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## Consequences of Necro Politics on Post-Colonial Africa: The Management of Foreign Influence

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper tells of oppressive dispositions of slaves in Africa during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade by using the concept of Necro politics as the basis to analyse the photograph by Tibi Puii, derived from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division. Through the use of Mbembe (2019)'s concept of Necro politics, we examine the sovereignty of colonial masters to expand the definition of concept to include not only individuals experiencing death, but also experiencing social and political death. Again, we examine recent events and involvements of foreign governments involvement in modern day Africa. Through this we derive the concept of Slow Life with instances of serious incidences of foreign involvements impact on political administrations and the general social mannerisms of people in Africa.*

*The paper answers the question, 'How can colonies be free from modern - day legacies of slavery and colonialism?'*

*However, we adopt a qualitative methodology to source data through artistic writings of scholars from books and articles. We further use Goffman 1981's methodology on Frame Analysis to explain Necro politics through the photograph by Tibi Puii which entails a non-conforming slave woman being dehumanized on the deck of a slave ship en route to America to serve labour purposes.*

*Finally, we recommend solutions to manage the influence of foreign involvements in Post-Colonial Africa as a result of colonialism.*

**Keywords:** Africa, colonialism, Necro politics, sovereignty, trans-Atlantic slave trade

### **1. Introduction**

According to Mbembe (2019), Necro politics is the use of political and social sovereignty to decide whether a particular group of people may or may not live. Sovereignty gives the ruler control over mortality thereby defining life as the deployment and manifestation of power. Mbembe further analyses the term Necro politics in relation to power by examining the means of power in the pretense of war, colonial domination, and terror as a way of obtaining sovereignty. This paper investigates the concept of necro politics in relation to the dehumanizing incidences during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and further examines the consequences of necro politics in modern day Africa. Just like Mbembe (2019) who is of the idea that modernity is at the origin of multiple concepts of sovereignty, I analyze the colonial and post-colonial influences of necro politics on the way of life people in Africa now live. This entails the adoption of certain domineering practices during the colonial period such as the building of prisons to being house slaves, the building of castles for housing presidents until their term of office is completed, incidences of coup to overthrow governments which reflects in the times of the colonial era when nations invaded other nations unawares in thirst for mineral resources will also be explored.

Colonialism as a figure of sovereignty instrumentalizes human existence and destroys human bodies and the population. Biafra depicted the nationalist aims of the Igbo cultural group, whose leaders realize their inability to coexist with the federal government of Nigeria which was controlled by the likes of the Muslim Hausa-Fulani's of the northern Nigeria. The struggle was because of economic, political, religious and ethnic hostilities which preceded Britain's formal decolonization of Nigeria from the year 1960 to 1963. Causes of the war in 1966 comprised of ethnic religious hostilities and anti-Igbo persecutions in Northern Nigeria. Domination over the profitable oil production in the Nigerian Delta as well played a critical role in the struggle. Within a year, the Governments' force surrounded Biafra and seized the oil facilities and the city of Port Harcourt. Military action was imposed as an intentional plan of action which resulted in mass starvation as the war lasted for two and a half years.

Mbembe (2019) refers to Bataille's understanding of necro politics and its relation to sovereignty by mentioning the many forms sovereignty has and its refusal to accept the limits of fear and death. According to Mbembe, sovereignty demands that the prohibition of death is violated under conditions defined by customs. This prevailed in colonial and still prevails in post-colonial Africa. The very administration who enacts and amend laws are the very people who have the power to break them. The impact of power during the colonial era will be analyzed in the picture by Tibi Puii, derived from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division. It is a photograph about an enslaved African girl hanged and about to be whipped to death in the presence of colonial experts who do not seem empathetic. The reason

for her being whipped to death was because she refuses to dance naked on the deck of the slave ship. Puar (2021) references Sayek Valencia (2018)'s argument on the profitable business venture death has become. The body becomes a commodity just like the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade where people were sold in exchange for sugar, mirror, spices and gold.

## 2. Necro Politics and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Colonial Africa)

To analyze the oppressive dispositions of slaves during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in line with necro politics, Mbembe examines the fact that the lives of slaves are forms of death-in-life. He mentions Susan Buck-Morss suggestion that the slave condition produces contradictions between the freedom to own property and the right to be free as an individual. Susan was referring to the right of the slave masters to own property which happens to be the slaves themselves and then the freedom of owning oneself. Mbembe 2019 explains the freedom of owning oneself as the power of a slave over life in the colonial era. This is whereby the slave is not an instrument of production in say the cultivation of farms and the building of houses but to serve and cater for their masters' children and work chores in their master's house. Let us not forget the fact that some slave masters were kind to the slaves they owned and treated them as part of their family.

To detail the dehumanizing experiences during the colonial era of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Mbembe, 2019 defines colonial occupations in necro politics as gaining control over a territory and its geographical landscape, establishing new set of rules and regulations, and creating hierarchical administrations thereby gradually extinction the indigenous culture of their colonies. Hartman (2007) analyses the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and chooses Ghana due to the numerous prisons and dungeons as compared to other West African states. The Portuguese, English, Dutch, French, Danes, Swedes, and Germans built fifty permanent forts, and castles designed to guarantee their place in the Trans-Atlantic trade. During this era, slaves were captured, infants were murdered, pregnant women were disemboweled, girls were raped, and young men were burnt alive. These incidences of Necro politics have resulted in increased criminal activities in Ghana where people are most of the time announced missing only to finally realize that their body parts have been removed and their bodies dumped in a bush somewhere. Disobedient wives were also sold as slaves when their family members or husbands conclude that they are possessed and are witches. To escape poverty and hunger, families sold their children to cater for their basic needs for survival, Hartman (2007).

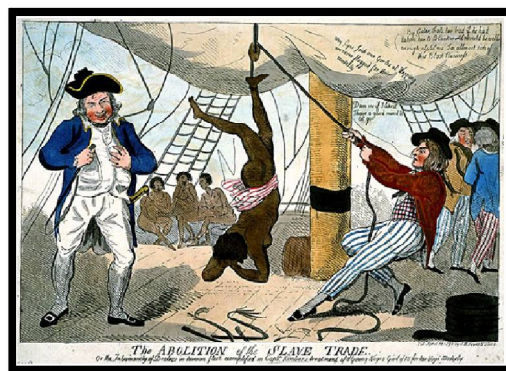


Figure 1

By Tibi Puiu, United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs Division  
<https://www.zmescience.com/science/transatlantic-slave-trade-study-05232/>.

According to Goffman (1981), frame analysis describes a piece of art by explaining by the concept to describe distinctive characteristics of the phenomenon or concept which is being used as the basis of analysis. This is done through keying the major important pieces. Keying involves stating and describing the terms of primary framework which has been transformed into patterns of activities.

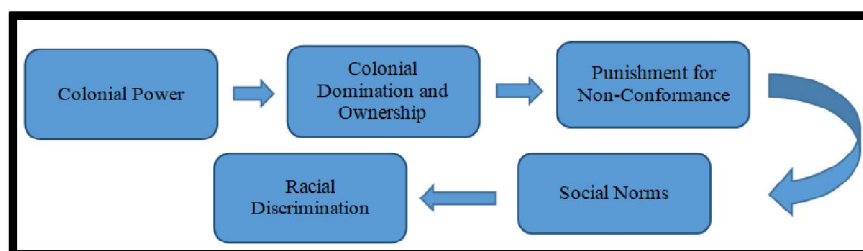


Figure 2

In analyzing the photograph from perspective of Necro Politics, the conceptual framework discovers a primary key which is colonial power, through power there is the avenue for domination and freedom to decide who should live and who may die. The enslaved African girl who was sold for either being a witch, or in exchange for food for survival by her parents, is hanged and about to be whipped to death for refusing to dance naked on the deck of a slave ship. The bodies of these women are owned by these slave masters. In the background, two experts are happily involved in a conversation and

overlooking the inhumane act being done behind them. Since the mishandling of slaves was a social norm, masters could even push slaves into the sea, and it would not be surprising to other slave masters on the ship nor the onlooking slaves themselves. The power to win the bodies of slaves provides sovereignty the privilege to bring death to a slave or let live. Also in the background, three naked slave women are communicating with each other, and they seem quite comfortable in the state they find themselves. In analyzing this, these women heed to the demands of the slave masters and have understood that their bodies are not theirs hence they will obey every order so that they are not punished. The mass acceptance of domination and discrimination by slaves and non-slave Africans have contributed to the prevailing problems with racial discrimination.

Elmina Castle was a place where the slaves were caged until they were ready to be transported abroad for building and other purposes of production. Merchants travelled through Saharan Africa with salt, textiles, mirrors, and other commodities in exchange for gold and slaves. European sailors and merchants heard of the rumors of naked people with fists full of gold who were eager to trade it for old clothes and other foreign items. The Portuguese, the first invaders to arrive in the Gold Coast, now Ghana, were eager to trade. They exchanged used garments, shells, beads, and slaves for gold. The gold obtained fueled the Portuguese slaving efforts in Benin which was the first major source of trade in the Atlantic Trade. By 1600, the Portuguese had exported almost half a million Africans, Hartman (2007).

Foucault argues that, through a biological inference of the topic of the political enemy, the Nazi state's organizing of war exposed the city to its own citizens on the rights to kill, Mbembe (2019). Based on this argument, in the Elmina Castle, built by slaves under the supervision of the Portuguese, comprised of the quarters of the slave masters and their wards on the first floor of the castle, dining rooms and rooms reserved for female slaves in time when their services are needed sexually, the finally, the ground floor where the dungeons were built to house male and female prisoners separately. The exposure of slaves into the dungeons, the whipping of slaves when they showed behaviors of resistance and other dehumanizing activities has impacted the African populace in establishing prisons with uncomfortable living conditions. The Ghana prison for example houses many inmates in one room such that it becomes difficult for prisoners to breathe as a way of punishing offenders. It is quite recently that the government of Ghana under the administrations of His Excellency Nana Akufo Addo and that of His Excellency John Dramani Mahama that new prisons with enabling environments for inmates have been built to curb the inhumane conditions of living prisoners used to live.

Another impact of Necro Politics in Ghana is the incident of series of coups in the Ghanaian administration in the year 1966. Jerry John Rawlings overthrew Kwame Nkrumah in 1981. In Africa, more than seventy leaders of state were overthrown by the armed forces as a way of changing hands, Hartman (2007). These incidences in coups can be related to the seizure of the Elmina castle from the Portuguese by the Dutch in 1837 after a failed attempt in 1596. As earlier mentioned, the Castle was built to house the Portuguese and their families as well as other masters who facilitated the sale of slaves. This domineering act or act of sovereignty was adopted by the president of Ghana Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who led Ghana to independence in the year 1957 to choose the castle as his presidential place of residence to symbolize colonial authority. He later built the parliament of Ghana to deter from corruption and the guise of colonial invaders, Hartman (2007).

Berlant (2001), defines slow death as the physical deterioration of a group under conditions of historical experiences. The history of slave trade in Ghana especially, when revisited, brings about hate and regret among tourists and even Ghanaians who have heard and retell the stories repeatedly. There for the question I would like to pose is that should our history be lost because upon its remembrance, puts people in certain moods that may cause them to harm people from modern-day colonial countries? Should African governments tear down tourist sites that narrate the dehumanizing history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade? According to Berlant (2001), Slow death prospers on aspects of living in which everyday activities and memories of dehumanizing and domination is realized. Therefore, telling the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade does not cause slow death but the influence of the history on the people as well as the consequences and traces of history is what can cause slow death. A typical example is the above-mentioned problem with the oil refinery in Nigeria and the health impact on the surrounding inhabitants. This has increased the death rate in the area since the government is reluctant in ensuring adequate measures to provide healthy and enabling environments for the people.

Currently, 50 years of oil spillage has left a 27,000 square-mile region of swampland, and mangrove forests in southeastern Nigeria which is one of the most contaminated places on earth. Life expectancy is 41 years. Robberies and gun violence are predominant as different weaponized groups spill over into the city. The government of Nigeria in time reached a peace deal with the rebels, with some of them contracted to protect the companies they once attacked. Peace was incorporated into the world system by the slave trade that endured from the 16th till the 19th century. Local chiefs sold captured men, women, and children to the Portuguese and then the British. The slaves were also shipped to the new world as muscle for the mines and plantations in Brazil, the Caribbean, and the U.S. When slavery was abolished, it was the Delta oil that became a vital ingredient in the industrial revolution. Over years the government and the oil companies have made promises to clean up but have not heeded to their promises. Nigerians from the Delta are presently asking British judges to permit them to sue Royal Dutch Shell in London over the damage caused by oil spills. This has affected the fishing communities as fishing boats are abandoned in the delta after half a century of oil spillage. A study by the United Nations Environment Program in 2011 found that at least \$1 billion was needed to mend the damage done by decades of crude production in one Nigerian district.

During the colonial period, Slow Death was realized because of the harsh treatments meted on slaves. In the dungeons for example, some slaves who were sick and needed access to healthcare were ignored. Again, in instances

where some of the slaves were infected by contagious diseases, it spread easily among them. Some slaves slowly died of hunger while those who could live were full of bones from their skulls through their ribs.

### 3. Conclusion

Even though colonialism caused harm to the African population, I will not dispute the fact that it brought some good to Africans. Africans have been introduced to human rights-based perspectives and deprived African countries are supported by international organizations to meet the needs of women and children especially, Puar (2021).

To answer the question of how colonies can be free from modern - day legacies of slavery and colonialism, African governments must learn to be independent. The governmental and strategic involvements of donors prescribe the assistance process more than concerns of good governance in the recipient nations. This makes African countries look like a helpless civilization led by corrupt leaders. Colonial history plays a vast role in the overseas aid activities. France for example, gives a lot to its colonies as a result of remorse of the past. Africa is loaded with natural resources to help develop the continent but there is an increase in corruption and embezzlement of state funds by parliamentarians and institutions of power. Some African countries like Ghana have rubbished the indigenous ways of litigation and have adopted western laws in high courts. When issues of marriage and inheritance arise, there are conflicts between the customary laws and adopted foreign laws. Judges tend to employ customary laws on issues like marriage and inheritance but use western laws on issues of criminal law which introduced the death penalty. In the Indigenous laws, crimes like rape, murder, and other crimes were subject to banishment as against the death penalty. Until Africa learns to be independent, modern-day colonialism will still prevail.

### 4. End Notes

- The power to spare life and kill was at the hands of colonial experts and is still in the hands of colonial nations through the approval and acceptance of foreign aids by some African leaders.
- Modern day colonialism is still prevalent in African because of the adoption and massive reliance on a vast array of western culture.
- In managing foreign involvements in Africa, there is the need to moderate the reliance on foreign aids by African leaders. Not all aids should be accepted due to the long-term consequences for generations to come.

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