Shifting the Goalposts: Postcolonial Africa and the West in the Global “Two Publics” of the Development Paradigm

Taiwo A. Olaiya

Abstract

Heretofore, development studies seldom focus on the systemic twists in the market functions and the structural contradictions of capital functionalities that appear to deny African states the opportunity to engage the world as global financial competitors. This article engages the nagging reconstruction of Africa’s development discourse, particularly the debate about the fallout of the global development paradigm that created “two publics” of the West and the “Others.” The classic works of African and Africana political thinkers are explored to thoughtfully situate the position of African states in the contemporary competitive market systems amidst the various distortions in the trade morality and fundamentals. Using a systematic approach and rigorous evidence-based review, the article combines materials and methods from sociological, economic, and political perspectives to scrupulously situate a perceptive case on the continued economic tension that Africa has had to grapple with from a conceivable past to the modern days. The article argued that the global economic order transformed from the mutuality interface that capitalism arguably represents into exploiter/subject relations. The aberration created by the scenario negates the freedom of all, including the impoverished, to trade on equal pedestals, and specifically, made Africa’s economic development forlornly challenging—not necessarily for being a poor player but for the constant shift in the goalposts.

Keywords

African development, capitalism, global inequality, global market forces, global public, market distortions, postcolonial Africa, regional imbalance, The west and others

Background Statement

The fundamental economic and political imperative that places the grossly underdeveloped continent of Africa side-by-side with financial giants of the globe has continued to elude scholarly attentions. Going by critical reasoning and review, the West appears too fast, vast and far in science, technology, economic capabilities, and financial strength to be in the same world with most regions of the global South in general and the more significant parts of Africa in particular. Keita (2016, p. 24) listed the “wide disparities in the [economic] metrics” of the two best African economies—Nigeria and South Africa—in sharp comparison with many developed and developing economies. The results showed that these states, despite the benefits of large populations, the accompanying “markets,” and the recompenses from large deposits of mineral resources, paradoxically lag distantly behind states in other regions in per capita GNI. With about 200 million population and a GDP of $522 billion, Nigeria records only $3,000 income per capita while the 350,000 peoples and a $15 billion GDP in Iceland produce $44,000 income per capita (Keita, 2016). Reinert (2019, p. 2) had queried: “Why is the real wage of a bus driver in Frankfurt (Germany) sixteen times higher than an equally efficient bus driver in Nigeria?” “The main explanation,” in Reinert (2019) words, “is that the rich world today has confused the reasons for economic growth” (p. 143).

In an eloquent allegory of the hapless and desperate case of Africa, Mkandawire (2011, p. 1) quoted a 1966 comment of African statesman and former president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere that contemporary Africa is at a stage where she has to “run while others walk.” As Pillay (2015, p. 59) also argued, the celebrated “Africa rise” narrative appears to be a sheer incestuous mantra and a “false sense of promise” of enhanced economic fortune that the current global financial

1Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Corresponding Author:
Taiwo A. Olaiya, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife 220005, Nigeria.
Email: olaiyata@oauife.edu.ng
regimes “can never” deliver for Africa. Beyond the interminable interests in the deleterious effects that centuries of the transatlantic slave trade and decades of colonial and imperial missions of the West have meted on Africa, discussions about the broader issues of governance and economic situation in the continent may not abate for a while considering the economic realities facing most African countries in the contemporary time. There appears no gainsaying the fact that the umbilical cord that binds the nations of Africa with their past and the injustices that leave permanent characters on the sociology of her governance is still very much in existence (Ayogu, 2016). Thus, the limiting of African governance issues to happenings within the continent without interrogating the interconnectedness and implications of these global actors may not be sufficient in getting to the root of the pervasive governance crisis.

Available works on global commerce and African political economy have tended to gloss over the interminable challenges that African states experience against stiff and competitive economic circumstances occasioned by free enterprise. This article attempts a reasoned critique of the discourse on the global functioning of market-supporting institutions such as multinational corporations, financial regulatory institutions, and institutions for macroeconomic stabilization. The article further explores an eloquent analogy between the classic work of an African political thinker, Peter Ekeh, in his theory of “two publics,” and the German social theorist, Jurgen Habermas, in his philosophical explanation of the transformation of the bourgeois and liberal public spheres into the modern capitalist system with various market distortions.

Colonialism may seem a shared historical experience across global passages. Nevertheless, the dimensions meted on Africans, as Bamgbose (2019, p. 85) posited, produced unthinkable and shocking anguish, in terms of overwhelming and constant “magnitude of colonial destruction and exploitations of humans and ecology” than recorded in scholarly works and elsewhere. There are extant authorities that established the disruptions that the Arabs and Europe successively meted on the peace and stability of Africa during the slave trade and colonial era (Clifford, 1921; Crowder, 1968; Lugard, 1922; Harunah, 2001; Shaw, 1905). As Eichhorn (2019) wrote, the “Atlantic World was part of the slave trade experience since well before the Atlantic World even came into existence” (p. 103) “From 1451 to 1870,” Loveday (2019) estimated, about “9,566,100 slaves were imported into the Americas and other parts of the Atlantic basin” (p. 265). Shaw (1905) wrote that the human trade boomed and attracted investors from all parts of Europe—a fact buttressed by another author that “more merchants and investors became dazzled by the profits offered by a successful slave voyage” (Forest, 2020, p. 60).

The illicit trading in Negro people allegedly originated with the Arab slave raiders in the ancient era and beyond the middle age, and subsequently given “considerable extension of the traffic” through “the application of European energy and enterprise to [the] trade” (Clifford, 1921, p. 5). “In the fully developed Greek city-state, the political order, as is well known, rested on a patrimonial slave economy. . .and a lack of slaves would in themselves prevent admission to the polis (public sphere)” (Habermas, 1991, p. 3). As Easterly (2006, p. 273) argued, the European overpowered the native Africans to “mess up the pre-colonial arrangements” by “sponsoring native autocrats,” “low standards of performance,” and promoting tyranny against women and youth. The submission of Torero and Chowdhury (2004) appears to capture the situation of African states at independent era:

“Unlike Asia and Latin America, Africa inherited a highly dispersed and unevenly distributed infrastructure from its colonial past. There was little, if any, improvement of infrastructure during the colonial era, and, according to [Baland and] Plateau (1996, p. 200), “in some important respects, it can even be said that colonial policy reinforced the handicaps of SSA”. The limited infrastructure that was built during that era was driven by the objective of connecting natural resources to export markets. For example, Plateau noted that “two-thirds of the African railways built in the colonial period connected mines to a coastal harbour” (p. 200). The rest of the continent was virtually ignored and, according to Boserup (1981, p. 148), “only the Union of South Africa with mass immigration of Europeans had more than six meters of railways per square kilometre in 1970 and six countries had no railways at all”.

In the same vein, as Brautigham and Knack (2004) argued, unlike the way colonialism was engaged in other former colonies such as India, the case of Africa presents multiple jeopardies. According to the authors:

“Colonialism did little to develop strong, indigenously rooted institutions that could tackle the development demands of modern states. . . state capacity and institutions of governance in many African countries have never been particularly strong. The newly independent nations of Africa were not well prepared for self-government, and many faced ethnic tensions that had been exacerbated by colonial rule. Local skill bases were weak. Only six universities had been established in all of sub-Saharan Africa, and in 1960 postsecondary enrollment levels were about one-sixtieth of those in Asia and Latin America. During their occupation of India, the British had established the Indian Civil Service, providing a dense network of several generations of well-trained civil servants with a growing tradition of meritocracy. Few countries in Africa had any comparable experience (Mauritius is an exception). In Nigeria, for example, only 15% of the upper-level civil service positions were filled by Nigerians as independence drew close. In other countries, the percentage was even lower”. (Brautigham & Knack, 2004, p. 255) (Emphasis mine)

The relevance of Walter Rodney’s “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa” persists in the discourse of the how major economic powers severally and jointly plundered
Africa—seen as the world’s most endowed continent (Vimercati, 2019). From the period spanning 1500 AD to the momentous independence era of 1960s, Rodney (1981) revealed the helpless series of deliberate exploitation of Africa’s natural and cultural resources by imperial European nations. There is, therefore, a sizable convergence around what Adeoti (2016) wrote: “slavery and colonialism are two defining factors in African history” (p. 2). However, beyond the largely empathic effusions of Rodney and other Africanist writers, historical accounts of the likes of Robin Law in The Oyo Empire 1600—1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade detailed the historiography of the rise and fall of Oyo Empire. In that book, the author argued that the imperial expansion of the Oyo Empire that spanned about four centuries was predicated on the perversion for Western materiality and illicit wealth derived from slave raids. At the promptings and military assistance of the European slave traders and at the “expense of its neighbors” who were raided and ebb of able-bodied men and women of productive age “from time to time,” the so-called Empire launched into a more extensive networks of the slave trade, with incommensurate benefit, going by the loss, and by strokes of nemesis eventually got annihilated when it embarked on local raids of its citizens (Law, 1977, p. vii). “The Old Oyo Empire” as well as “empires” of Benin, Songhai, Kanem Borno, Kano, and other along the West African sub-Region engaged in expansionist campaigns against immediate and remote neighbors but nevertheless predominantly for “kidnapping” of hostages to be sold as merchandise to the Arabs at first (trans-Saharan) and later to the Europeans (trans-Atlantic) slave traders (Harunah, 2001, p. 13). According to the writer,

In all these wars of territorial expansion, an important question was not whether one community was a Yoruba-speaking State or its next-door neighbor a non-Yoruba group. What was crucial was success in . . .harrying of captives, most of whom were almost immediately ‘converted’ to trade goods and exported to the slave ports in Badagry, Port Novo, Whydah, etc. . . . This was how the Alaafin of Oyo rose . . .to become the most powerful monarch in Yorubaland before 1800. . . . His empire became the leading supplier of slaves to Europeans in that part of the present-day Nigeria (p. 27-28).

As Inikori (1992, p. 27) revealed, the “dominant interest group in Oyo had no overriding interest in territorial expansion” or angling “for administering conquered territories”; the material issue was “raiding neighbors and forcefully removing their population” in “a cycle of hostility.” As empires wax and wane in Africa, therefore, what ignites the inordinate ambition to “war-war” was not about expansionist plans, which is unknown to primordial Africa (Crowder, 1968; Inikori, 1992), but the intense and intensifying demand for slaves from slave merchants. The emphasis here is not to engage in the imaginative fancy of historical determinism, but to showcase the cruel misfortune that the historical past impacted on Africans and Africa’s public realm and how such might have shaped today’s economic consequences. Even though Habermas’s postulations focused on European states and societies, their connections in explaining the transformation of morality spectrum from the public to privatized morality through the systematic shift of power base and moral agenda settings from the citizens to the political authority can hardly be overstated. First, we attempt to examine the global inequalities as a probable consequence of a prejudicial economic system that produced double standards in financial regimes: one which operates in the West and continues to thrive in the proper economic mechanism, and the other operating in mainly Africa with skewed economic laws. We subsequently interrogated a probable “concentric” encirclement between Ekeh’s theoretical and practical exposition of the African experiences of Europe’s missions in Africa and Habermas’ philosophical consequences of change from a bourgeois public sphere into the modern public sphere through a dynamic political process in Europe. The attempt arguably bears the contrast of juxtaposing two continents with vast differences in the fortune of socio-economic and political history and success, while at the same time showcases the similar generational experiences between the rich North and the poor South. In sum, the work conflated Ekeh and Habermas, intending to invite the attention of pan-African scholars to the need for new postulations on the “received” global financial regimes that appears to have failed (in) Africa.

**Conceptualizing African “Publicness”**

Sustained discourses on the word “public” in Africa would vary just as its harmonization has become tenuous elsewhere. The African pre-colonial notion of publicness differs from public space in post-colonial Africa. Again, this is not a basket case of Africa. Hasan (2005) distinguished India pre-colonial setting from the modern Habermasian “publicity of representation.” To the extent that “public sphere” is impartial, as Habermas contends, represents traditional African society; to the extent that a public sphere deters intervention in personal estates unless presumptively applicable to all. The morality of the case, not popular prejudices, ingratiates the concerns of the public sphere. Hasan’s graphic rendering of India pre-colonial society as a “normative system of intersubjective communication” available to the ruler and the ruled; the common and the powerful; to influence public opinion in favor of private interests may seem to bear some significant tangent to Africa of pre-colonies. In most societies of pre-colonial Africa, publicness connotes the confluence of people coming together for private reasons. The patronage is therefore cultural and may include meeting points such as marketplaces, worship centers, traditional shrines for idols, and various centers of everyday activities where gathering are involuntarily established for people pursuing private gains. In all, subjective motives are the main
forces establishing the centers. Even though there may be rulers of the centers as it applies to modernity, they are no more than volunteers who, in addition to pursuing their private gains, render public services pro bono. The traditional centers for resolving conflicts of interest may also go by the name “public.” Arguably, therefore, morality and law appear inseparable in the pre-colonial African society. In other words, what is adjudged lawful is also moral for social exchanges and interaction.

In colonial and post-colonial Africa, things may have changed. The word public appears to aggregate more of colonial authorities regulated by law or the proclamations of the appropriate bodies. The centers are created for specific purposes of common interest, in contrast to its emergence by routine in the pre-colonial days. In the British colonies, public places would include the residences of indirect rule chiefs, who are appointees of the colonial powers for administrative and tax purposes. On the one hand, the law that pervaded is the received English Laws that apply both in toto and ad valorem. In British West Africa, for instance, much of the judicial ratio decidendi and obiter are either subscribed directly from common law or a stare decisis system in which the local case laws have been heavily tainted by the received laws. The same scenario applies to legislations and statutory instruments that mutate from the statutes operating in England as of January 1 1900, known in commonwealth legal system as the Statutes of General Application (SOGA). On the other hands, the native law and customs that constituted the rule of law during the pre-colonies and which conditioned both private and public realms became subjected to the repugnancy rule or compatibility test instituted by the colonial powers. This idea is, as it were, to make and did make the native law and customs amenable to the legal frameworks of the received English laws by condemning those laws that appear to run contrary to British tort and criminal justice system by declaring them “repugnant” to “natural justice, equity, and good conscience” or “contrary” to “public policy.”

The import of the discourse of legality in colonial and post-colonial Africa is to let out the conscription of the private realm under the public realm. It would then seem to be consistent with the pre-colonial arrangement only in form and not in substance. While the formation of the law accentuates in one body of law, the morality that greets the applicability varies as issues move from private to the public realm. In this work, therefore, the focus is on the mechanical dislocation of “free trade” and associative distortions in the market functions and the structural contradictions in financial “corporationalization” as the bane that dislodged Africa from the global scene. Two significant works, Peter Ekeh’s *Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement* and Jurgen Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, among others, were reviewed for insight into the representativeness of the jeopardy in Africa’s past in the present to draw associational parameters between them profoundly.

### Ekeh’s “Two Publics” and Habermas’ “Liberal” and Modern “Public Spheres”

Peter Ekeh undoubtedly hinged more on how colonialism bred “double standard” in the African public realm and how each of the “two publics” interacts with the “private realm” with varying moral consequences. The issue restated here concerns the corporationalization of the realms of private and public domains. His remarkable allusion to “publicization of the private realm” and “privatization of the public realm” bears credence to Habermas postulations on liberal public spheres and the modern public sphere. At the root of both, as Bhargava and Reifeld (2005) pointed out, is the grandiose corporationalization of the public realm that has swallowed the entire system. In the milieu, Africa’s economic and democratic conditions have continued to nosedive as state and non-state actors are conditioned to making flawed public decisions, in addition to mismanaging economic and social resources. Ekeh (1975) drew a remarkable distinction between the civic public and the primordial public. The writer pointed out that there are two public realms in post-colonial Africa.

At one level is the primordial public, which has its root in the communal settings of pre-colonial Africa. According to him, the primordial public is moral and operates on the same imperatives as the private realm and is closely identified with primordial groupings, sentiments, and activities, which nevertheless impinge on the public interest, influence, and determine the individual’s public behavior. On the other hand, is a public realm, called civic public, which is historically associated with the colonial administration and which has become identified with modern politics in post-colonial Africa. It is based on civil service structures: the military, the civil service, the police, and other institutions of government. The civic public, according to him, is amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives operative in the private realm and the primordial public.

In a classic teleology of the contradictory scruples attending the modern public sphere, Habermas (1991) justified the existentialism of free enterprise as an offshoot of liberal social practices. Such liberality has become befuddled by modern economic practices that left the colonized world, especially Africa, consistently behind. In Habermas’ opinion, the public sphere is an emergence from functional civil society and the insatiable quest by individuals to acquire private estate. The civil society, which Bhargava and Reifeld (2005) excellently described as “purely private associations,” concerns registered individuals with the confluence of interests and without the encumbrances of social constraints from the political authorities. As other authors would say, civil society means civilization occasioned by the economic...
growth and the attendant social exchanges—the space for devising “universal code of human behavior and communication” (Frevert, 2005, p. 65) or “where citizens could meet to socialize. . . , to exchange ideas. and to discuss issues of common concern” (Mohan, 2015, p. 142).

Indeed, the civil society of Habermas’ construct is a crucial element that shaped the manifest and latent elements of the public sphere. In a Habermasian society, the public sphere lies between civil society and the state. There, a critical mass of civic discussion on issues of common concern is debated and utilized to monitor the state. The public sphere is an aggregated prudence of the people, unforeseen by policymakers and untailored by government’s economic guidance. As Habermas pointed out, the historical circumstances of a developing capitalist economy befits the liberal public sphere. However, capitalism brought untoward sentimental attraction that changed perception from common concern to personal romanticisms. As Baker and Joly (2009) deduced, capitalism expanded to a situation in which the rich beggars the poor, and laws are observed more in the breach than the moral observance. The civil societies became tamed in lobbying for what is personal to each, and the modern public sphere emerged from the rubbles of the older fashion. It aggregates, albeit delicately compared, what Obadare and Adebanwi (2010) tagged “modern civilizations,” whose principal objective exemplified Claude Levi-Strauss’ famous description of the inevitable consequences that continuously seek to “egregate, evict, marginalise or ‘vomit’ their adversaries” (p. 11).

The “Two Publics” and the Amorality of the Habermas’s Publicum and Subjedum

The contemporary emergence from the modern “public sphere” from the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere is at the core of the publicum and, by extension, the consummation of the subjedum in a society otherwise governed by compromises and cooperation. The Habermasian public sphere is a common ground for articulating and patronizing both public and private interests. Public interest is served when private interests are alloyed into an aggregated opinion that eventually serves as the modus operandi that binds the state, the apparatuses, and private estates. The change occurred, as Habermas argued, when the publicum took over the “public” to dominate the subjedum as subjects and uncritical receivers of “regulations from above” and the subjedum gradually emerged as the “ruling authorities” antagonists. The situation is tantamount to what Adebanwi (2017, p. 80) tagged a governmentality culture predicated “on subject-citizen dichotomy.”

However, conceptualizing morality here would seem to depart the Ekehnian uncritical ecclesiastical sense. It would, instead, be globally defined in terms of the unconscionable activities of the corporations in Africa in both economic and political sense. In the economic sense, it connotes the calculated attempt to skew the global economy against the weaker global partners, of which the mention of Africa is inevitable. Most notably, the political sense that was ushered into Africa in the pre-colonial time by the way of subtle, and sometimes overt, inducement of inter- and intra-kingdom wars prepared the continent for the historic dearth of resistance to colonialism. It would also encompass the activities of the companies who administer trade relations in designated territories of Africa on behalf of the colonial powers. With the advent of colonialism, the territories hitherto held by the companies were directly administered as “colonies” under various European powers. In the sense of politics and economy, it spans the centuries of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial “trades” with African societies in a contra-economic sense. Specifically, it would include the aberrations in the global financial system, which no reasonable person would ordinarily anticipate: which African states contemporaneously and ignorantly encounter at first and incapable of reversing or curtailing when discovered. It necessarily includes, but not limited to, what Baker and Joly (2009, pp. 2, 3) described as “falsified pricing” in “trade transactions” by “major instruments in the illicit financial structure of Western Countries” whereby exportation is grossly over-priced and importation grossly under-priced: the ultimate purpose for which is to secure ill-gotten gains from developing states and cloak them with the similitude of legality in the West.

Illicit money certainly goes beyond attributing the “dirtiness” in a global financial flow to breaking the “laws in its origin” only: if it circumvents the law in transit through to destination, then it qualifies to be called illicit. Acting as a catalyst in this inappropriate gains are the lacunas “left in the laws” of the West that analysts have adjudged as the facilitating instruments that have assisted the willing financial structures to move the proceeds to the West (Baker & Joly, 2009).

In 1902, John Hobson had argued the era of free-trade, which Baker and Joly (2009) misapplied as “fair” play in commercial prospect to all parties, is over for good and replaced by corporationalized monopoly. The scenario bespeaks a global (Western) amorality that, in addition to forcibly interfering in the affairs of weaker nations, seeks to “secure a gain in excess of the net services rendered” (Särkkä, 2009, p. 166). It connotes the centuries of brutality on Africa “in the hands of the European” (Sachs et al., 2004, p. 123) that established “the structural conditions and history that have led the continent into such a trap.”

While critiquing Adam Smith’s (1776) approach to international trade, a renowned political economist argued that colonial power might benefit at the expense of its colony. The writer submitted “The trade with a colony may be so regulated that it shall at the same time be less beneficial to the colony, and more beneficial to the mother country, than a perfectly free trade” (Ricardo, 1821, p. 231). The morality of trade, wrote Adam Smith (1776), could however be considered to frown at sly social exchange patterns in which those
Corporationalization of Idea in the Modern Public Sphere

The development of “public sphere” as an analytical medium for the common good in eighteenth century Europe is the core of Habermas’ propositions. Habermas (1991) wrote that the civil society, described as coalitions of private interests, is the principal factor in the public sphere discourses independent of interference from political authorities. It provided a forum, not only for nurturing and aggregating significant public opinion but also for questioning decisions of political...
authorities and ensuring people’s opinion are substantively reflected in the decisions of the state. As capitalism progressed and individuals became recognized as a legal personality rather than the property they own or their background, the structure of social interaction changed strictly to trade relations. Under the liberal public sphere, the notion of reasonable bargain and price mechanism combines reasonably to determine real estate acquisition. Since agreements and decisions are dictated by reason, market, and private ownership equitably complement each other among the populace, such that the “triumph of the market and private property is at the same time a triumph of reason” (Bhattacharya, 2005, p. 132). The powers of individuals heightened to strengthen the public sphere as a powerful medium for self-actualization. For Habermas, the emergence of the public sphere marked the advent of “constitutional states that feature parliamentary democracy” (Bhattacharya, 2005, p. 131). The public sphere, wrote Habermas, is a progressive forum where issues are proposed and accepted (or rejected) by the strength of the argument dissipated to substantiate it. As a forum where objectivity features prominently, and engagement is free and continuously guaranteed and unencumbered by any form of restrictions including from the state, rationality, and reasoned critique prevails in settling matters. In Habermas’ public sphere, all forms of subjective manipulations like propaganda, reckless displays of spectacular objects that are capable of obscuring reason and quality censorship, are adequately relegated.

However, the public sphere becomes endangered at the moment individuals get persuaded by flamboyant displays of ideas, rather than reason: when ideas get pushed and beclouded by spectacles of colors and scenes from television advertorials. The multinational corporations used their financial strength to practically bypass dialogue. Habermas (1991) wrote,

“The process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between the private bureaucracies, special-interest associations...and public administration. The public as such is included only sporadically in this circuit of power, and even then it is brought in only to contribute its acclamation” (p. 176).

At this point, the decision-making process grounded in objectivity and social exchange of ideas disappeared and got replaced by mono-logical reasoning. The individuals separate from and no longer count in the public sphere. The public sphere is dominated by the idea of corporations of private estate owners who take advantage of the hitherto passivity of the state to lord their self-interest in the form of trades and market forces on the individuals. The ensuing situation represents the notion of publicum and subjedum as givers and takers of public sphere decisions. The publicum sets the policy agenda; hoodwinks the state into the objective frameworks; while the subjedum merely prunes to withstand the pressure. As Purdy (2010) pointed out in regards to fossil fuel users, the publicum crafts the policies and enjoy the benefit, and share only the harm with the subjedum. The phenomenon, as Ekeh (1975, p. 91, 92) rightly argued, is the “privatization of the public realm”—the rerouting of political authorities and benefits from public grip into private domains.

As Pillay (2015, p. 66) pointed out, the corporation comprises “powerful government and international finance” system of the West and China, and their multinational companies and media houses that “straddled the world.” In line with Ekeh’s analysis of the “two publics,” the article conceptualized the operational settings of these corporations in the West as “primordial” and those of Africa as “civic.” What is “primordial” or “civic” would strictly appear here as the double standard that varies the morality spectrum, or outright lack of it, as the corporations operate in the West or Africa. In line with Ekeh’s analysis, the primordial public remains a moral ground where Habermasian liberal public sphere dictates the operationalities of the corporations. The conceptualization of the private realm would then depend on location in which the public operates. The corporationalized public conducted businesses in the Ekehian primordial ways when operating with private realms of western locations and “civil” manners in Africa.

Flowing from the two effusions above, the African state appears to stand little or no chance in the current economic and political dispensation. As economic powers of the world combine political powers into their folds, the dependent economies, of which African states populate, not only lose grip to compete but also the power to negotiate for equilibrium exchange of merchandize of comparable advantage. In this matter in which capitalism theoretically presumes that a supplier will stand on the same pedestal to haggle for agreed prices, the domineering economic and political powers by the West of any of the emerging southern powers denies Africa such mercantilist estate. The ensuing scenario, in the opinion of Ekeh and Habermas, is the lot of trade and exchanges in the global world order. Capitalism must suffer setback where mutual dependence and power evaporates and yields for master-servant relations. The order creates a sentimental and lopsided economic space in the “publics,” which as they “became pervasive” cause “the number of self-sufficient economic units shrank and the dependence of local markets upon regional and national ones grew” (Habermas, 1991, 24).

The Shifting Liberal World Order and African States

Writers have promoted the idea about ascribing Africa’s development crisis to colonial focus in 21st century as misleading (Nnaa et al., 2015; Orji et al., 2021), particularly for the myriads of post-independent leadership crisis (Ejimabo, 2013; Dike, 2014; Olayia, 2014) and pervasive corrupt
practices since political independence (Ijewereme, 2015). However, the enduring marks of queer state-making and manipulative leadership, autocracy and violent subjugation, and overbearing property grabs and profligacy that were endemic in the colonial officialdoms may have towered above all else and fundamentally influenced the development trajectories. In the words of Brautigham and Knack (2004), African states could hardly escape the development crisis occasioned by the colonial rule because “when patterns of poor governance deepen over time and become institutionalized, the political difficulties of reform become even more challenging” (p. 256).

In that sense, the clash of modern liberalism and neoliberal world order is playing out more in Africa than anywhere else. Although both are variants of classical liberalism that emphasized reliance on market forces and minimal government intervention, the former relate more to Africa than the latter. The undoing of unfettered capitalism leading to inequalities, poverty, and discriminatory trading between the strong and the weak nations, denounced by modern liberalism, is a fundamental fact about Africa and the West. For instance, the reparation quests for millennia of slave taking of scores of millions of black people leading to low economic potential for take-off and growth remains unaddressed and wholly ignored by the Western states who partook and benefited immensely, and perhaps in part, owe their economic take-off to the spoils of slave labors. There are also the plunders that immediately followed for centuries of colonial looting of human, physical, and mineral resources. Recently, there are reports that a few tens of Africa’s cultural heritages forcefully taken during the slave trade eras and later colonialism are being returned.

In November, CNN (2021) reported that the returns are a drop in the ocean when compared to over 90% of African cultural heritage, numbering hundreds of thousands that were looted. In the worst scenario, the market system recasts inequalities as virtuous by insisting that only competition could guarantee every player’s returns (Monbiot, 2016) leaving behind the crucial fact that unequal players cannot (hope to) trade on equal terms nor would the weak be in any position to properly negotiate the terms of competition. Even at that, the failure of global public to ensure that African peoples get appropriately compensated for progressively contributing so much to the global economy, albeit by coercion, appears to have shifted the crux of liberalism. As Karlsberg (1968, p. 194) argued, “the massacre of millions of people who had not taken part in any way in active warfare, but who had become mainly passive victims of racial, religious and political persecution” that resulted in “total deprivation of millions” constitutes a crime that must be addressed in order to create liberal society.

If the past is discountenanced, the continued economic incursions into Africa are a reminder that, perhaps, the historical past bespeaks the present situation. The renewed interests of the West (Baker, 2005), and perhaps the

enthusiasms of the newly sprouting economic powers of the South (Pillay, 2015) in African renewable and non-renewable resources and broad market within the last six to seven decades, leading inexorably to a similar crisis of governance and mutual ethnic distrust and social violence that appear similar to the adverse experiences of the historical past, are a challenge that calls for renewed scholarly attention. In the global village driven by free trade and cooperative networking, Africa faces the twin challenges: that of deprived productive capacity that primarily made her an onlooker, and that of yoked democratic institutions. Toward the independent era of the 1960s, several financial institutions and multinational corporations emerged with a worldwide reach and financial architecture. In the words of Särkkä (2009):

“These financial forces were parasites upon patriotism. . . In public, they desired to extend the area of civilisation, establish good government, promote Christianity, extirpate slavery and elevate ‘the lower races’. In secrecy, they utilised these more unselfish forces in furthering their financial ends” (Särkkä, 2009, p. 166).

The current engagements of China, with mainly resource-rich and large African states, have attracted the attention of pan-Africanists. Insinuations are starting to well up of the neo-colonialist tendency that smacks of smart economic parochialism that approximates the extant North-South dealings. As Bbaala (2015) pointed out, the recent Sino-Africa economic adventures appear propelled by China’s craving for mineral resources and intercontinental markets for its rapid economic expansion. Though appearing like beneficial to Africa in the meantime, wrote Bbaala (2015, p. 116), the relations could soon degenerate “into ‘win-lose’” against an unsuspecting African State.

Conclusion: Rethinking the “Two Public” Global Economic Inequalities

This article attempts a reasoned critique of the “two publics” created by the corporationalization of the public sphere by powerful private and supranational bodies of the West. The article, in line with Ekeh’s postulations, identifies the presence of two publics in the world: one located in the West as the original aboriginal base of the brainwork and sentiments that culminated into ideas that dominate the planet, and one located in, and perhaps not limited to, Africa. It then argued that several historical imbalances had created a wide gap in the ability to dominate and be dominated within the two publics. On one hand, the utilization of advanced technology accorded by the industrial revolution; and millennia of slave and colonial missions by the establishments of the modern West and the weakness engendered by the predatory exercises of those mentioned above, on the other hand, have long determined the reality of why the Western corporations dominate as the publicum of the modern global public sphere.
The classic sense in Adam Smith’s (1776) economic thought revealed that a country does so at her peril that “neglects or despises foreign commerce” or go into restricting “vessels of foreign nations into one or two of its ports only” (p. 112). Nevertheless, the historical phenomenon of African states dispossesses them of the needed economic breath to fairly compete in the highly volatile global trading. The current financial system supposedly anchors on free enterprise, liberal democracy, and welfare governmentality. The freedom to trade only exists in travesty for Africans considering how the West and the emerging mercantilist powers of the South, such as China, relate with Africa. For Adebanwi (2017), the “modern economy” is one of the exploitative apparatuses of the paradox of double-dealing: while the formation of the states of the West involved the merger of morality in the public realm with the private realm, such was not imposed during the formative stages of African states. Mamdani (1996, quoted in Adebanwi, 2017, p. 79) argued that “modern free trade is predatory on Africa and presaged the annihilation and scattering of the native populations,” that Sachs et al. (2004) deemed a fundamental factor that continues to undermine the emergence of the nation-state.

Toward rethinking of the global financial system and its “two public” economic inequalities, a few points that are enumerated as thus may suffice.

**Historical Governance Incapacity**

The starting point is that modern states (former colonies) of Africa are victims of a loose governance history. That in which a massive (pre-colonial) slave trade seriously undermined the formation of nation-states due to centuries of historic animosity among ethnic neighbors; and that in which the colonial masters desperately scrambled for a portion of Africa, not for any whiff of consideration for the fate of Africans but for access to the abundant extractive resources for feeding European industries with free, if not slily pilfered raw materials. The submission that Queen *Moremi* had to find an ingenious way to stop the Ugbo people from their constant attacks on Ife people, as Blier (2012) argued, smacks of the slave-taking missions preponderant at the time, which calculated to scatter the confluence of purpose and resilience. The point here is that the need to replace African faiths served as the seed for technological take-off. There was also the reformation of native minds that revolved around religiosity. There was also the notion of public sentimentality that behoved moral attitude in the private capacities has become replaced by parochialism. Along the same line, Boon and Eyong (2005) argued that governance in Africa before the arrival of the white man was centered on communal leaders who, as individuals or groups, excelled in various ways by insisting on the moral commitment of the citizens to the public and the collective improvement of the citizens. Colonialism, however, disrupted the united fronts and caused disaffection across the board arising, especially, from the created political and administrative territories without regard to cultural and linguistic affiliations. During the milieu, oppressing and dominating Africans was made possible, as well as excavating and shipping the endowed minerals to the West without any significant challenge, which could have served as the seed for technological take-off. There was also the reformation of native minds that revolved around religiosity. The point here is that the need to replace African faiths goes beyond the *truth about God*. It arguably was a plot calculated to scatter the confluence of purpose and resilience that often circulate among folks of the same faith. By some stroke of inexplicable logic, as Fanon (1986) argued, “colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.” (p. 210)

Mainly, it was a big scheme to, wittingly or unwittingly, deny Africa of its rich history, culture, and wealth. Thus, slavery
and colonialism primarily wrought today’s marginalization of the African peoples.

Also, the clueless post-independent African leaders simply continued in the same fashion by plunging into the erstwhile master’s economic system with uncritical abandon. As Olaiya (2016) argued, some potentially strong countries like Nigeria at independence soon plunged into economic difficulty after independence by simply following the economic trajectories drawn by the colonialists. Thus, it is that historical past that defines (or fails to define) for Africa the governance direction capable of insulating the economies against the predatory financial architecture of the West that commenced in the post-independent and existing to date.

**Shifts in the Goalposts of Free Trade**

The current challenges facing most African states stemmed from global disparities occasioned by an economic system that failed to recognize the historical incapacity of Africa. The post-colonial states inherited poor physical and democratic infrastructures upon which to build. The modern financial corporationalization exacerbated the case. The “invisible hand” known pillars of free trade turned visible by determinate financial principalities that continually shifted the goalposts against a continent still learning to recoup and cope in a web of uncertainties. There is no doubt that capitalism rests on predictability: that both capital owner and purchaser are expectant of securing capital gains. As Habermas (1991, p. 15) wrote, early capitalism was predicated on conservative “economic mentality” particularly “as regards . . . a characteristic way of doing business typified by ‘honorable’ gain”.

There is no known economic rationale that allows capital flight in free trade. Paying peanuts and inducing an unfair trade conditions with military force, or in some cases whisking away capital endowments for free, are by logical sequence a dampening of expectations. The Report on the Illicit Financial Flows and “Panama papers” showcased for Africa the futility of the so-called price mechanism. The manifestation is what Pillay (2015, p. 66) relayed “centuries of accumulation by dispossession” from unfair dealing by taking advantage of the weaker vessels and leading to “a system of uneven development, with rising inequality both at the national level, in general, and at the global level.” In the same vein, the current trade terms for African economic sector are such that the “food and cash crops are sold cheaply, exported, processed into bland garbage devoid of nutritional value, packaged neatly, imported, and sold at prices that are unaffordable for the farmers who originally grew the crops” (Isola, 1992, p. 17).

If anything, the current global economic system only guarantees the continued mapping of resources from Africa toward the Western metropolis. The results of the colonial and imperial capital- and brain-drain that the North colonial powers had executed in Africa requires a great deal of determinism to prepare Africa for the current capital-intensive “free enterprise” of the global economic system. The current global financial system created “two publics”: one in which the tenets of free trade operates, largely insulated from illegals and where the morality of mutualism of benefits of trades prevails; and one which operates in stark opposite by reconditioning the expectations and actual experiences of trade terms in favor of a party against the other. As Pillay (2015, p. 62) rightly argued, African traded with West “not in the intrinsic value of the things . . . or for their use-value to society, but in terms of their exchange value (what they can be bought and sold for, particularly for the few large corporations that straddle the world).”

**Morality, Public Policy, and Law**

Historically, Africa had jurisprudential systems that thrived in cultural values. Though these varied from society to society, the fluidity was strikingly similar. The system is comparable to the Habermasian society in which critical public opinion emerges, and political authorities controlled through interrogated dialogue among the people. Also, the public sphere is separated from political authorities. The jurisprudence were also densely woven in moral values such that the two work in consonance, and hardly define the person but his activities. However, colonialism brought into Africa the Western jurisprudence that thrives more in person, a legal personality, and reconstructed the legal system that re-categorizes individual’s social psyche from a “We” spectacle of the Habermasian-type public sphere into an “I” obsession of the modern-type public sphere, which united morality from legal obligations. Social relations become more fixated in legality than the emphasis on justice and morality of dealings. This legal personality system undoubtedly works in a Western-type society where, as Ekeh argued, the morality of the public sphere correlates with that of the private realm. While lamenting the debased phenomenon in African literary writing, a writer pointed out that “During colonial times, a few familiar ideas about traditional political governance (e.g., the legal system) were chosen, redefined beyond recognition, forced into the western model and imposed upon the people with disastrous social effects” (Isola, 1992, p. 17).

In Africa, however, the corporations of supranational bodies and multinationals have sequestered public sphere morality from that of the private realm. While they arguably operate with the Habermasian public sphere in the West, they arguably turned full-circle to distort the economic and political process in the South. This strictly legal posture implies that it affords the corporations the chance to bifurcate from the Northern regulated economic activities in their operations in the South: without a mission to be just or moral but certainly without breaking the law. This, using Ekeh’s theoretical statement, is the notion of “primordial public” of the West and the “civic public” obtainable in Africa. The process transformed into a legal space that hinged on struggle and survival of the fittest, operating with esoteric languages beyond ordinary man’s comprehension and a style of dialogue that alienates the common.
Monoculture of Ideas and African Economic Space

Colonialism disrupted Africa’s diverse agrarian structure of subsistence farming and replaced it with monocultural agricultural society backed up with manufacturing and industrial production within the context of a reliable service sector. The disintegration of values and the confluence toward the sentiments of the West may be regarded as a monoculture of the idea. The knowledge and power nexus inherent in cultural diversity is not the focus of this work but undoubtedly relevant. As Shiva (1993) argued, the disappearance of diversity and alternative system and its replacement with centralized control methods of production of ideas according to Western values is taking a tremendous toll on Africa. In Africa, the acclaimed cultural diversity in Africa is gradually thinning out and rapidly giving ways for western ideals. The capacity to compete eluded African states for the historic reasons of slave trade, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. Not in the least for what the aforesaid engendered to render the states inchoate with depleted physical and cultural resources, but much more for how the two reasons incapacitated the states to operate on equal pedestal in a global economic practices that prices competition notwithstanding the capacity reposed in the players.

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ORCID iD

Taiwo A. Olaiya https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2701-8596

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