**Tears Of The Sun**

"They are our heroes; they battled for our independence; they suffered severely enough just to earn freedom for us; they went through terrible conditions and unfair treatments under colonial control," my father would tell me. Yep, I concur with it as well. What does freedom mean to us? Is it the chance of being ruled by one of our own and not the westerners? Is it the economic freedom where each person can work on their farms freely, harvest, and later sell at the right returns, without middlemen getting in the picture? Is it reducing the burden of taxation on our shoulders? Is it obtaining free and fair trials and decisions from our judicial jurisdictions? Is it being misguided by the democracy that we chose, drafted, and fought for, ourselves? Is it the position of being in control of minerals and then exchanging them for aid and grants that are worthless to our growth and, in the long term, our future? I would like to know the definition of freedom and democracy that we always claim to have.

We don't, in my opinion, have any freedom at all. True, those we once referred to as colonialists—those who sold our ancestors as slaves and used their labor as a commodity—have long since disappeared, but not entirely because their influence can still be felt today. But how come we still aren't free? The truth is that the white colonialists are no longer among us, but their replacements, the black colonialists, are, by all accounts, worse. It disgusts me that they deceive us and profit at our expense while abusing us legally, especially by cleverly utilizing the same constitution and democracy that we choose against us.

We were left with greedy countrymen who believe in forming dynasties and ways to profit from the meager resources left on the table, which are essentially for the benefit of all of us collectively and our country's development. There is and never will be, happiness where our own, those that we trust, and those that we fight for; mistreat us by killing our children, draining our economy, closing the little roads that might somehow lead us to success, saddling us with onerous taxes, killing markets for farmers and finally sabotaging our future by denying our children the key to success.

State capture refers to the way formal procedures (such as laws and social norms) and government bureaucracy are manipulated by government officials, state-backed companies, private companies, or private individuals, to influence state policies and laws in their favor. State capture makes a mockery of our hard-earned democracy and it is the worst-case scenario that a nation can be in such an evolved epoch; the 21st century. It dehumanizes the people, creeples the economy, and cuts growth in more sore developing countries.

Saying that Africa is currently in an economic crisis is probably a great understatement. Basic infrastructure in most African countries is dilapidated, economic growth is minimal, access to the basics like food, health, and education is sparse and expensive, arid areas are encroaching into previously arable land, and so forth. The list is enormous. All this while the continent is deeply entrenched in debt to the developed Western countries, much of which was acquired to fight the economic hardships, but have failed to make any marked improvement in the situation.

In my opinion, the African debt problem is the biggest hindrance to any possible solutions to the overall economic crisis. This is ironic because the purpose of the loans in the first place was to help alleviate economic hardships in the receiving countries. Most African countries were in debt almost as soon as they gained independence. The amount of debt has been constantly rising since then. Currently, African governments spend huge chunks of their annual revenue just to service loans, money that could go quite a distance in developing their economies. From this, it is evident that Africa’s wealth is being repatriated to the richer countries in the west, just like it was in the colonial days, but masked under “debt servicing”, and thus my notion of economic colonialism.

I reject the notion that the poverty crisis in Africa and its underdevelopment is solely attributed to the lack of proper industries and technical skills to process and maximize our resources. While this is certainly a contributing factor, the major issue is a failure of mindset. Too many African countries have become overly reliant on exporting raw materials to the western world, who then process and sell these materials at a much higher value. Instead, African countries must shift their focus towards developing sustainable economies that are based on local resources and innovation, rather than external aid and investment. Unfortunately, our leaders have been influenced by the western world to accept aid in exchange for raw materials and other goods, which only prolongs the realization that this approach is not beneficial to Africa. It is crucial that we take control of our own economic future and strive for self-sufficiency, rather than being dependent on external aid and investment.

No human is limited, and this undoubtedly holds true for Africans as well. To enhance and increase our technical skills set, African countries must invest in their people, particularly the youth, through education, skills training, mentorship, and apprenticeships, entrepreneurship, technology transfer, and collaboration. In addition, there is a need for Africans to create quality industries that will enable them to process and innovate many things, not forgetting to create job opportunities for their people. These industries can add value to our raw materials and resources, generate wealth, and spur economic growth. By doing so, we can reduce our dependence on external aid and investment, and create sustainable economies that are based on local resources and innovation.

"I would rather argue, that we need to mobilize the right mindsets, rather than more funding. After all, in Africa, we have everything we need, in real terms. Whatever is lacking, we have the means to acquire. And yet, we remain mentally married to the idea that nothing can get moving, without external finance. We are even begging for things we already have. That is a failure of mindset." --Paul Kagame