Foreign Management of Visas and Neocolonialism in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on the management of visa in Nigeria and the concept of neocolonialism in consideration of the activities and methods of operation of some of the embassies of United States, Canada, British, among others in Nigeria an over view from 2005 to 2014. The insistence of non-refundable fees and the non-issue of visa to a large percentage of applicants presuppose siphoning of the income of visa aspirants with impunity. This action in a way retards the living condition of the people. Besides, the lack of standard of operation as everybody is not treated same way is a thing of worry. This situation compels the authors to make the following recommendations among others: the federal government should come up with policies on issue of visa and their fees in Nigeria. If visa is not given owing to one circumstance or the other, if not all, part of the fees should be refunded. Besides, standard for offering and refusal of visa should be well defined and made public. The government has to ensure that visa aspirants should not be made to face harsh conditions by embassies.

Key words: Challenges, embassy, foreign, management, prospects, visa-fees

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, it is our intention to unravel how the treatment and undefined approach of visas issue by some embassies in Nigeria has imposed some challenges and how it has been perceived to adversely affect the economic situation of the many visa aspirants in the country, an over view. Nigeria has undergone series of experiences, among which includes: environmental restructuring, intimidation, humiliation, oppression and exploitation to become what it is at moment. Nigeria was a good source of slaves for the European countries until colonialism was in vogue. However, slave trade was abolished by the Britain in 1807 and they also solicited other European countries to join the ban. One of the reasons for such decision by the Britain was that American colonies were no longer under British Empire that needed slaves for economic activity and productivity. Besides, the extent of increase in industrialisation necessitates Britain to rely on raw materials from Africa instead of slaves. Consequently, trade on European valued palm oil and other items for industrial purposes replaced slave trade. Many European countries were interested in Nigeria as explorers like Mungo Park, Hugh Clapperton of Scotland, John
and Richard Lander of England and Heinrich Barth of Germany, among others played significant role in charting the Niger River and its environment for easy voyage to the region. Gradually, domestic trading was instituted. Christian missionary were able to come into the country with their positive influence. Colonialism can be said to begin in 1884 when Europeans (Britain, France, Portugal and others) scramble for Africa. Conflict of interests led to Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, hence Africa was partitioned for colonialism and British had a share of West Africa due to the existence of her trading activity and influence in the Niger Delta region. Colonialism lasted for over seventy years in Nigeria (Nabudere, 1978; Charles and Kenneth, 1992; Wright, 2008; Mastanduno, 2008; Uma, 2009).

Neocolonialism or new imperialism is concerned with the activities of powerful nations in the affairs of less powerful countries in such a way that there is element of economic imperialism. In this regard, the powerful advanced nations act like the colonial powers which resemble colonialism in a post-colonial situation (New World Encyclopedia, 2008). This circumstance involves exploitation of less powerful economies’ resources at the detriment of the fable nations, thereby contributing to impoverishment, poor development and low living standard.

Gidado (2002) and Okoro, (2012) posit that the United States of America had no colony in Africa, as it has no share in the partitioning, but on becoming the political and economic chieftain of the world made available the foundation for de-colonialism process. Given the situation, the world power (USA) sought for open door policy or liberalization in the management of colonies and territories of Africa. The adoption of open door policy by many African countries resulted to Transnational Corporations of US penetrating the then monopolized colonial markets. So, the period of decolonization and neo-colonization was made possible by the twin aspiration for independence by the native elites and the US pursuant of open door policy in the international political environment. Consequently, some African countries were granted independence in the mid 20th century. Nigeria got her nominal independence in 1960 given that her political, social and economic activities were still under the control of the colonial masters, specifically Britain. This is partly the genesis of neocolonialism in Nigeria. The physical withdrawal of the colonial administration gradually gave rise to neocolonialism. Neocolonialism actually is a term used to describe the actions and intentions of the colonial masters who believed and in a subtle way repositioned themselves on the basis that colonialism should not give up its position entirely. Consequently, the imperialist power headed by the United States, the mainstay and safeguard of contemporary colonialism hastened and fastened the shackles of neocolonialism on liberated Asian and African states by subjugating them economically and politically in a very subtle and restrained way. Nkrumah (1965) posits that neocolonialism is the worst form of imperialism and a nation in the grasp of neocolonialism is a servant and not a master of its own destiny. This is because the mode of production, economic and political policies of such sovereign economy are administered and stage-managed from beyond the boundaries of the country by international economies or bodies, and so the economy’s productive resources are shared between the neocolonialist and its victim, thereby adversely retarding improvement of the living standard of the people. Besides, the major concern of the people is at variance with the interest of the neo-colonists which implies a supposed sovereign nation dancing to the orchestrated tune of the power holder at the expense of the needs and aspiration of the land owners.

Many authors have examined the roles of colonialism and neocolonialism in Nigeria ranging from political, socio-cultural and economic influence, and the extent they retarded development of a developing nation. This led Arthur (1990) to posit that Nigeria has been greatly injured in all angles as a result of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The injury has for a long time remained unhealed. The situation cum leadership predicament, quagmire and bottleneck has posed a very slow match to development.

Okereke and Ekpe (2002) assert that the poor development of Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular hinges on the forceful incorporation of the country into international capitalist system due to some factors such as slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. However, the aspect not yet examined in the literature is the visa saga termed by the authors as a new face of neocolonialism experienced by many Nigerians who aspire for visa and desire to visit European and American countries. The critical situation is
happening in some foreign embassies in Nigeria. The situation has escalated to an alarming stage and has in different ways consumed the meagre income of Nigerians-visa-aspirants through the conduit of non-refundable visa fees.

Be it as it may, the paper is stream-lined thus: section two focuses on issues of neocolonialism in Nigeria; section three dwells on the new face of neocolonialism while section four is the immiseration implications and conclusion.

**Issues of Neocolonialism and Perspectives**

The major motivation of colonialism in Nigeria is economic factor in which the British was seriously aspiring to satisfy their basic home need of industrial raw materials. This gave rise to adoption of strategy for labour exploitation and establishment of routes such as sea ports and railway for conveyance of products to Europe. The period of colonialism was mainly designed by the colonial masters to design avenue for the evacuation of the country’s resources to boost productivity in Britain. The little or no attention on food production and the insistence on cash crops needed in their home industries was a serious blow to the social and economic lives of the people. This compelled Okoro (2012) to note that the overall agenda of the British exploitation is that while Nigeria was socially and economically robbed and development process retarded, Europe was developing at the cost of adverse effect on the indigenous people of Nigeria. This view is in line with Rodney (1972) who asserts that the advancement of Europe plays significant role to the underdevelopment of Africa.

The powerful nations in collaboration with transnational economic institutions spread their tentacles in the affairs of weak countries politically, socially and economically. So, neocolonialism is regarded as a form of contemporary and economic imperialism such that powerful economies act like colonial powers and such action is quite similar to colonialism in a post-colonial era. It is most dangerous in that your oppressors are not visible to you but have designed a powerful and invincible channel of resources appropriation without concern of the inhabitants’ welfare.

Strategic plans were intentionally made by the British colonial administration in Nigeria to foster and continue post-colonialism or neocolonialism. At the period of de-colonilization, just between 1952 and 1960, the British colonial masters through legislative and executive approach put in place measures aimed at continual control of economic and political status of independent Nigeria. Unfortunately, the neocolonialists approach were established with the help of Nigerian allied referred to as compradors in the Federal government. Besides, other approaches such as tax laws, bilateral agreements among others were design to perpetuate British dominance in the affairs of Nigeria beyond political independence. The bilateral relationships were made on economic and financial agreement which focused on benefiting in all angles the post independence activities of the British government and her businesses. All agreement intentions were mainly the creation of a strong conduit pipe that was sufficient to siphon the resources of Nigerian economy thereby bringing about immiseration of the people but targeted to the acceleration of British economy. (Osoba, 1987; Lange, 2009a; Austin, 2010).The high dependency linkage experienced by the country was well calculated and meticulously designed prior to the relinquishing of political power.

Tactfully, the British colonial masters designed beneficial laws in their favour and at the disfavour to the country. For instance, Income Tax Ordinance was used by some foreign companies to evade taxes. A typical example is the elusive actions of a British company in Nigeria, Elder Dempster Lines Agencies Limited that could be taxed only when profit is declared from the agency fees and not during actual operations on the ground that the Agencies had paid taxes in the United Kingdom. The formal tax base of the Agencies that usually realise very huge profits from operations in Nigeria were carefully carted away without a significant contribution to the government of Nigeria in form of tax. This is because of the way tax law was tailored to favour foreign businesses during decolonization process (Berger, 2009; Attah, 2013). The situation was highly detrimental to Nigerian economy as the tax law was purposely made to undermine taxes that suppose accrue to Nigeria and mainly to exonerate British business from fulfilling necessary obligation.
Other contractual agreements were made mainly to ensure being the only shipping company for Nigerian goods. The shipping arrangement was made only to benefit the British company as there was no indigenous shipping company. Besides, there was no provision to allow Nigerians to patronize other foreign shipping companies. The essence of this arrangement was to siphon the country’s resources required for development (Osoba, 2006). Nigeria was not allowed to delve into shipping business even after independence. Annoyingly, transnational oil cartels exempted Nigeria from the conveyance of Nigerian crude oil in spite of efforts made by Nigeria which led the country to acquire vessels in 1978 and 1986, but were frustrated by foreign shipping lines and so the vessels acquired eventually become storage tankers.

Disgustingly, to ensure neocolonialism, the colonial authority on physical withdrawal from Nigeria ensured that the large petroleum reserve in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria remain under the influence of her two indigenous companies: the British Petroleum that is fully owned by the British and the Royal Dutch Company which is joint Anglo-Dutch business. The two firms continuously control Nigerian oil industry from beginning to the end with the motive of enjoying all the benefits at the expense of the owners. This continued even after independence in spite of granting exploration right to other transnational oil companies that represented United States, Germany, Italy, Japan, France and so on. However, the later role of these transnational oil firms placed Nigeria as only tax agent of oil industry while the entire control and management of the industry was at the beck and call of these representatives of powerful nations, a mark of neocolonialism (Attah, 2013; Uche, 2008)

It can be categorically stated that the foundation of most developmental growthlessness in Nigeria hinges on the structure of colonialism exploitation with little or no attention given to the process of manufacturing, science and technology at the right period needed for effective development and harnessing of Nigerian resources. Harshe (1997), points that neocolonialism is a stage of imperialism and its associated web of dominance and control. Neocolonialism brings about the connection between the dynamics of external supremacy and the formal independence of the dominated weak economies. The asymmetric relationship in a way is highly beneficial to the powerful nation in comparison with the subjugated states. Neocolonialism has also introduced deprivation and impoverishment on the underdeveloped economies through the process of neo-liberal reforms anchored by the “structural adjustment programmes” of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Besides, Neocolonialism created compradors, indigenous elites affiliated to the neo-colonists. Jones (2006) posits that neocolonialism resulted to the local aspect of the ruling class who now has enabling environment to enrich themselves through parasitic operation and corruption. The compradors or saboteurs are highly inclined to the powerful masters and they are at their beck and call in perpetrating influence in the subaltern. In the view of Onimode (2000) the excessive action of colonialism by the native elites, gave rise to elites struggle for independence. Neocolonialism whichever form it has taken is not beneficial to the victim. This is because the hardship associated with many people by the perpetrators could be avoided if and only if efforts are put in place to counteract it.

Disappointedly, when a country is under the spell of neocolonialism, Nkrumah (1965) posits that it is subjected to being independent in theory but essentially being trapped by international sovereignty. Consequently, the existing economic system and political policy is directly influenced from outside the boundaries of a sovereign nation. The modus operandi employed could be the existence of imperial power troop assumed to be on peace mission on the territory of neocolonial nation and directly or indirectly control the ruling government. It is often operated through economic or monetary means such that the imperialist may insist on patronizing only her manufactured product to guard against any form of competition with any other economy. Some financial incentives or grants offered to assist the business of the victim government can be devised to control government policy in favour of the imperialist power. Besides, monetary control over foreign exchange through influence of the banking system is aimed at sufficient control by imperial power. These in different ways have been experienced by Nigeria which has reposition economic and political operation of the economy at the adverse impact on development but favourable to neo-colonist.
Neocolonialism is a development stage of an ex-colony that is supposed to be transitional and temporal but in the case of Nigeria, it has become a continuous tool designed to encourage underdevelopment. Neocolonialism is envisaged to be a prolongation of the role of the ex-colonist indirectly but circumstances have shown that countries that were never colonized somehow become neo-colonist nations. Independent economies that did not witness or experienced colonialism have been made to become neo-colonial nations by international financial capital due to the weak economic nature of the economies. For instance, the United State of America has used its capitalist economic prowess to design and establish a good number of colonies such as Liberia and Ethiopia which were not in any way colonized by her. Besides, Iraq and Afghanistan are presently American colonies due to invasion and settlement by America without the usual process of colonization. The issue is that there is a strategy of a gradual emergence of weak nation dependence on powerful nation (Attah, 2013; Emerson, 1960).

Domatob (1988) points that sub-Sahara Africa’s media training, policies, technology, new values, language and advertising were designed to favour and perpetuate neocolonialism position. Neocolonialism refused to acknowledge economic independence and the establishment of bodies like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund among others, and the cooption of all sub-Saharan African were aimed at perpetuating them to remain as suppliers of raw materials and cheap labour mainly to satisfy the whims and caprices of the imperialists’ world capitalists. The reality of neocolonialism in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be over emphasised. It exists and influences all aspect of life such as social, political, religious and cultural. It dominates the African media through the news and programme content that is dominated by strong Western metropolitan perceptions. The situation presupposes that most countries of Africa live in the shadow of their former colonial masters and so the African media is devoid of philosophy and ideology. The propagated mass media depends on neo-colonist ideology. Besides, the pattern of advertisement bequeathed focuses on consumerist culture for Western goods dumped in African markets. The media technology, international marketing and Transnational Corporation dealing on products and gadgets in Africa perpetuate neocolonialism in the media.

In another perspective, Onimode (1981) posits that in most part of sub-Saharan Africa, the British, French, Portuguese and Spanish tactically established petty bourgeoisie made up of chiefs, businessmen, labour leaders, lawyers, doctors, engineers and military officers before offer of independence. The same allied elites class were handed over political power but subtly manipulated and dominated economic power at the phase of neocolonialism which has persisted since 1960 to date. It is unequivocal that the degree of the underdevelopment of Africa and Nigeria in particular is a function of excessive dominance of imperialist powers or neo-colonialists that have sophisticated technology in all facets of life. Their roles sharpen our taste so much that we have absolute reliance on their products and disregard for our own. Consequently, always creating markets for Western products; more aggregate economic activity of Western economy with accelerated economic growth but low turnover/consumption of domestic output and consequently high unemployment rate.

Management of Visa and the New Face of Neocolonialism
In spite of the influential trade patterns, programmes, strategies and policies by neo-colonists for Nigeria over 54 years, a lot is still on-going, which is a form of excessive exploitation on the part of the populace. It is disheartening to see how Nigerians are treated at various embassies in the country in the quest for securing a visa to travel to Europe and other countries of the world. That apart, the undefined approach of denying visa by some embassies like Britain, United States and Canada after sufficient on-line test running of qualification to apply; then satisfying the requirements as demanded in the forms and templates provided and make payment of about twenty nine thousand naira or more. Unfortunately, a flimsy reason is given for refusal of visa. Some of the visa aspirants must have travelled over eight to ten hours on the road from some parts of the country to the embassies’ offices in Abuja or Lagos. In some cases, a reapplication with same information initially used in which a refusal of visa was made is eventually given visa. The issue here is that every day over one hundred candidates do line up in Canadian visa centre, United States Embassy and British
Embassy, amongst others in Lagos and Abuja, each having paid a minimum of twenty-seven thousand two hundred naira (₦27, 200.00) in the case of United States, so for a hundred people, the total is two million seven hundred and twenty thousand naira (₦ 2,720,000.00) a day. At the end of the day, less than 30% is offered visa. Huge income made every year by embassies in Nigeria yet not allowing the populace the opportunity to travel.

Really, one could say the insurgent situation in the country could contribute to this, but it is difficult to accept this wholly as this situation has persisted. For instance, Nigeria World (2014) reports that in the year 2004, out of 12,000 visa applications by students to United Kingdom 6,300 which is 55% were accepted and issued with visa while 45%, 5,700 were refused visa; in 2005/2006 the applications doubled to 27,500 but 75% was refused visa. In addition, 72% was refused visa in 2007 while in 2008 out of 25,000 applications, 8,500 which is less than 40% were issued with visa. Whatever is the reason for refusal, it is unequivocal that each year a large sum of non-refundable visa fees are taken away from visa candidates. Each year stringent conditions are put in place to ensure more refusal of visa by British Embassy so as to make more income from the country in the name of non-refundable fees. The visa policy of this neo-colonist is not far from the earlier policy of exploitation put in place after our nominal independence. The situation as far as we are concern is a new face or form of neocolonialism that is sapping the meagre income of the people.

The way people, old or young are made to line-up outside some embassies premises like the United States Embassy in Nigeria under the sun or rain in the bid to be considered for visa is dehumanizing. One would expect a reaction on the part of the Nigerian leaders, but they are treated differently and do not experience the callous treatment meted to visa aspirants. So, the ordinary men who are in majority wishing to travel for one reason or the other are made to face harsh conditions in the course of attending visa interview and in the long-run would not be given visa for undefined reason(s). The question here is why should the embassy invite one for interview after assessing the individual’s application and found it to be unsatisfactory for visa issue? Why compel visa aspirants to waste precious time and money attending visa interview which is eventually denied? Are the interests of embassies in Nigeria mainly to exploit the masses and create avoidable psychological trauma and inconveniences? Is the interest of embassies mainly to get the non-refundable visa payment only and device a way to satisfy their conscience before enjoying the payment? These questions beg for answers considering the flimsy excuses, lack of standard of attending to visa aspirants and the avoidable inconveniences usually created for seekers. The circumstance can be referred to as a new face or form of neocolonialism involving serious elements of exploitation.

The Impoverishing Implications of Visa Management and Neocolonialism
Industrialisation and the development of a country hinges on resources availability, developed capital market, adequate capital (physical and human), level of technology, infrastructure and relevant policies (Onwumere and Igwemma, 2010). Unfortunately, these factors are lacking in Nigeria and the situation has posed a serious constraint to the progress and advancement of the country. Actually, the third world countries, Nigeria inclusive are characterized by poverty which gave rise to low income, low saving, low capital formation, low investment and low productivity which culminates to poverty in a vicious circle. This situation is not entirely made by the people of the country rather a lot of factors in operation, working and reacting due to the activities of colonists; neo-colonists and leadership bottleneck have over the years placed the country as one of the poorest economies the world over. Attah (2013) observed that the character of the present underdevelopment is therefore a product of the historical conjuncture of neocolonialism rooted in the decolonization agenda. Suffice it to state that this new face of neocolonialism and others that may spring up have already been in-built in the system and operation of Nigerian economy. A change can only be possible if and only if the government says no to it.

So, many activities in the country have resulted in worsening the welfare of the people in spite of abundant resources bestowed by nature. Specifically, the pattern of management of visa in Nigeria has continuously impacted negatively on the development of Nigeria economy. It does siphon the income of
visa aspirants. Disgustingly, some embassies in Nigeria use the concept of non-refundable visa fee as an easy avenue for flagrant and abysmal exploitation of the meagre income of Nigerians. It is highly demoralising the way this event takes place. The U.S visa fee of N27, 200 for non-immigrants, Canadian visa fee of over N28, 000 and British visa fee of over N22, 000.00 in 2014 is indeed a large chunk of money for a low income earner or poor economy. In some cases this amount of money is higher than the monthly income of visa aspirants seeking for job opportunity in view of open door policy advocated by powerful nations. Taking this large sum of money without reciprocal fulfillment of the objective of the candidates is paying for a commodity without getting the goods and it is perceived as egregious maltreatment of the people which have greatly affected the economic position of the people. In other words, the designed visa policy which has frequently been increased over the years is calculated intention of exploitation without redress and it shows a high degree of regular immiserization of Nigerian people. To all intents and purposes this is like a wealthy man devising an approach and consciously extorting money from his subaltern and so weakening the economic power of the populace.

Consequently, while the superior advances in all ramifications, the subalterns continuously crawl for survival. This is what is happening to Nigerian people vis-à-vis the powerful countries’ embassies in Nigeria. This is a new form of neocolonialism which if nothing is done about it the economic status of many Nigerian would persistently deteriorate with the amount of non-refundable visa fees taken away without any benefit. The aggregate non-refundable visa fees that are taken away from Nigeria every year are enough to revive moribund industries in Nigeria. On this note, Ikenna (2009) asserts that the abysmal failure to get Nigeria’s developmental agenda right has been traced to neo-colonialism among others. The gradual siphon of income of the people of Nigeria in subtle ways has adversely affected the welfare of the people and so more than the average populace has poor living standard. Besides, the intention of disposal of labour by some Nigerians abroad is denied whereas the emphasis of powerful nations is on open door policies. This made Okoro (2012) to point that it is mainly goods, funds and capital are allowed to move without obstacles around the world, while Nigerian who are eager to sell their labour abroad are impeded but rather exploited.

From the aforementioned, it is unequivocal that the regular activities of foreign management perceived as neocolonialism has taken have brought about impoverishment or immiseration of the living condition of the people through visible and invisible exploitation, and subtle suppression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Obviously, every pad-lock has a specific key, so also every problem that affects man has an already made solution by the side. Be it as it may, it is our sincere perception that the following points will help minimise the immiseration tendency of this new face of neocolonialism in Nigeria.

(i) The federal government should come up with policies on visa fees in Nigeria. If visa is not given owing to one circumstance or the other, if not all, part of the fees should be refunded. Besides, standard for offering and refusal of visa should be well defined and made public. In some cases visa aspirants will carry large documents recommended for visa interview and at last not even a copy will be looked at by the embassies’ staff and refusal notice is issued. The action of refusal of visa by embassies’ staff based on psychological or physiological disposition is highly prejudicial and unacceptable.

(ii) A follow up is that the government should ensure that the embassies’ web site information for visa applications should specifically categorize in clear terms if one is qualified for visa or not. This will guard against waste of precious time and money in travelling over ten hours on the road for those taking off from the South-South, South East, and North West geopolitical zones and in the long-run refusal of visa is made without reason.

(iii) The government has to ensure that visa aspirants should not be made to face harsh condition by embassies. The government has to play significant role by monitoring and evaluating what is happening at the embassies from time to time with a view to intervene and protect the citizens. Visa issues should not be made a business venture by embassies.
CONCLUSION
The paper has examined the embassy management of visa in Nigeria which has in various ways taken huge income of visa aspirants in the name of non-refundable fees and expressed perceptions of such events as a form of neocolonialism which has played immeasurable role in impoverishing of Nigerian people. The view of the authors is in conformity with other studies that neocolonialism has ever remained in operation in Nigeria in particular and Africa as a whole. It is the responsibility of the leaders of the country to devise approaches to circumvent the ugly experience of the people emanating from embassies in the country with the intention to reduce the exploitative tendencies. Neocolonialism has helped greatly to bring about the underdevelopment of Nigerian economy and need be addressed.

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