

Chapter 2

The Perspectives of African History

ABSTRACT

Anecdotally this chapter describes several perspectives of African history. These historical perspectives include the slavery period, the colonial period, the post-independence period, and the so called structural adjustments and reforms period. The consequences and impact of what happened, during each of these periods, on Africa, are analyzed. Therefore, the chapter gives the origins of the continent's current social, economic, political, and business circumstances. Moreover, a discussion is developed on how to overcome the negative effects of these circumstances in order to create more and enhance existing economic and business opportunities in the continent.

1. INTRODUCTION

The perspectives of African history give the background and context of African economic and business situation today. African history is an interesting and amazing panorama of ever changing events. It is a tortuous history (Mbaku 2004).

Based on living memory, and from a business perspective, one can broadly divide African history into four distinct periods. The occurrences, during these four periods, mostly happening out of the control of the African people, have had a tremendous and long lasting and many-a-time devastating impact, particularly,

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on the continent's low social, political, technological, and economic development over the years. These periods form the background and the context of the African social, economic, political, and technological conditions today.

It is oftentimes stated by scholars that the events during these periods created and perpetuated the state of social and political instability, technological backwardness, slow economic development, innovative and entrepreneurial challenges that have dogged Africa during the last sixty years of independence of many African countries (Denge et al., 2002; Mbaku, 2004; Moyo, 2009). The four periods can be described as the slave trade; the colonial; the independence; and immediately post independence, the structural adjustment, and the rising of the effective governance periods.

2. THE SLAVE TRADE PERIOD

The main African slave trade age ran approximately from about the middle of the 16th century to the second half of the 19th century (Larson, 2004). Slavery was a savage act that became illegal in Great Britain in 1807/8 and officially ended in the USA in the middle of the 1860's, after having wreaked havoc on the African continent, particularly the Western African countries of Ghana, the Guineas, Benin, Togo, and Senegambia (Horton et al., 1999; Larson, 2004).

Acemoglu et al. (2012), assert that "the more intense areas or countries of slavery such as Angola, Benin, Ghana, and Togo, total cumulative slave exports amounted to more than the population of the countries in 1400". These countries were the main sources of slaves to the New World and Europe and there has never been compensation or payment of reparations for the human destruction of these counties. The slave trade left un-healing human wounds to the slaves themselves and to the countries of their origin.

The East African countries are said to have been sources of slaves to the Middle East, where there is no legacy of slaves because men were castrated immediately they arrived as slaves. Available literature further indicates that slaves were badly treated and ill managed like chattel, despite their good behavior, hard work, and considerable ability to contribute to the economic advancement and wealth of the slaveholders particularly those in the USA (Horton et al., 1999; Larson, 2004).

Although there is no early evidence of developed institutions to support development in Africa, the institution of slavery robbed Africa some of the best and brightest people. Perhaps, the strongest and most creative African people, who could have made a difference in the social, political, economic, and technological advancement of the continent, were targeted and taken away through slavery (Larson 2004).

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