2022). Yet, the same African nations are the pool of human resources for the European, American and Eurasian health institutions (Ntshebe, 2010; Lawal et al., 2022). Worst still, most of the basic pharmaceutical and health products sustaining the overseas health industries are obtained from Africa however, Africa still remain the destination for substandard drugs and equally experience scarcity of pharmaceutical products (Fatokun, 2020; Ekeigwe, 2019).

A statistical irony about Africa presently is that Africa is the major pool for human resources for Europe, America and Eurasian health institutions but, is classified as one of the worst regions in terms of health-workers-patients' ratio population density (World Health Organization, 2020; 2021; Niohuru, 2023; Oraebosi et al., 2020; Ntuli & Maboya, 2017). Majority of African indigenous health workers trained domestically and overseas end up serving in the American, European and Eurasian health institutions following the perceived poor service condition at home and other envisaged discomforts. Within the economy of virtually all African nations, the principle of the more you look, the less you see seems to be overriding the system following the corrupted structures either inherited from the colonialists or induced by the neocolonialists. Virtually all African nations have not less than 5 mineral resources serving the needs of the global communities and being exploited from overseas however, the same African nations are on the top lists of nations depending on the Britten wood institutions for survival via borrowing and aid (Ogundipe & Ogundipe, 2014; Gukurume, 2012). From North Africa to South Africa, and from east Africa to Central and West Africa, virtually all the nations within these regions are under different borrowing formula and aid assistance from the Britten wood institutions, United Nations allied bodies and different colonialists and neocolonialist exploiters. These borrowing and aids are systematically conditioned to enslave the economy of the receiving nations to the givers, continue without end and sustain intergenerational domination of the economy of the receivers. And, these borrowing and aids by the former colonialists and neocolonialists are operating in virtually all the African countries currently. In any case, virtually all the economies of African nations are sick and struggling.

Politically, across African nations, no nation can boldly make an independent policy from the United Nations allied bodies and the league of colonialists and neocolonialists without being reprimanded. The leaders of African nations are technically stooges of the colonialists and neocolonialists hiding under the cloak of Britten wood

institutions and the compromised United Nations and her allied bodies. This is exhibited in the continuous and widespread anti-African socioeconomic policies by the leaders under the yoke of United Nations globalization agenda covertly sustaining the interests of the former colonialists' and neocolonialists' interests across African nations. The former colonialists and neocolonialists, technically undermined by the United Nations exploitation agenda are now using aids, allies and diplomatic smokescreen to penetrate and influence socioeconomic policies among the vulnerable African nations. All the public institutions established among the African nations such as education, banking, public health institution, commerce and industries, culture and public orientations, etc are all patterned to accommodate and please the European, American and Eurasian colonialists and neocolonialists.

## THE PATHOGENS OF COLONIALISM AND NEOCOLONIALISM IN AFRICAN SYSTEM

Following the pattern through which colonialism and neocolonialism were institutionalised among African nations, the lifestyle of the subsequent generations has been automatically sequenced to build on the faulty foundations of the colonialists and neocolonialists ostensibly designed to keep Africa in perpetual dependence on the European, American and Asian nations while Africans are being exploited. This has resulted to self-hatred among the indigenous population of Africa due to comparison with the colonialists and neocolonialists values, African nations depending on the Britten wood institutions for borrowing and economic aids, Africa building her socioeconomic policies around the colonialists and neocolonialists socioeconomic models, maintaining public institutions that have no relevance to the indigenous people but aspires to meet the colonialists and neocolonialists global standard and political leaders in Africa being handpicked by the colonialists and neocolonialists to represent their interest against the overall interests of the indigenous population

By 14<sup>th</sup> century, the seed of colonialism and the subsequent neocolonialism had begun to germinate in the African region of the neoglobal map. This began with the empire conquest and natural resources colony in proxy by the European nations such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Britain who were exploring the world for natural and human resources for the emerging industrialization that has greeted the world via the European and American economies who have made breakthrough against the hitherto agrarian society and mechanical society. As part of the enterprise of the American and European league of exploiters in legitimizing illegitimacy when it is a sure way of continuing unfriendly capitalistic tendency, the proxy conquest and resources colony was graduated into full blown macro scale system of exploitation, first as slave trade, which received acceptance among the majority participating in the business in Europe and America, and latter into colonialism approved and accredited by the European league of nations.

The principle of the survival of the fittest, which has become a norm among the European and American League of Nations, seems to have permanently guided every intra and international relationship they have maintained. It was only a matter of compromising the image and intention of the activities involved in the relationship to capture whichever victim they came across. As such, the capitalistic tendency that pushed these nations to seek for materials and resources elsewhere compelled them to see the African nations at each stage as ripe for exploitation but by different strategies and approaches. For instance, during the era of conquest for empire and slave trade, they simply appeared as helping the trapped victims with rejected products in the European and American markets as well as, protecting the trapped population from the pseudo war they have invented. This superficial view of the initial contact was soon contradicted by the subsequent impunity with which they exploited the populations including the local leaders who ignorantly entered into alliance with them against their subjects.

After the era of proxy conquest for empire and slave trade bowed to the prevailing moral pressure emanating from the self-inflicted injury the European and American did to themselves by activating the canon of human right consciousness, colonialism, which officially received the blessings of the European league of nations in 1884 in Germany began to take off the stage in the disguise of civilization and protection of the vulnerable and already trapped African territories. Europeans having encountered resistance at the earlier stage of the colonial conquest while using force and weapons, changed the strategy into deception of the population with the Greek foil of friendship and civilization ostensibly to compromise the social psychology of the population to ignore the inherent dangers of self-enslavement orchestrated by the colonialists. As such, the policy of assimilation and that of association were introduced to eventually make the population vulnerable to self-hatred, a situation that graduated to auto rejection and autoimmune among the African population till date (Arukwe, 2010).

Colonialism itself was institutionalized via the social institutions, public institutions and public orientations such that, every aspect of African existence bowed to the infection of colonialism. For instance, the indigenous concept of security was transformed to modern institution so that the indigenous people were recruited to protect the interest of the colonialists, the indigenous concept of family was transformed to the colonialists home grown family ideology promoting individualism and segregation in the communities (Holzinger et al., 2019; Fenske, 2013), indigenous concept of leadership was corrupted to promote the colonialists slave master ideology capable of sustaining the interest of the colonialists long after they have left the system (Okafor, 2016), cultural orientation was corrupted with the quest to promote the colonialist culture and self hatred among the colonized (Lee, 2022; Ehiabhi, 2014), public orientation generally became a tool for the colonialists to subject the colonized to perpetual

servantship to the colonialist system (Bolt et al., 2022; Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013), etc.. The neocolonialism enterprise took the trajectory of institutionalised colonialism but with slight changes to adjust into the system that has been tensed by the agitation against the colonialist after colonialism got superseded by the prevailing moral order in the historical epoch. While the league of colonialists was within the wall of European nations, the web of neocolonialists included the former colonialists covertly maintaining their domination over their former colonies, and new entrants into the business of exploitation of the African and other nations who covertly used economic aids and other covert strategies to lure and tie down the vulnerable African nations.

## **SOCIAL WORK AS SOCIAL HEALTH INSTITUTION AND SOCIAL WORKERS AS SOCIAL HEALTH WORKERS**

Social work as a profession and discipline emerged as reaction or rather counter measure to the observed and envisaged social dilapidated condition of the time in Europe and America (Mehmet & Amra, 2013; Horner, 2012). While the social dilapidated condition is perceived as a social scientific concept to capture the abnormality in the society affecting the population, the social indicators were the visible suffering of the population in different areas of life. As such, social workers' corporate social responsibilities, which culminated into social work profession and specialized disciplines was the invention of the necessity of assistance to the poor masses lacking access to the basic social support and available resources for survival (Jordan, 2008; Starkey, 2000; Charlesworth, 2010; Yerli, 2020).

Social work by its appearance in all areas of the socioeconomic life of the society can best be captured as social health institution with much emphasis on its responsibility in dealing with the pathological condition of the society. While the pathological condition of the society exhibits the symptoms of diseases in different aspects of the societal life, social work as social health institution appears as multifaceted institution specializing in dealing with the different diseases dealing with the society itself. Clinically, there are different health condition and dimensions of health, which warrant specializations in the medical profession; this situation is obtainable in the social system, warranting the different specializations in social work, which deal with different issues in the society affecting the social wellbeing of the human beings in the society.

In the social scientific parlance, the different challenges faced by the poor masses in the society, which prompted the activities of the social workers are all social health issues requiring some professional training and understanding to deal with them in other to bring about social wellbeing for the population. Social work specializations, which are numerous such as in the areas of management, advocacy, policy and planning, public welfare, social justice, leadership etc., are typically designed to bring solution and ensure wellbeing of the population in these different dimensions of human existence. These different dimensions of human existence are supposedly social indicators of wellness and social pathology, which required social health specialists to bring about wellness of the population. This goes with the problem of colonialism and neocolonialism, which are developmental and policy crises dealing with the African system in the current historical epoch. While colonialism and neocolonialism are diseases and pathogens that have infected and continued to deal with the African system, the symptoms are the indices of underdevelopment and system degeneration, which we have continued to observe, experience and complain about. These are health and pathological conditions waiting for the social work health institution in the current history of Africa. Social work came as a healing service to humanity but started mostly as affairs for the poor. However, with time the realities of the essence of social work services for the vulnerable such as the African population has gradually emerged as the specialization in the social work profession has begun to explore the strategic areas of African vulnerabilities before the league of global imperialists. Social work as social health institution implies that the activities of the social workers are geared towards healing the society from different diseases and health conditions including pathological condition as Africa found herself currently. The healing of Africa from colonialism and neocolonialism can be achieved through the specializations in social work profession, which tally with the different areas of African colonial and neocolonial problems such as in the areas of educating the youth, public policy, leadership, social justice, monitoring and management of foreign aid and the likes.

### **Institutionalizing Decolonization in Africa: the expected Surgical Intervention by the Social Workers**

Unusual disease cannot be cured by everyday medicine. Colonialism and neocolonialism are not common developmental problems, which the theory of sustainable development by the United Nations can deal with owing to the fact that the phenomenon of colonialism and neocolonialism were properly designed perhaps by the same League of Nations who designed the theory and agenda of sustainable development. Colonialism and neocolonialism were perfectly institutionalised to capture every aspect of African existence for continuous bondage from generation to generation. As such, there is a need to set up a counter institutional process to reverse the domination and manipulation of colonial and neocolonial imperialistic activities. Social work as social health institution is perfectly positioned to do this in Africa.

Decolonization agenda is more complex in application than they appear in concept and assumptions owing to the high level of intelligence behind the colonization and neocolonization processes. Colonialism and the subsequent neocolonialism did not just appear in African system and started ruining the system without a coordinated and high intelligent works by the colonizers and the neocolonizers who designed the game. Beginning from the era of conquest for empires to that of slave trade, colonialism and the current neocolonialism strategies, they were carefully crafted system of imperialistic mission with multiple dimensions to capture African population virtually in all dimensions of life. While some of the dimensions of this imperialistic agenda were imported from the colonialists' territory, others were developed in the field of imperialistic mission following the principle of *necessity is the mother of invention*. In any case, the colonialists and the neocolonialists applied inductive and deductive strategies in managing their imperialistic mission in Africa. However, the most complicated level of the colonialists and neocolonialists operation in Africa was the institutionalisation of colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa.

Institutionalisation of colonialism and neocolonialism in African system followed certain processes and trajectories to capture and eventually enslaved the entire African societal system including the non-colonized territories who eventually were captured in the ongoing neocolonialism agenda. The processes included the basic learning processes such as *capturing of the attention* of the population, *imbuilding the colonialists covert agenda in the memory* of the population, *subversion of the indigenous languages* for the colonialist and neocolonialists' languages, *elevating the colonialists and neocolonialists logical order* in the life pattern of the population, *subjecting the colonized and neocolonized to the writing pattern* of the colonialists and the neocolonialists as well as *enslaving the thought pattern* of the colonized into the colonialists and neocolonialists agenda. These basic learning processes are naturally occurring but are vulnerable to whoever wants to manipulate them for whatever agenda such that through these processes, one can develop a population or a generation that will destroy itself in ignorance. The colonialists and the neocolonialists utilized these learning processes to gradually and steadily enslave the African system to make a way for their imperialistic agenda in the socioeconomic life of the population. They utilized the two major institutional and quasi-institutional trajectories to actualize this among the African population during the colonial period and the ongoing neocolonial historical epoch. These trajectories included the educational institution and the public orientation institutions such as the public media, work situation orientation, career orientation, religion and other tertiary orientation avenues among the population. Through these trajectories, the colonialists and the neocolonialists eventually developed an army of ignoramus who deliberately sustained the colonialists' and neocolonialists' agenda regardless of the disastrous consequences of the agenda on their side (the colonized and neocolonized). This system of colonialists' and neocolonialists' institutionalization of their imperialistic merchandise has lasted beyond the initiators and become a regular thing that has replicated the population of pro colonialists and neocolonialists interests in African system.

Having observed the colonialism and neocolonialism as pathogens and diseases in the African system, and how these pathogens and diseases found their way into the system, there is a need for sustainable strategies by the social health workers to heal the system. The surgical intervention by the social workers in dealing with the current pathological condition of African system as social health workers begins with the understanding of the processes and sustainable factors of colonialism and neocolonialism and how to reverse these factors in the system. However, for sustainable effects, whatever workable strategies to be adopted, they must be institutionalized. Institutionalisation of decolonization is the process of regularizing sustainable strategies in public counter measures against colonial and neocolonial orientations among the victims of colonialism and neocolonialism. The surgical intervention by the social workers as social health workers in healing the African system from its present pathological condition spans across the areas of specializations in social work discipline. In any case, social workers can use their professional specializations, which touch all social institutions of the society and virtually all aspects of life, to penetrate and sanitize the African system. These include the creating of avenue and establishment of sustainable educational program within the educational institutions to regularize counter colonial and neocolonial orientation among the youth and the users of educational resources and services among African population; capturing the public orientation institutions such as public media, career orientation process, work situation, etc., through advocacy to sustainably reverse the thought logic of colonialism and neocolonialism among the population; penetrating the policy initiation and implementation processes, with Afrocentric orientation and counter colonialists and neocolonialists orientations; building and popularising teams of Afrocentric leaders at various levels of leaderships among the new generation leaders in order to phase off the already muddled leadership system in Africa, capturing and reversing micro and macro scales foreign aids from colonialist and neocolonialist intension, into indigenous African resources for genuine and sustainable development activities.

## CONCLUSION

The African system captured as the social, economic, cultural and political lives of the African nations has been subjected to sustainable attacks by the so called developed nations and even emerging economies in a manner best understood and expressed in this paper as pathogen attacks resulting to pathological condition. These attacks have

basically come from the league of the former colonialists and neocolonialists who covertly entrench themselves into the systems of the African nations via Britten wood institutions, economic aids and vertical bilateral relationships with the vulnerable African nations. Over a century, scholars, political elites and even the common masses have tried in different times, strategies and dimensions to liberate African nations from this illicit engagement however, there has been some level of complications invariably making it difficult to ordinarily deal with the situation. The complications have virtually hanged on the fact that the whole issue of colonialism and neocolonialism was a system institutionalised beyond one individual, group or nation, but operated across regions, time and fluidly interwoven with the life system of the colonized and the neocolonized. Meanwhile, unusual disease can only be cured by unusual medicine; this is applicable to the current condition of the African nations. The unusual medicine for the pathological condition of the African system is domicile with the social workers who are exceptional in dealing with social problem. Social workers are perfectly positioned with their strategic relationship with the poor mass across African nations who are in the majority of the population analysis of African existence and also are more vulnerable to the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism. This they can achieve exploiting the multidimensional approach to societal social wellbeing captured in the specializations in social work profession.

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