

FIFTH COLUMN IN NIGERIA: The Lagos Elite

By
Dapo Ladimeji

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"If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success..... Therefore a superior man considers it necessary that the names he uses may be spoken appropriately, and also that what he speaks may be carried out appropriately. What the superior man requires is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect."
Confucius 'Analects'¹

One of the great mysteries for many is the incoherence of Nigeria despite its brilliant people. To unravel this mystery we must first start with an understanding of 'fifth column'.

Britannica's definition is as follows:

fifth column, clandestine group or faction of subversive agents who attempt to undermine a nation's solidarity by any means at their disposal'²

Mola is credited with inventing the concept of 'fifth column' during the Spanish Civil War.

'In October 1936, Mola launched a drive on [Madrid](#) with four columns of soldiers. He publically announced that a "fifth column" of Nationalists inside Madrid would help him take the city. '³

Though the attack failed the phrase entered common usage.

Fifth column differs from open compradors such as Quisling. Quislings are less dangerous because they are openly subservient to another power. Fifth columnists pretend to be loyal to the people, to the nation. Quisling was a puppet proposed ruler of Norway for the Nazis during WW2.⁴

Who are meant by the 'Lagos Elite'? This will become apparent as we examine further. But for clarity's sake we refer not to a standard body of persons but to what has become a cultural norm that spreads further than to the original members of the pre-Independence group who would strictly qualify as 'Lagos Elite'.

The Lagos elite

Where do the 'Lagos elite' come from? Patrick Dele Cole did his PhD at Cambridge University on this topic, later published as 'Modern and Traditional Elites in the politics of Lagos'.⁵

¹ (Confucius, 500 BCE, pt. 13)

² ('Fifth Column | Definition & Facts | Britannica', 2023)

³ (turtledove, n.d.)

⁴ ('Vidkun Quisling', 2023)

⁵ (Cole, 1975)

The answer is quite simple: the Lagos elite came from a mix of descendants of pre-abolition slave traders, Saro (ex Sierra Leone freed slaves) and Brazilian 'returnees' all of whom worked with the British, Portuguese and Dutch. Later they accommodated the British colonial authorities. Lagos itself is named after a place in Algarve, Portugal. At the turn of the 20th century 10% of Lagos were Brazilian returnees⁶(see note 4). The Independence leaders generally came from elsewhere. During the transition to independence, Britain made sure that many of these 'emigre' people inherited the most important administrative positions. It is not always remembered that the Lagos elite were not colonial subjects like the vast majority of Nigerians but full British citizens! This created an enormous legal and psychic gulf between them and the 'natives'. Being full British citizens they had no incentive to seek Independence.

I recall being told by these people or their descendants that 'Britain is our friend'. They valued Oxbridge education and the status of working with/for overseas companies and had contempt for Nigerian enterprises. They had no wish to create a competitor to Oxbridge i.e. a Nigerian elite alternative to Oxbridge. They managed to hoodwink most of Nigeria by telling them we are the people who brought you independence. They suggested that they 'had a quiet word' with the British who agreed to leave. I remember in the 60's listening to traditional rulers in Abeokuta refer to Lagos representatives as the former slave traders! But the Lagos elite have now taken on the clothes of traditional rulers. To what effect? During the endSARS rebellion the Governor had to send security forces to save the Oba of Lagos from the people of Lagos who were coming to lynch him. Think of that! The people seeking to lynch their own Oba? When I asked how he related to the local people of Lagos I learnt he treated them just as the old compradors class under British colonial rule treated the locals -- with complete contempt.

I recall Ambode, when Governor of Lagos, publicly referring longingly to the times of great partnership with Britain to the British PM Theresa May. This was the era of slave trading and colonialism. Even the Brits were embarrassed.

But this dressing up in the traditional clothes as a fig leaf for people who owed allegiance to foreign powers is not new or unique to Lagos. Mobutu one day decided that his previous uniform was too obviously that of a puppet and so he began wearing the clothes of the dissident African intellectuals -- dashiki and buba. This caused a sensation! Within a month, dissident African intellectuals abandoned the dashiki. You will no longer find African intellectuals wearing dashiki. Soyinka was seen wearing traditional Yoruba hunters jackets! I had worn either dashiki or buba everyday I was at Cambridge. It was my signature. After I saw Mobutu wearing a dashiki I have never worn one since.

We have a Lagos culture which frankly is embodied in the phrase 'our friends, the British', maybe updated to 'our colleagues, the Americans'.

A Lagos culture that is dominated by compradors cannot encourage a national culture or an internationally competing culture or any kind of national revival. It will have no faith in a Nigerian 'Harvard.' When my father was introduced to a group of senior Nigerians who wanted to create an Oxbridge Club in Lagos I did everything I could, unsuccessfully, to collapse the proposal. Though I was at Cambridge at the time, I felt that such a club would symbolise that the way to importance or respect was to seek admission to a prestigious foreign university. In my mind we needed a Nigerian 'Harvard' or a Nigerian 'Cambridge' not a Lagos Oxbridge Club. These elite institutions are surprisingly easy to create and are dependent on low teacher/student ratio, teachers who must

⁶ (Oyebode, 2014)

continue to perform advanced research and aggressive selection that seeks out the truly exceptionally talented. Harvard/Oxbridge do not give students talents they were not born with!

The culture of the independence movement was of collaboration among each other for a common purpose. Many members of the independence movement fought in liberation armies. Collaborate or die. Post-Independence, the countries of Africa were often taken over by the local allies of the former colonial powers.

This 'Lagos Elite' continues its vision without understanding how the world has since changed and that their 'masters' no longer need this behaviour. Basically, the Lagos Elite are obsessed with their guilty secret history of slave trading, focussed on hatred of their fellow Nigerians as they base their status on their superiority to the natives and closeness to the former colonials. If the natives develop greatly as the country wishes their own sense of 'superiority' and their superior status will be destroyed. To see how far they will go, let us consider how they behave today. At an Oxford and Cambridge Club lunch I was told that several Lagosians claimed to groups of British interlocutors that they were descendants of Nigerian traditional rulers who had been slave traders and they were proud of this. They did not notice their interlocutors embarrassment. But what were they doing? They were seeking acceptance in the British power elite by disparaging the traditional rulers of Nigeria as willing slave traders and compradors. By claiming to be descendants they pretend to be making a 'confession' though for many reasons they can be shown to be utter liars. So even today behind the scenes these compradors are dedicating themselves to destroying Nigeria, the reputation of its people, and seeking acceptance within the British power elite as their 'fifth column'. They celebrate with *schadenfreude* the failure of any local initiative ('I told you so') and disparage and weaken any sense of self reliance. One has to remember these people had been made full British citizens under colonialism and identified with the colonial powers, not the independence movement.

Their greatest harm is the culture of compradorism that they have established, concealed behind the lying claim that they had brought Independence to Nigeria. This needs to be unmasked.

To be fair, the neo-liberal elite in the West show signs of a similar contempt for their own people. Recent events around the Ukraine war has shown that there are many members of Europe's power elite who are willing to sacrifice their countries for their personal benefit and that of a foreign power.

Putting 'the Lagos elite' in context

It is of some importance to put 'the Lagos elite' in context. Let us start in 1945. The US sets up Europe as an independent sector and rejects USSR offer for a peaceful Europe. Churchill investigates invading Russia under 'Operation Unthinkable'. We can now see in the light of future US conduct, particularly in Ukraine, that the plan was divide and rule. Create conflict which creates a need for American support. A Cold War becomes a means of frightening the population of Western Europe and then imposing where possible a team of pro-Atlantic vassals to rule Europe. The vast transfer of wealth to Europe creates a booming Europe concealing its vassal status. This wealth comes from the enormous transfers of wealth that the US was able to effect from the majority South of the world. Europe and its vassals feel they are partners in the US plunder of the world.

Once the US is no longer able to maintain its global dominance and no longer wishes to pay for the defence of Europe and begins to see in European industry a potential competitor the old relationship unravels. Build back better AT HOME appears to include attracting major German industries to the US. Now the US is accused of deliberately de industrialising Germany, its greatest European industrial competitor.

In the view of the US National Security Strategy :

‘the People’s Republic of China is “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.”⁷

Given this is the US priority it allows damage to the German economy to be considered mere collateral damage in pursuit of higher goal. Decades of having Germany’s economic well being as a central goal of US policy have ended and German has not quite recovered from the shock.

Being a vassal of a great empire can be a very profitable position. The Lagos elites’ comprador status allowed it to gain considerable wealth, political power and status. Similarly the whites in Apartheid South Africa were vassals of the US and reaped many gains for many years. When their troops were in grave trouble the US came directly to their aid in the form of Chester Crocker.

What may be unique is the immense cultural effort the US made to mould the world perception to its desired version. The prosperity of the West not only undermined the growth of left parties such as the Communist Party in Europe but also gave substance to idea of formalism: democratic institutions, rule of law, transparency led to wealth and stability. Academic institutions in the West followed the money and produced endless books and reports along this line. The history of Japan, South Korea and Brazil entirely ignored such requirements. This highly co-ordinated campaign is massive and effective and has greater longer lasting effects than armed violence.

Prior to the collapse of USSR and end of the Cold War many attempts were made to make the West appear totally open and free with support and manipulation hidden behind the scenes like in the case of Modern Art⁸. The importance of manipulating the Western intelligentsia was well understood and sufficient clandestine funds were allocated to covert operations.⁹ Were the Western academics entirely unaware or did they look the other way?

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the mask was torn aside.

A most persistent move is the corruption of language which can undermine an entire culture and society as well identified by Confucius. Plutocratic authoritarianism is called democracy. Democracy is reduced to a formality about the availability of a technical voting opportunity. Markets are free when the market power of the monopolists are such that the markets are not free. Leaders in Africa are corrupt and authoritarian even when they do nothing different than European leaders are few are in office as long as Angela Merkel (16 years).

⁷ (daalder, 2022)

⁸ (saunders, 1995)

⁹ (Shannon, 2016)

Return to Lagos

This slight digression is to show that the African compradors were not significantly different than European vassals. Whereas the role of the European vassals was to help develop post war Europe, the Nigerian vassals' role was to permanently obstruct the development of Nigeria.

Karaganov puts this into the context of the world changes taking place.

‘The underlying, and even fundamental cause of the conflict in Ukraine and many other tensions in the world, as well as of the overall growth of the threat of war is the accelerating failure of the modern ruling Western elites—mainly comprador ones in Europe (Portuguese colonialists used the word ‘comprador’ to refer to local traders who catered to their needs)—who were generated by the globalization course of recent decades. This failure is accompanied by rapid changes, unprecedented in history, in the global balance of power in favor of the Global Majority, with China and partly India acting as its economic drivers, and Russia chosen by history to be its military-strategic pillar. ‘

He then added:

‘Their countries are losing their five-century-long ability to syphon wealth around the world, imposing, primarily by brute force, political and economic orders, and cultural dominance.’¹⁰

This comprador behaviour of the Lagos elite is widespread, accepted and encouraged by many in the West. I recall many yeras ago attending a prestigious event relating to Africa. I was approached by several hosts and seeing my well heeled state congtrulated me on the rape of my fellow countrymen. The assumption was that I was making money by ripping off fellow Africans. When I mentioned that I was merely a typical City partner earning my daily crumb, they left in embarrassment.

Our agenda here is that Nigeria needs to identify the evil legacy of the ‘the Lagos elite’ and rid ourselves of it , but not on the basis that we are seeking to become more like Europeans. We need to address the inequality in our society but not on the basis that we are seeking to be like the West. Since the US has far greater inequality it cannot be any goal for Nigeria. This article focusses on Nigeria but the issue applies to Africa in general.

There is no future for Nigeria until we rid ourselves not only of these people but also of the culture they have imbued in Lagos and in many places throughout the country. A cultural revolution is required. There is no alternative.

¹⁰ (karaganov, 2023)

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