

EXCLUSIVE

Impact of colonialism will be perceptible in Africa for many decades to come

By Mohammad Memarian*

Colonialism is not something of the past nor a matter of merely historical interest. Even after decades of the formal independence of various former colonies, the reverberations of their colonial heritage still happens to shape their present conditions and even in some cases contributes to tremors in their very sociopolitical foundations.

"The post-colonial states and societies carry the hangover of colonialism for a very long time," said Rajendra Govind Harshé, a founder and former vice chancellor of the Central University of Allahabad, who has taught political science and international relations for more than four decades in various academic institutes such as the University of Hyderabad.

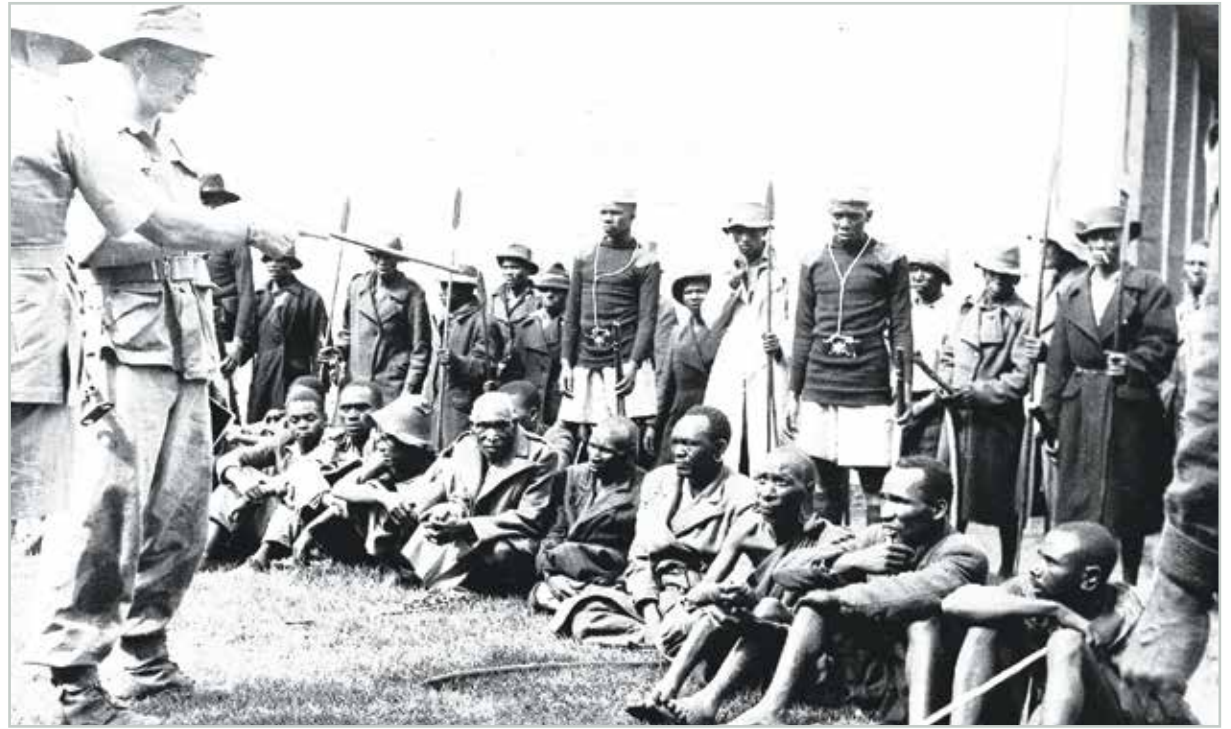
Harshé who served as the president of the African Studies Association of India from 2005 to 2011, believes that "the colonial past is present in every moment of any post-colonial state." That's one of the major themes which he investigated in his latest book, *'Africa in World Affairs: Politics of Imperialism, the Cold War and Globalization'*, published by Routledge in 2019. In the following talk, he has touched upon some key aspects of his latest book.

*Mohammad Memarian is a staff writer at Iran Daily.



AFRICA IN WORLD AFFAIRS
POLITICS OF IMPERIALISM,
THE COLD WAR AND GLOBALISATION

Rajen Harshé



BRITISH RECORDS FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES UNDER COLONIAL RULE

In your book, you've touched upon an important yet often neglected aspect of colonialism: The psychological violence that it commits upon the colonized by creating an inferiority complex and making them internalize their inferiority through which the colonized try to emulate the colonizer and become them. Had it been a deliberate act on the part of the colonial rulers or, as some might say, just an uncalled-for by product of the colonization process?

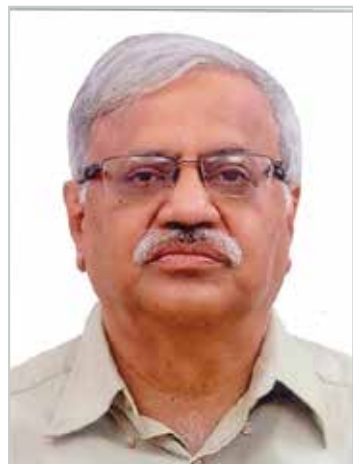
At the outset let me state that showing colonial subjects as inferior beings is necessary to justify any colonial rule. Without degrading the subjects, their cultures and societies, the superiority of the colonial power cannot be established. Frantz Fanon, an anti-imperialist thinker, from Martinique, has dwelled deeper on this theme in his celebrated works such as *Black Skins and White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* in the context of the behaviour of the black races in the erstwhile Francophone world.

In fact, any form of colonialism is anti-democratic and authoritarian. Further, it was through superior fire power, police and the army that the coercive force was exercised by the colonial state to control the colonies. The colonial state was also oppressive in terms of levying taxes and relying on the practice of forced labour while exploiting the colonised people. Apart from the economic, political and geographical control over the land and resources of the colonies, the colonialists commit violence on the minds of their subjects because racism is integral to colonialism. Such violence was easier to commit on the people of Africa because the institution of slavery was prevalent in Africa even before the advent of modern colonialism. Under slavery the individuals were bought and sold like commodities which insulted the black race. A formidable combination of colonialism and racism only aggravated the damage on the minds of the colonial subjects. In the process, the cause and effect become synonymous. For instance, if someone is white skinned, he/she must be sophisticated, beautiful, and bright and cultured. Conversely, if someone is black skinned, he/she must be crude, uncultured and unintelligent. According to Fanon, the colonial world essentially is a Manichean world where things are perceived in "black" and "white" or "light" and "dark". The violence committed on minds through this process for generations has a lasting impact for centuries.

Following up on the above question, you've also mentioned that this aspect "has proved lasting despite the formal decolonization of Africa." Would you please elaborate on its

lasting influence? Can it still be felt on the continent?

Indeed, the post-colonial states and societies carry the hangover of colonialism for a very long time. That is how in social sciences post-colonial theories have shed a different light on the post-colonial societies. Simply put post-colonialism signifies that the colonial past is present in every moment of any post-colonial state and society and such societies mediate with their colonial past to work out their future. For instance, the post-colonial societies, especially the societies in Africa, are immensely attracted to Western educational institutions such as Oxford, Cambridge or Sorbonne because any degree from such places adds to the prestige of the people who obtain it and the graduates from such institutions are well placed in their respective societies when they return to their native land.



This not merely demonstrates a form of inferiority complex but cultural under confidence within the post-colonial world. They treat educational institutions in their 'ex' metropolitan countries as superior and are almost convinced that such institutions do not exist in their respective countries.

Imitation is the best form of flattery and even in contemporary times people from the erstwhile French Africa try to behave like 'Frenchmen'. Under French colonialism, colonies were being treated as integral and indissoluble, if not contiguous, part of France at one stage. Among all the erstwhile colonial powers, the neo-colonial influence of France is the strongest among the French colonies because France succeeded in institutionalizing neo-colonialism by signing comprehensive economic, political, military and cultural agreements with most of its former colonies. Moreover, most of the African countries in terms of development are far behind the advanced industrialized world. They continue to depend on markets, funds, trade and technology as far as the industrial world is concerned. On the whole, the

impact of colonialism is perceptible on the continent and it will remain in different forms on the post-colonial societies for decades ahead.

You stated that "under globalization, the impact of neo-liberalism was clearly visible." What was the visible impact of it on Africa? What was the actual result of neo-liberal policies espoused by donor agencies on the African Continent in terms of their development?

Let me answer this question with the essence of arguments in my book. Globalization as a phenomenon, in principle, involves multi-layered interactions between diverse actors that stimulate free flow of goods, capital, trade, services, finance, technology, knowledge, terror and even diseases. Globalization has compressed time and space, and revolution in the Information Communication Technologies

liberal agenda was embraced by the international donor agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), these loan disbursing bodies began to accentuate the development of private initiative and curb the role of the public sector. In fact, under the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the IMF and World Bank, the donor agencies review the overall structure of the economy to enhance its international competitiveness and help it to resolve balance of payments crises. However, the aid is conditional. In order to obtain the loan, several African countries were constrained to liberalise their economies since liberalisation was a precondition to obtaining the loan. Likewise, in addition to these agencies, Western donors also wanted to promote representative democracy in Africa before the loan was sanctioned. In fact, during the 1990s, Africa wit-

nessed a wave of democracy when so many countries held elections. In several cases, they were not free and fair, or even rigged, but elections were necessary to get the funds from the various donor agencies.

The impact of globalisation has been uneven in Africa, with mixed results. In Africa, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Rwanda have the fastest growing economies according to the IMF. However, all the economies are not growing at a faster rate. Such growth necessarily is not accompanied by overall development in the social sectors.

Moreover, the African countries have strengthened the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (REC) as a response to meet the challenges of globalisation. Through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) the AU member states have been engaged in creating a single market for Africa. This is not going to be a mean achievement. At the same time, the phase of globalisation has had its adverse effects. It has caused uneven development between and within states. The states that are re-

source rich have done better than those that have paucity of mineral and other resources. Within the states, it has also aggravated social and economic inequalities, poverty, unemployment and other problems of development.

In regard to China's new role in Africa, you argue that regardless of some potentially alarming signs, it has essentially diversified the sources from which sovereign African countries can seek assistance for their development. Is my impression accurate?

You have made a valid point. After attaining independent statehood, a large number of African states were either dependent on the 'ex' metropolitan powers or the other Western countries. Some of these countries also relied on the former Soviet Union for assistance during the phase of the Cold War. However, with the Chinese

2017) in Zimbabwe. In fact, China has sold weapons to the dictatorial regime of Bashir who, in turn, used them to suppress armed struggles in Sudan in its western (Darfur) and southern parts (currently South Sudan). The role of Chinese companies and labour as well as China's ownership of large tracts of land in countries like Ethiopia have made China's presence conspicuous. Irrespective of China's occasional philanthropic stances, China's policy in Africa is not without imperialist tendencies. It may not be conventional colonial imperialism of the European variety, but dominant-dependent ties that are so characteristic of imperialism are visible in China's Africa policy. Nevertheless, China has provided African countries a window of opportunity to pursue developmental projects.

Today, stateless powers, notably multinational and big tech companies, exert extraordinary levels of influence over global affairs, most importantly in terms of labour market and capital flow. How do you see their role in Africa in the new century?

This again is a pertinent question. Diverse networks of multinational conglomerates are operating in different parts of Africa. Thus, most of the major powers including the US, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, China, India, Japan and South Korea are involved in Africa through the multinational firms. Under globalisation, finance capital is quite mobile but the labour mobility can be problematic. Before organised capital of the conglomerates, labour is at a disadvantage.

I have shown in my work how collaboration between Western oil firms such as Mobil, Chevron, Shell and Elf Aquitaine (currently Total Fina Elf) was working with Nigerian National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC) under the dictatorial regimes in Nigeria from 1985-1998, and how they exploited labour ruthlessly. The callous disregard of the multinational firms for human and environmental rights has caused immense sufferings to the people of the Niger Delta. At the moment, Russian companies are moving quite aggressively in states such as Central African Republic (CAR) and Guinea, primarily in extractive industries. In the process of catering to the interests of its firms, the Russian state is also getting involved in domestic politics of African countries such as Guinea. The untapped mineral and natural resources in Africa will continue to attract investments from multinationals and tech giants. In response, the African states too have to strengthen themselves through the RECs and the AU to protect their interests as far as they can.

Showing colonial subjects as inferior beings is necessary to justify any colonial rule. Without degrading the subjects, their cultures and societies, the superiority of the colonial power cannot be established.

(ICTs) have brought the world much closer, where the areas of cooperation as well as conflicts have widened. I have explored the links between capitalism and imperialism, on the one hand, and capitalism and globalization, on the other hand.

Imperialism is an integral part of the development of capitalism. It signifies an asymmetrical relationship of interdependence between the materially advanced and backward societies. Of course, apart from conventional capitalist countries, the erstwhile Soviet Union, too, was imperialist, and contemporary China, too, is not free from imperialist policies. Furthermore, I consider globalization as yet another stage in the development of capitalism.

The term neo-liberal came into existence in the context of Britain, under Thatcher, and the United States under the Reagan administration during the 1980s. Basically, these conservative capitalist leaders wanted to roll back the state from business, cut excessive expenditure on salaries and subsidies and support the expansion of the transnational capital and its movements across the world. As the neo-

liberal agenda was embraced by the international donor agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), these loan disbursing bodies began to accentuate the development of private initiative and curb the role of the public sector.

The impact of globalisation has been uneven in Africa, with mixed results. In Africa, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Rwanda have the fastest growing economies according to the IMF. However, all the economies are not growing at a faster rate. Such growth necessarily is not accompanied by overall development in the social sectors.

Moreover, the African countries have strengthened the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (REC) as a response to meet the challenges of globalisation. Through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) the AU member states have been engaged in creating a single market for Africa. This is not going to be a mean achievement. At the same time, the phase of globalisation has had its adverse effects. It has caused uneven development between and within states. The states that are re-