Review

Western imperialism in Africa. The Italian connection

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African contact with the Western World right from the fifteenth century marked the gloomy dawn of imperialism, and an unending trail of exploitation of the continent. This process which lasted many centuries led to a plethora of institutions, values and etiquette which over time consolidated an alien social order. The prime motive of all these was to unceasingly appropriate the essential resources of the colonies, and subject the continent ‘within the ambit of international commercial flows’. Unfortunately, extant literature on imperial rule of Africa has concentrated on the activities of a few countries, with amazing disregard or slight attention to the Italian imperial forage in the continent. The aftermath is that Italian legacy in Africa seem to be withering away. The focus of this paper therefore, is to analytically demonstrate the unique role Italy played in the imperialist coup d’grace of the continent. The paper argues that its entry into the scramble for Africa brings to the fore the fallacy of Western civilizing mission to Africa. Most interesting is the fact that almost all the countries subjugated by Italy had no trace of mineral endowment. Perhaps this may have accounted for the haphazard colonial administration which left the countries in an intractable post-colonial conflicts and wars such as in Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Consequently, an objective exposition of Italian imperialist motivation in Africa will enrich the comprehension of the theory of imperialism. It concludes that this understanding will go a long way in addressing some of the lingering post-colonial and post-conflict challenges in the continent.

Keywords: Imperialism, irredentism, assimilation, underdevelopment

INTRODUCTION

There can be no critical discussion of Africa’s Post-colonial development without an in-depth reflection of its past. The epoch of slave which castor for four centuries witnessed the transfer of intelligent and able-bodied Africans to pile up wealth for capitalist countries in the western hemisphere. The development of virgin lands required cheap labour, defenseless Africans then became the ready made reservoir from which to draw that labour force with minimum expense and risk. The modern negro slave trade has considered an economic necessity prior to the adventure of the machine. This would last until the mid nineteenth century (Diop, 1967)

By the late nineteenth century, the usefulness of slave trade was subjected to philosophical scrutiny even by those who had sanctioned and practiced if in the past with the triumph of industrial revolution in Europe, its attendant social upheaval market, a legitimate trade was emphasized.

Gradually, Africa found itself in another organization of colonial imperialist. This was the situation until the fragile independence in 1960s.

While it may be argued that the wrong of colonialism twenty-first century would have been corrected by African leaders, but it is important to note that even after independence neo-colonial recognition and dehumanization of the continents has continue to form large in many spheres. No African leader objectively reinforces this point in his writing and speeches than President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. For him, therefore, the pattern of imperialist aid to Africa is set not only to draw the unwary people back into neo-colonialist relation but to tie them into cold war realities (Nkrumah, 1963).

The internal political incoherence and the exogenous orientation of African economies have greatly constituted a hindrance for the development of the continent. The aftermath is motion without movement, speeches without action and a confusion of agendas reproducing neo-colonial notions of development (Ake, 2001). The focus of this paper is to look at the imperialist incursion into Africa and the Italian connection. This is germane because
most literatures on Western Imperialism in Africa highlight the activities of Spain, Britain, France and Netherlands without an exposition of the Italian involvement in the rape of Africa (Du Bois, 1996).

This has given a stamp of innocence, and cloaked the country’s legacy of fascistic brutality, economic and social confusion suffered by Africans.

**Conceptualizing Imperialism**

Imperialism is not a novel concept in political studies since the Roman Empire; countries have been subdued to the caprice of stronger ones.

In this section, we shall concern ourselves with western imperialism in Africa. Simply put, imperialism is the indirect control affairs of a country by another. The desire to control is not for fun, but a precipitate of a level of economic development which needed some adjustment. It is thus, a vital necessity for an economy in which the production of goods has reached an industrial scale (Mbonjo, 1998).

The penetration of imperialism into Africa was to satisfy the industrial needs of European economy, and turn the continent to a capitalist paradise for appropriation of surplus value. According to Walter Rodney, penetration of foreign capitalism on a world scale from the late 19th century unheard is what we call imperialism.

Imperialism meant capitalist expression. It meant that (European, North American and Japanese) capitalists were forced by the internal logic of their competitive system to seek abroad in less developed countries opportunities to control raw materials and find markets, and to find profitable investment (Rodney, 2005).

The end of industrial revolution was epochal in the development of British political economy. Financed by the proceeds of slave trade, European capitalists needed outlet to dispose off their industrial goods and mediate social crisis. Wolf stated that ‘the latest half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century were remarkable for one of the most violent outbreaks of imperialism in human history. Nineteenth century imperialism originated in Europe. It was almost confined to the incursion of a small number of European states into other continents. Australasia, nearly all Africa and large portions of Asia and incorporated in European Empires (Chikendu, 2004).

Eric Williams in his Capitalism and Slavery (1964) demonstrated the link between slave trade and industrial development of Europe. Profits from the triangular trade with slavery as its base helped finance Britain’s industrial revolution and launch one of its best known commercial institutions, which were still flourishing in the late twentieth century (Garshon, 1981).

According to Ake, ‘imperialism is the economic control and exploitation of foreign lands arising from the necessity for counteracting the impediments to accumulation of capital engendered by the internal contradiction of the domestic capitalist economy (Ake, 1981). Its expansion is a fulfillment of capitalist logic of profit maximization. Hence, it is the expression one of the phase of capitalist development and cause of armed conflicts was not the only possible form of development of capitalism (Harman, 2010).

For V. I Lenin, imperialism cannot be divorced from capitalism because it represent the apogee of capitalist development, hence imperialism is

**The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1975).**

Lenin pointed out five stages of capitalist development which led to the rosy dawn of imperialism in the late nineteenth century. Among other things is ‘the enormous growth of industry and remarkably rapid process of concentration of production in ever-larger enterprises are one of the most characteristic features of capitalism,’ ‘the growth of finance capital controlled by banks and employed by industrialists,’ the export of capital and the division of the world among the great powers (Lenin, 1975).

From the above, we can deduce that imperialism involves exploitation of weak countries by the strong. It cannot be separated from the law of capitalist development and not because of the tendency for production to outgrow consumption, a tendency towards over-saving and over investment and under consumption’ as Hobson stated in his *Imperialism a Study* (1902).

**Colonization of Africa**

The Berlin Conference witnessed the slavery of Africa among Europeans under a sterile and fallacious capitalism. As Otto Von Bismarck, Convener of the conference declared, all the governments share the wish to bring the nations of Africa within the pace of civilization by opening up the interior of the continent to commence by furnishing the natives with means of instruction (Quoted in Akani, 2002). Nothing can be misleading than this. The conference was convoked to circumvent the prospect of war and the sudden realization that wealth and national pride has in colonial requisition of glories.

The starting point of colonial politics of division was the very manner in which boundaries of sub-Saharan states were drawn up at a conference in far-away Berlin in the nineteenth century. These demarcations reflected the balance of power between European imperialist countries, not the historical process with the continent (Mamandani, 1983).

The conclusion of the conference in 1885 intensified the scramble for African lands, such that Britain that led that colonial acquisition became interested. In 1852, British Prime Minster, Benjamin Disraeli stated that “the
Table 1. Territories under colonial rule 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of countries</th>
<th>AREA (Square Miles)</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother country</td>
<td>Colonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>United Kingdom 120,979</td>
<td>1,605,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>France 204,092</td>
<td>3,740,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Germany 208,830</td>
<td>1,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Netherlands12,648</td>
<td>782,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Portugal 36,038</td>
<td>801,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spain 197,670</td>
<td>234,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Italy 110,646</td>
<td>188,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Australia/Hungary 241,032</td>
<td>23,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Denmark 15,289</td>
<td>86,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Russia 8,660,395</td>
<td>255,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Turkey 1,111,741</td>
<td>465,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>China 1,336,841</td>
<td>2,881,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>USA 3,557,000</td>
<td>172,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 136</td>
<td>15,813,201</td>
<td>22,273,858</td>
</tr>
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Sources – Statesman’s Year Book, (1900), Morris, H.C.

colonies are milestones round our necks” (Lenin, 1975), but by the close of the nineteenth century, the worship of the world; and the despot of the world market (Eaton, 1979) became a strong advocate of the colonial subjugation.

The Philosophical radicals, Joseph Chamberlain, secretary of State for the colonies and Cecil Rhodes all prude the British government to plunge into imperialist adventure for colonial advantage.

The Radicals represented by J. S. Mill declared that colonialism was not only a remedy to curb under-consumption and declining rate of profit, but state of the world is the best affair of business in which capital of old and wealthy country can be engaged (Quoted in Akani, 2000). For Rhodes, the Empire, as I have always said is a bread and butter affair. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialist (Lenin, 1975). The Chancellor of Germany whose country did not pay much attention to Africa also had a volt face. According to Turner, what brought Bismarck to reconsider his policies were the multiplying signs of the early 1880s.

That the era of free trade, which he himself had dealt with such a heavy blow in Europe by the adoption of protectionist Tariff of 1879, was also drawing to a close in the colonial world. Quite clearly, his attitude began to change under a barrage of reports to the effect that colonial powers were beginning to favour their nations by means of differential tariffs and other discriminatory policies (Akani, 2010).

By 1900, more than 136 territories had been subdued by colonialism (see table 1).

According to Lenin, “the year of 1884-1900 marked the epoch of intensified expansion of the Chief European States. Great Britain acquired 3,700,000 square miles of territory with population of 57,000,000. France acquired 36,500,000 miles and Belgium 900,000 square miles with 9,000,000 inhabitants (Lenin, 1975:94). The ferocious struggle to maximize national interest at the expense of others and appropriate foreign wealth degenerated to WW1 (1914-1918) and WW11 (1939-1945). The imperialist was led to the death of more than 80 million people and unimaginable properties destroyed. Each European country was bent doing everything to acquire foreign territories and increase the wealth of it country. This is not amazing because when the great scramble for Africa began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, European capitalism which had by then reached the stage of industrial and financial monopoly that needs territorial expansion to provide spheres of influence for capital investment and strategic points of imperial defence (Nkrumah1963:xiii).

Though the absolutism of the colonial states, an exploitative machinery of governance was instituted in the colonies. The colonial states was not only interventionist in action, but relied on the frequent use of force such as the Force Publique, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), and the constabularies created for the pacification of the hinterlands. Apart from the introduction of cash crops as the basis of the economy, Ake noted that the disarticulation of pre-capitalist economy laid the foundation for an externally-oriented dependent economy. The aftermath was that the African economies became incoherent, incapable of autocentric growth and dependent. The net effect of all these is that the escape route of the African economy from primary production was blocked (Ake, 1981:38). This process gradually stultified the development capacity, and exposed the continent to mind-boggling looting. In his Storm in the Niger Mokwugo Okoye noted that European companies amassed fabulous wealth from their colonies. According to him, from 1947 – 1952 the declared profits of 53 French West African colonial companies rose from 1,277 million francs to 10,952 million and Belgium firms got 253 million dollars in 1950-1954 from the Congo where
the Union Miniere plays the role of the United African company in Nigeria. British colonial profit alone amounted to 100 million pounds in 1950, 7 big monopolies bagging 468 million pounds a year later, and United corporation realized 7,200 million dollars in the year 1950-1958 from the undeveloped countries compared with 399 pounds which they lost in other developed capitalist countries (Akani, 2010).

This unprecedented wealth was used to develop the metropolitan countries of Europe. Indeed it was within this period, Britani assumed the prefix of Great Britain with a vast empire where the sun never sets. In Nigeria, British administration was pioneered by Lord Fredrick Lugard whose racial arrogance and contempt for Africans was not hidden. As the Governor –General of Nigeria, 1914-1919 he laid the framework for a colonial governance which ultimately pitched Nigerians against themselves. He believed in the messianic notion of leadership (Levitter and Witter, 1996), and the Eurocentric's that African civilization must come from abroad (Davidson, 1922). Through porous treaties, amalgamations, and gunboat diplomacy, the disparate mini states that made up Nigeria were brought under one administrative unit. According to Olorode et al. (1998) armed forces were used, and to conquer and consolidate British rule in Nigeria. Between 1886 to 1899 the forces of the company (Royal Niger company) fought fifty battles in Nigeria overwhelmed such scattered places as Patani, and Akasa, in the Delta, Kefi and Wasse on the Plateau. Illorin, Bida in the North west and Gloria, Ibo and Oguta in the South East (Olorode, et al, 1998).

Congo (Democratic Republic) became the private possession of king Leopold 11 of Belgium on August 1885 through a resolution of the chamber of Representatives and the Senate in April 28th and 30th, 1885.

The possessions of the International Association of the Congo are to form, henceforth, the Independent State of Congo. His Majesty, Leopold II, has taken with the consent of the Association, the title of Sovereign Independent State of the Congo, the Union between Belgium and the State being absolutely personnel (Ekpebu, 1989).

This development gave unquestionable carte blanche to king Leopold II to treat Congolese as he desired in the quest for raw materials such as rubber and elephant tusks. All those who refused to be part of Leopold II’s forced labour system had their hands cut off. This was given a stamp of approval because in dealing with a race composed of carnivals for thousands of years. It is necessary to use method which will best shake their idleness and make them realize the sanctity of work (Hochschild 1999). In his Crimes of the Congo, E.D Morel called the organized system of dehumanization perpetuated by king Leopold II and his cohorts the greatest crime which has ever been committed in the history of the world (Hochschild 1999). In the French colonies, the policy of Assimilation was aimed of the ‘frenchification’ of Africans. Felix Houphon Boigny former President of Cote D’ Ivoire summarized the colonial policy of France in Africa when he averred that “with docility we accepted the values of the west, its discursive reason and its techniques “our ambition was to become photographic negatives of the colonizers” black skinned French men (Meredith, 2005).

There is no African country that had a benign colonial experience. By the time independence was granted in the 1960s, it was beyond doubt that the continent was at a sociopolitical cross- road, saddled with a state that is a major manufacture of inequality (Bayart, 2010). Controlled by a bourgeois class that has a tenuous relationship to production, and a rudimentary economic base. These attributes hastened the development of dependency and underdevelopment. The profundity of neo-colonial relationship in this scenario has made the continent a haven for perennial conflicts and a byword of regression. Africa now exist at the fringe of globalization and burdened by capitalist exploitation. The capitalist system of economic organization is based on exploitation i.e capitalist accumulation of surplus value generated in production. It follows that from this that dependent economies within the capitalist system are characteristically underdeveloped (Levitt and Witter, 1996).

Apart from the burden of economic dependency, little effort was made for human capital and infrastructure development. For instance, after more than 500 years of Portuguese presence in Africa in 1959 literacy rate in Zimbabwe was 97.8 percent, 96.77 percent in Angola, 98.835 percent in Guinea – Bissau and 78.5 percent in cape Verde (Tordoff, 1984). By 1961 Tanzania has only 16 university graduates to run the country, Zambia had 110 university graduates 6,000 with two years at secondary school in a country of 4 million (Aiyittey, 1999). In Congo, the number of university graduates were few in a country that has provided marvelous wealth for Belgium.

The attempt to rise beyond the litany of colonial inhibitions by some African leaders have resulted to their over throw or sudden death, sometimes externally crafted like Presidents kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Patrice Lumumba of Congo (Zaire). It is against this backdrop that President Nkrumah vehemently declared that ‘until imperialism and colonialism in all various forms and manifestations have been completely eradicated from Africa, it would be inconsistent for the African revolution to co-exist with imperialism’ (Nkrumah, 1963). In other words, peace and African renaissance would be elusive without a concerted effort to eradicate all imperialist stratagem in the world stage.
The Italian connection

As we noted earlier, imperialism is a particular stage in the development of capitalism (Eaton, 1979), it is essentially an economic phenomenon, and does not lead to direct political control or civilization. However, Africa was the victim of civilization. In the period of the scramble for Africa, Europeans made a grab for whatever they thought spelt profits in Africa (Rodney, 2005). Italy was not left out of this sphere for colonies. During the Renaissance period in the 13th century, it was made up of independent city states, kingdoms, principalities, and the dominance of the Catholic Church. Its major city states such as Florence, Naples, Venice and Sicily played major roles in the rebirth of knowledge. In spite of their diversity, they were united by their love for liberty, virtue and good governance. This led to a corpus of advice books which harped on Italian nationalism and need for a united country. These writers were better known as Humanists. In his, The Civic Life, Matteo Palmieri, eulogized the cultural splendor of Florence. According to him, every thoughtful person must thank God for having been permitted to be born into this new age, so full of hope and promise which already rejoices in a greater array of nobly-gifted talents that the world has seen in the course of the previous years (Skinner, 1979).

The Humanist, begin by defining the concept of liberty in a traditional and well established way. They habitually use the term to denote both independence and self-government – external interference as well as in the sense of being free to take an active past in the running of the common wealth (Skinner, 1979).

The Italian Humanists like Dante, Marsiglio of Padua and Niccolo Machiavelli firmly believed in Italian irredentism anchored by virtue and exercise of civic spirit. It was Machiavelli (1469-1527) who popularized the theme of aggressive Italian nationalism in his major writings such as The Prince, (1513) and The Discourses (1998). He noted that a good reading of the history of Rome would notice that great virtue was maintained for many centuries, and that later on these came into being the empire into which the republic developed (Machiavelli, 1998:100). While other countries like France, Spain, and England were foraging foreign lands and piling up wealth for their citizens, Italy was torn by civil strife and burdened by the influence of the Catholic church. The Church, “unable to occupy the whole Italy, or has it allowed anyone to occupy it (Machiavelli, 1998).

Machiavelli was pained that Italian’s exemplary performance in diverse endeavors could not galvanize into a national ethic and leadership. ‘Look at the duels and the combat between a few, how the Italians are superior in strength, in inventiveness, but when it is a matter of armies, they do not compare. All these are because of the weakness of the leaders (Machiavelli, 1995).

As in Paris during the Enlightenment epoch, Florence became the epicenter of Italian intellectual and political resurgence. As Leonardo Buni noted “Florence harbours the greatest minds whatever undertake, they easily surpass all other men whether they apply themselves to military or political affairs, to study or philosophy. For Machiavelli, ‘Florence the only town in the world in which the eye meets nothing ugly, the nose smells nothing revolting, the fort treats no filth (White, 2000). He was convinced of the historical justness of the struggle because ‘there is great justice in our cause’ (Machiavelli, 1995). This is predicated on the fact that a united Italy will be a force to reckon with in the comity of nations and “what doors will be closed to him? What people will deny his obedience? What enemy will stand in his way, what Italian who will refuse him allegiance? This barbarous tyranny stinks in the nostrils (Machiavelli, 1995). Unfortunately, Machiavelli died in 1527 before his dream was actualized in 1861 under Victor Emmanuel II. Italy emerged on the world stage with the unification of the kingdoms of Piedmont and Sardinia in 1861, later kingdoms like Naples Sicily, and Lombardy and Venice were annexed. By 1870 when Rome was annexed the process of creating a political unit was completed. Perhaps, it was the unification that made it a late comer in the scramble for African lands. By the late 19th century when Italy joined the scramble, it was in the Horn of Africa that it desperately focused. Sandrock noted that ‘arriving last to the colonial race, and being weak in the foreign relations department, meant that Italy was largely dependent upon the acquiescence of Great Britain, France and Germany towards its empire building. One of the last remaining areas open to colonization was the east coast of Africa (Sandrock, 2001). It is important to note that at this juncture that Italy’s avid desire for foreign lands was strongly motivated to rejuvenate an ancient historical pride, and to solve the problem of overpopulation. It is therefore, not amazing that Benito Mussolini who was against imperialist conquest now “... yearned to re-establish the glory of Rome, believing that Italy was the successor state to the Roman empire and the most powerful of the Mediterranean nations” (Sandrock, 2001). The idea of greater Italy (Grande Italia) became a recurring decimal in the country’s foreign policy.

The imperative of the greater Italy was also justified by archeological excavations in Africa that unearthed Roman ruins which Italians used to link their colonizing activities to the glory of Roman Empire http://Harvard.ed/gazette/story/2010/Italy-and-Africaentwined. Accessed on 19/03/12.

Leptis Magna one of the cities in the Roman Empire and the third largest in Africa rivaled Carthage and Alexandria during the reign of Emperor Septmius Severus. Incidentally, Leptis Magna is located in Libya.

On the other hand, the need to relieve population pressure at home, constrained many Italians to migrate to many places for economic sustenance. These immigrants
undertook menial jobs and were on the fringe existence. Italian immigration was 100,000 annually in the seventies of the last century, it now stands between 500,000 and 1,000,000. All these people are paupers, driven from their country by starvation in the literal sense of the word. All of them provide labour power for the worst paid branches of industries. This mass inhabit the most crowded poverty stricken, and squalid section of the American and European cities (Lenin, 2005).

It was against the backdrop that the Futurist Movement emerged. The Movement was founded by Filippo (1909). It loathed the past and glorified the future. The Movement called for a New Unified Italy that would be forward looking and on the fast lane of development. In its Future Manifesto (1909), its motivating principle included exaltation of speed and action, championing of violence and conflict, emphasis on youth, rebellion against the past and disrespect with Italian cultural stagnation, championing of industrial age, the mechanical technology and exposal of fervent Italian nationalism and imperialism http://www.historytoday.com/richard.jensen/futurism – and fascism. Assessed on 15/03/12.

Behind the Futurist effusion is the rapid intent to occupy Africa. According to Tawney: “the futurist exploitation of Africa as a new domain for creative expansion is simply the aesthetic equivalent of the imperialist conquest of new territories for the argumentation of Italy’s economic and political strength (Tawnyymn, 2012). Africa was not only a land of exile and escape, but as Professor Minghelli stated, “people like Futurism founder Marnetti F. T chose Africa as the stage on which to perform the speed, modernity, action and violence of his Futurist poets.”


It is not stupendous that Italy’s colonial policy in the Horn of Africa mirrored the internal forces contending for social relevance.

Colonialism in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa lies within the Eastern part of the continent with the Red Sea creating a divide between it and Asia. Connected to the Mediterranean water way, its vantage position has made it commercially attractive to European capitalists. Therefore, a control of the Horn means an undisturbed access to the Gulf of Aden and Suez. It is, therefore, not strange that Italy’s vigour and aggressive expansionism took its root in the Horn. Italy’s colonial adventure commenced in Eritrea in 1882. This was when it acquired the bay of Assab bought by Rubattino Shipping company. In 1889, the Treaty of Wuchale was assigned between Menelik II of Ethiopia and Pietro Antonelli of Italy in the town of Wuchale. This treaty gave Italy the right to control part of Ethiopia, Bogos and part of Tigray. Eritrea is reputed to possess one of the ancient civilization in Africa. It was part of the kingdom of Aksum (Axum) in the 1st century AD, and between 1557-1885 it fell under the ottoman empire. The place was then known as the kingdom of the sea or Land of the sea. Under Italian control, it became Erythranian sea, the Latinized version of the Red sea. Grifits noted that the ports of Assab and Massawa became Italian colonies in 1882 and 1885 respectively and in 1889, they were incorporated into the formed Italian colony of Eritrea which included the whole of the coastalship of British Sudan and French Somalia (Grifits, 2005: 1). From Eritrea, Italy launched into the surrounding areas within the Horn. This was the genesis of the Italo – Abyssinia war of 1895 in which ‘the worst defeat ever suffered by a colonial power in Africa (Knight et al., 1998), took place in the battle of Adowa in1896 under Menelik II of Ethiopia. This historical humiliation was never forgotten by Italy. Desirous of exercising an economic clout in economic the Suez canal and the Gulf of Aden, Italy had an agreement with (Sultan and Ali 1880). This understanding led to the declaration of Hobyo as an Italian protectorate, and in April 5, 1908, the parliament declared the Somalia Italia. Before Italy established an imperialist interest in Somalia, Britain has been in the area since the early 19th century. The British occupation of Aden in 1839 brought an expanding world capitalist economy to the door steps of this pastoral society. After the opening of the Suez canal, the British moved to the Somalia coast.

The conquest was aimed at satisfying two needs. First, the strategic location of the Somalia coast was deemed necessary to the British possession in the east and second there was the need to secure full supplies for the British garrison in Aden. In fact, Berbers, the Somalia port, supplied all the animals consumed by the garrison in the 1860s (Samatar, 1989). Under the pretext of checkmating the excesses of the Ottoman empire, the Italo-Turkish war took place in 1911-1912 . Consequently, Libya was wrested from the latter. Interestingly, Libya has been under the ruler ship of the Roman Empire from 146 BC to 640 AD, Arab rule from 640-1551 and the Ottoman empire from 1551-1911, and finally under Italian colonization. Italy also attempted to take over Tunisia, but was rebuffed by France. The complete acquisition of Libya was proceeded by bloody wars which included the use of poison gas to weaken the resistance of the people in the 1914-1917 and 1923-1931 wars. The defeat of Ethiopia in the second Italo-Africa war marked the declaration of the African Orientale Italia (AOI) in May 9, 1936 with the capital in Addis Ababa. It covered an area of 1,750,000 km² (676,679sqm) and a population of 10,000,000 people.

The administration of AOI was characterized racist arrogance and oppressive policy of apartheid. The Italians did not come to Africa for development. Their mission was purely exploitative and extortionist. The AOI was headed by a Viceroy, answerable to the emperor, Victor Emmanuel III, while the Governors of each of the
colonies reported to the Viceroy.

Eritrea rechristened little Rome (Picola Rome) became a centre for the expansion of the convenience of Italian emigrants. As part of the stratagem of dehumanizing the people, they were denied educational opportunities. (Woldeyesus noted that; Italian colonial rule divided the country into seven districts referred to as “Awrajays” each district was again divided into subdivisions called “Wereda”. The administrative staff was dominated by Italians but still there were some Eritrean officials, known by the title of “Meslenta” who used to administrate few “Wereda”. However, since all the officials were loyal to the Italian masters, they assisted the colonizers in suppressing the popular opposition.
Accessed on 23/03/12.

It was the this policy of divide and rule that sustained the statuesquq. The sixteen Governors that ruled Eritrea from January 1890- May 1936, systematically ensured the construction of a social hierarchy which placed Italians as a superior race, and Eritrea occupying the lowest level of the echelon. Their arable lands were forcefully confiscated and converted to plots for fruits, vegetable farming, plantations for cotton, coffee and dairy farming. This process of land alienation reduced Eritreans to landlessness in their land, and as a colony for settlement and raw materials (Negesh, 1987). The administration introduced Catholicism and built the gigantic cathedral at Asmara in1922, constructed a network of roads and advanced communication system. Cities also developed because of infrastructural development such as Asmara, Massawa and Tessni.

The story is not different in Somalia whose arable land is only 2% with a semi-arid terrain. Somalia fell into four powers – Britain, France, Italy and Ethiopia. Each of these powers introduced a mode of governance that guaranteed a divergent vision, heightened by the grim struggle for resources. The callousness and oppressive character of Italian Governors ultimately snowballed into the Gosh revolt led by Nassib Buuuto. The administration of Libya also followed the selfsame dehumanizing pattern of governance. The five Governors who presided over the affairs of the colony starting from Italo Balbo, see as the father of modern Libya from January 1, 1934 to the last one Giovannin in May13, 1943, all made sure that Libya was exploited to the fullest for the national interest of the “mother country”. In fact, Mussolini saw Libya as offering the; one possibility of civilization by Italy’s burgeoning population of the goals of Italian civilization was the concern with over population. Italy called Libya “The fourth Shore” and promoted Italian settlement there.”http://www.hisclo.com/country/arab/lib/history.
Accessed on19/02/12.

As in other colonies, Italian infrastructure and architecture was predominant. This is because of the dream to make it an extension of Roman heritage. This process gave the impression of internal development but it set a motion of cultural erosion and loss of identity of Africans.

The Italians in less than 30 years (1911-1940), cultivated huge works, allowing the Libyan economy to flourish to a level unseen since the time of Roman empire. Italian farmers cultivated lands that had been lost to the desert for centuries. Even archeology flourished. Leptis Magna was rediscovered and viewed as a symbol of the Italian right to colonize the region. Libya was considered the “America” for Italian emigrants in the thirties.

It is important to state that Italian colonies witnessed a fascistic governance with the emergence of Benito Mussolini as Il Duce (Leader) in1922. This development changed Italian colonial policy and the balance of power in Europe. It also facilitated the emigration of a horde of Italian emigrants into Africa and other areas. Indeed, by the 1930s, Italian emigrants to Africa was on the increase. In the 1931 Census figures the number of Italians in Eritrea was 4,188. From 1910 to 1939, Italians in Eritrea increased from 1,000 to 76,000. http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian-Eritrea.
Accessed on 26/03/12.

In Asmara, capital of Eritrea out of a total population of 98,000 people, 53,000 were Italians. The 1931 census figure had 631 billion Italians in Somalia, and between 1936-1946, there were 300,000 Italians in Ethiopia. In 1928, the number of Italians in Libya was 89,0981. While the Italian emigrants had access to the modern amenities, Africans became chattels in their land. According to Ege et al, (2009), Italy lacked the financial and technical resources as well as the time, to effect a comprehensive transformation of the economy and society of Eastern Africa. Nevertheless, Italy believed it was possible to change the very soul of the region’s status by manipulating boundaries of the elites and major ethnic groups or nations. Italy’s colonial administration in east Africa constantly exploited issues of identity such as religion, culture and shared values. The objectives was to cut the peripheries off from the established countries of power, giving the subjected populations the illusion of having been liberated (Ege et al., 2009). This was the situation before Italy was defeated in the WW II.

CONCLUSION

The Scio-economic and political scar left by European imperialism in Africa cannot be brushed side easily. This is because capitalist imperialism was accompanied with brigandage, de-historicization of the continent and flagrant looting of resources. The horrific transfer of Africans to plantations in the Americas to produce wealth, and imperialism in the 19th century consolidated a dependent nexus in all ramifications. Rising above this
status becomes the major concern of African leaders and scholars. Regrettably in spite of the myriad attempts for good governance, things seen not to have improved. Most African regimes have been so alienated and so violently repressive that their citizens see the state as enemies to be evaded, cheated, and defeated if possible, but never partners in development (Ayittey, 1999). The undemocratic foundation of African leaders have made them utterly weak and confused to confront the negative machinations of capitalist imperialism. It is against this backdrop that former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere emphasized that, the greatest aim of African revolution is to liberate the African. The revolution is not sent from above but achieved by combating exploitation, colonialism and imperialism (Mutiso and Rohio, 1999).

Imperialism in the Horn of Africa took a complex dimension. Apart from Libya, Somalia and Eritrea suffered a multifarious exploitation by different European powers. While Northern Somalia has occupied by France and Britain, Italy occupied Southern Somalia. The discrete administrative system of these countries was anchored on a racist ideology, and this incubated a centrifugal consciousness which made unity elusive years after political independence. Italy was on the side of the Allied powers during WW I. It later switched to the Axis side when Adolf Hitler took over as German Chancellor in 1933. Mussolini and Hitler dreamed of a world under the ideology of Fascism and Nazism. It was in fulfillment of this dream that WW II was fought. Unfortunately, the brunt of this tyrannical impulse was borne by Africans. Italy appropriated African resources in the execution of the war. Their colonies supplied the men who fought the battles. In 1939 Libyans, were granted special (though limited) Italian citizen ship by Royal Decree No. 70 of 9th January 1939. The citizenship was necessary for any Libyan with ambitions to rise in the military or civil organisations.

The recipients were officially referred to as Moslem Italians. Libya had become the fourth shore of Italy (Trye, 1998). The incorporation of Libya into Italian empire gave Italian Army a greater ability to exploit native Libyans for military service: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/libya-during-worldwar-II, Accessed on 20/2/12.

With the defeat of the Axis Powers, Italian colonies were placed under the Trusteeship of the United Nations. In 1951 Libya became independent under Idris Farouk, and in 1960 Somalia became independent with the unification of Northern and Southern Somalia.

With the UN Resolution 390A Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia in 1952. But Ethiopia did not respect the principle of Federation. This degenerated to perennial wars and conflict under the aegis of Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) From 1961-1991. With a UN supervised referendum it became independent in 1993, but the sound of wars is not yet over.

Italian colonization of the Horn of African calls for a re-

examination of the economic determinant of imperialism in the late 19th century. It has been argued that the main reason for European imperialism in Africa was economics. This is because of the industrial base that needed markets and raw materials. But, Italian imperialism was predicated on the assertion of ancient pride, and to settle the horde of emigrants running from social distress of home. Hence it is not for nothing that Italian imperialism has been described ‘as a poor peoples imperialism’ (Lenin, 2005).

What the Italian colonial state did was to preside over the looting of the wealth of their colonies. The fact that modern infrastructure was provided does not change the leitmotif of Italian imperialism .The attempt to satisfy the social needs of European capitalists and their cohorts has undoubted exposed the Horn of Africa to deepening crises of identity, which has claimed many lives and valuable properties destroyed. While ethnic conflict was common in the pre-colonial period that was mostly associated with the process of state formation and the contest over resources, the kind that was exacerbated by colonialism derived its strength from the manner in which people were forced to live together. Colonialism was about exploitation, and the need to coexist together heightened the competition between groups (Falola and Njoku, 2010).

In conclusion, Italy’s imperialism in Africa cannot be forgotten not because of its benign ness, but because of its horrendous brutality associated with unbelievable ‘blood and fire’.

REFERENCES