

Original Paper

Colonialism and Its Effect on African Conflict

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Abstract

Colonialism is a major part of Africa's history and therefore plays a major role in the types of conflict present in the continent. While in the international community, there seems to be more inter-state and economic conflicts, African conflicts are characterised by internal differences, hence intra-state conflicts. Though there were five major colonial powers present in Africa, this study explores the two major ones- Anglophone and Francophone. Both forms of colonialism share some similarities which are explored in this paper. As with the different policies practiced by both France and Britain, there are differences in the form of colonialism and how it was administered. These differences are explored in this paper. Finally, this paper analyses the effect of colonialism on the type of conflict most common in Africa. This paper answers the question of post-colonial experiences in Africa and its effects on the types of conflict present in the continent.

Keywords

colonialism, Africa, intra-state conflict, ethnicity

1. Introduction

The 19th century marks the age of colonialism in Africa by the major powers of Europe which include Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Spain. This paper concentrates on Anglophone and Francophone colonial rule in the continent. In answering the question of the post-colonial experiences of both rules and the effect on the types of conflict present in Africa, this paper begins with the similarities of both colonial systems in Africa. Starting from the colonial period itself to the post-colonial era, this paper emphasises exploitation, creation of boundaries, the theme of dependency and economic troubles as some of the similarities between these rules. In differentiating them, independence, dependency and the policy used to state the points. Finally, this paper analyses the effect of colonialism on African conflict. Throughout this paper, examples of states and their colonists are cited appropriately.

2. Similar Colonialism

Although colonial activities in Africa were performed differently by several European powers, there were major similarities, one of which was the exploitation of the African continent. Africa has been tremendously vital to the industrialization of Europe as a source of natural resources and human labour (William Pear, 2014). Exploitation is the act of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work or resources (Oxford dictionary). Both Anglophone and Francophone countries experienced “exploitation colonialism”. Exploitation colonialism could be described as the national economic policy of conquering a country to exploit her population labour and its natural resources as raw material (Rimmer, 1978). Some examples of countries that were exploited by Britain are Gambia, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria. France exploited countries like Ivory Coast, Gabon.

In exploiting the continent of Africa, the Europeans used means like forced labour and the implementation of taxes on the market economy that was controlled by the Europeans (Khan, 2016; Rodney, 1972). The Gold Coast became a British colony in 1867, although it had been previously occupied by the Danes. In 1896, Britain had declared the Ashanti kingdom a protectorate, dismembered the kingdom and deposed the ruler. Gold Coast was a country with multiple resources including timber, cocoa and gold, however, cocoa was the exploited resource. The production of cocoa began in the Gold coast in 1873, largely produced in the hands of the Africans. The cocoa marketing board was established in 1947 to assist the farmers and to stabilize the production and sale of their crops. Soon the production of gold and timber was forgotten in the country, and the Gold Coast became one of the largest exporters of cocoa in the world market. Taxation system was then introduced as a form of generating revenues and was implemented by the local chiefs who had become the legislative council. Thus, the people of Gold Coast paid taxes to the British for goods exported to Britain for the British’s consumption and benefit. The men of the land had been made to work on the farm, some of which had been taken over by the British, and were paid just enough for their daily expenses.

An example of exploitation in Francophone Africa is Ivory Coast which was claimed in 1893. The country was not known for ivory but cocoa as well, similar to the Gold Coast. Both Africans and the French had cocoa plantations, though the French had bigger ones. The Africans that worked on these plantations were exploited and mistreated by their French masters. The taxation system was also introduced, and the Africans were never involved in the exportation dealings. All business transactions were handled by the French and the African plantation owners were paid less for their crops (History and politics, 2017).

Other examples of African colonies that were exploited include South Africa for gold and Gabon for oil. Gabon’s oil was used as collateral for aid that France provided for the Gabonese. Their resources were exploited and the labour force as most Africans worked in mines for long hours and were paid peanuts. The theme of dependency is profound in post-colonial Africa (both Anglophone and Francophone). The economies of the African countries were dependent on one product, i.e., operated monocrop economies. Majority of the export of these economies were to the West, mainly the individual colonial masters. For

example, Gabon's export was to France as South Africa's export was to Britain. Thomson (2014) describes it as "unequal exchange". These African states had "highly specialised" economies, producing one, two or three commodities for export. Colonial rule ensured that peripheral economies became predominantly export economies. Ghana produced cocoa, Gabon produced oil, Senegal produced fish and groundnuts, Kenya produced coffee, tea and oil and Ivory Coast produced cocoa and oil. However, countries with more than one product or resource would then concentrate on the product that has more attraction for the colonial power. With this, most African countries became rentier states, depending on their monocrop resources.

Apart from dependency on single economies, these countries were and are also dependent on exports to the West (Settles, 1996). Francophone Africa exported most of their products to France and Anglophone to Britain. This was the major source of generating additional income and there was no substitute good in the case of bad harvest, reduced production or slump in that particular product. This was a huge advantage for the western buyers also being that the products had no local demands. Both European colonies had encouraged the Africans to plant cash crops which helped the business of exploitation. Part IV of the treaty of Rome was structured to distribute among the European powers the "burdens and benefits" of the colonial pact and to provide some limited benefits for the African colonies. It was a means of protecting the colonial market and opening the colonies to greater markets and investments (Zartman, 2009).

African colonies produced the raw material and had to import the manufactured materials from the West. So, they bought "expensive western manufactured goods with the income generated by the export of these cheaper products" at an inflated price. A United Nations report estimates that 85% of the value of manufactured goods remained in the West and only 15% was sent back to the country that provided the raw material (IMF, 2017). Ironically, over time, the cost price of raw material fell but the price of manufactured products increased (Austin, 2010).

The grant of independence provided African countries a degree of political autonomy and they attempted to diversify their economies. Attempts were made to establish local companies, infrastructure and education. However, development of a country requires investment capital, leading to the need to borrow from the West and most importantly the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The main aid that the IMF gives comes with Structural Adjustment Programmes for conditional borrowing. Before loans were granted, these countries had to make changes to their economies (IMF, 2017).

These IMF adjustments included "liberalising their economies, opening them to international and domestic private capital, while at the same time reducing the role of the state in economic governance" (Thomson, 2014). These adjustments were difficult to implement by African leaders because their popularity in the countries were based on these companies and infrastructures handled by the elite. However, out of need and necessity, they had little or no choice but to accept these adjustments. Countries like Ghana, Kenya, Gabon, Senegal and Ivory Coast accepted these loans and signed the agreements.

Most of the products from which funds are generated in the economies come from the rural areas but the benefits were enjoyed by the urban districts, thus, capital was drained from the countryside to the cities and towns. A major consequence was that agricultural production performed very poorly in the post-colonial period. Farmers' pay was reduced, and they had to produce more goods, e.g, in Ghana. This resulted in African countries having to import the majority of its food rather than grow them. This is still the case in several of these countries as Africa is still dependent on imported food.

Paying the interest on these loans had a crippling effect on the local economies. IMF loans are meant to help member countries tackle balance of payment problems, stabilize their economies and restore sustainable economic growth (IMF, 2017). Although the IMF helped in stabilizing one African country, Ghana in 1982, it is arguable that it did not help the country towards sustainable development. Long after colonialism and the grant of independence, Europe is still present and influential in the continent of Africa, it has only shifted to more subtle forms. Much as military occupation and sovereign control over the territories have been eliminated, political influence, economic predominance and cultural imperialism remains. Both Britain and France maintain a high level of aid and investment, trade dominance, and a sizeable flow of teachers, businessmen, statesmen, tourists and technical assistants and this is still seen presently (Zartman, 1976). Colonial administrators had failed to provide Africa with the basic economic foundations governments need to boost their economies.

The boundaries established in Africa is another theme of colonialism and reflects in the post-colonial period. A look at the map of Africa today demonstrates an external rather than internal logic to the mappings. Majority of the boundaries are straight lines (Thomson, 2014). Thomson describes these boundaries as "arbitrary boundaries" (2004), in the sense that they echoed short term strategic and economic interests of the imperial powers, not the interests of the Africans they housed. The boundaries did not match the existing pre-colonial political, social or economic divisions (Schmidt, 2017; Blanton *et al.*, 2001).

The creation of colonial borders disrupted the lines of communication and trade, as well as causing problems for African States. With the creation of these boundaries, 14 African countries were landlocked, a huge disadvantage in terms of trade (Khan, 2016). Landlocked states have to rely on their neighbours' willingness and ability to transport the bulk of their imports and exports. These imposed borders also left some states without significant resources to build their economies, hence, some countries do not have an economic base (Blanton *et al.*, 2001; Austin, 2010).

Another problem of colonial borders is the existence of internal conflict within a state. The borders placed peoples of communities in different states, e.g. Somali people were scattered among 5 sovereign states- Kenya, British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, French Somaliland and Ethiopia. Due to these colonial boundaries, decolonization came to mean that national identities had to be built. Kenya, in 1921 formed 2 ethnic associations- the kikuyus and the Luos, and their political associations are based on these ethnic groups. The British played these ethnic groups against each other and now, the politics is based on

ethnicity and tribalism. This ethnic conflict and politics is still present in Kenya and is still affecting their growth, progress and development.

Vertical power structures existed in the post-colonial period. The Africans that got into power after independence did not want to let it go. Some of them were in power for long periods and others died in power causing a political problem in the countries. Examples are Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (1953-1966), Jomo Kenyetta of Kenya (1963-1978), Leopold Senghor of Senegal (1960-1981) and Albert Bongo of Gabon (1967-2009).

Cultural imperialism is also an important theme evident in post-colonial Africa. Both anglophone and francophone Africa were impacted with the cultures of both their colonial masters. Countries like Gabon, Senegal and Ivory Coast only speak French and went up to Paris for education, military service or to get a job. Countries like South Africa, Ghana and Kenya speak English and went to the United Kingdom for studies, work or to start a nationalist movement. Hence, both colonial powers socially and culturally affected and influenced Africa (Klein & Miers, 2013).

3. Different Colonialism

Although there were certain similarities between French and British colonial rule, some differences still exist. A major one is that Britain implemented the policy of association and indirect rule, and France, the policy of assimilation.

In the use of indirect rule, Britain believed that it was their role to conserve what was good in indigenous institutions and assist them to develop on their terms. The interaction between the British political officers and the chief was like that of an adviser or supervisor who intervened only in extreme situations. The British colonial rulers used the chiefs and traditional rulers to govern the small political units. The use of native leaders was considered to be less disruptive of the social order. Although the British indirect rule included the use of traditional rulers, the aim was not to preserve the institution of chieftaincy but to “encourage local self-government through the indigenous political institutions” (Crowder, 1964). Indirect rule was “the plan to use existing tribal structures and traditions as conduits for establishing rules and regulations, while British officials worked behind the scenes and could exercise veto power”.

In the Gold Coast, Several coastal tribes had submitted to British rule and its protection against the Ashanti wars. Under Maclean’s administration in the region, he defined the conditions and responsibilities of his jurisdiction and negotiated a special treaty with the local chiefs that became known as the Bond of 1844. The document obliged local leaders to submit the serious cases of crime to British jurisdiction, laying the groundwork of British colonization. Several treaties and bonds had been signed by the ethnic groups of the country for security and peace (Yates, 2012).

According to Lord Lugard, indirect rule was cost effective because it reduced the number of European officials in the field. Allowing local chiefs to exercise direct administrative control over their people minimized opposition to European rule from the local population. The chiefs however had to take instructions from the European supervisors.

Indirect rule for the British also meant that there was no political role for the African professionals. They argued that indirect rule made further African representation unnecessary because the people's interests were represented by their traditional rulers (Blanton *et al.*, 2001). Unlike the French, the British colonial rulers preferred Africans to be uneducated and ignorant. Several Africans had been educated in Britain and wanted to execute changes in the policies of their country. Their steps and approaches were obstructed by the colonial masters. Some of these educated elites were arrested for the nationalist movements such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana in 1948, Jomo Kenyetta of Kenya in 1953 and Nelson Mandela of South Africa in 1956. All these educated elites were arrested for their attempts towards freedom from colonial rule (South west). In England, these set of leaders had been a part of the Pan-African movement. At the grant of independence, these elites became the leaders of their countries. The policy used by the French colonial masters was the policy of assimilation. While the British depended on the traditional rulers' relationship between the political officers and the native authority, the French system placed the chiefs in an entirely subordinate role to the political officers. Chiefs were only agents of the central colonial governments with clearly stated duties and powers. They did not lead a political unit. The French divided the countries under the rule into "cantons" and so the chiefs were chiefs of a canton. Different from the British rule where chiefs were selected according to customary procedures, in French Africa, chiefs were chosen based on loyalty to the French or had obtained education (Crowder, 1964). Both Britain and France used traditional chiefs in their colonial rule though in different capacities. Assimilation was the underlying policy that enabled France to implant French culture and civilisation on the people with the intention of suffocating the culture and fundamental traditions of "Afrikans". The political administration of assimilation, which was controlled from a centralised federation of French West Africa, had its headquarters in Dakar, Senegal. The law for the federation and its administration were made in France and guarded by the legislative body. The administration consisted of the colonial minister, the governor general, lieutenant governors, the *commandant du cercle*, *chef du subdivision* and then the African chiefs. This was different from the administration of the British who had the governor, the political officials and the traditional chiefs (Austin, 2010).

While the British colonial masters wanted to encourage local self-government, French colonialism was solely meant to implant French culture on the local people, thus distorting the cultural heritage of the local people. "French civilization meant everything Africa (Afrika) was barbaric and ungodly", and the locals needed to accept and uphold their claim of French culture being divinely ordained. Hence the purpose of the policy of assimilation was to turn African natives into French men by educating them in the language and culture, they were therefore made French citizens. They were supposed to be French in everything except the colour of their skin. Senegal was the oldest French colony in Africa with the discovery of Saint Louise in 1659. In 1872, the citizens of the French settlements were granted citizenship.

In 1902, Dakar became the federation capital. The French had decentralised ethno-politics and focused on assimilation. Leopold Senghor of Senegal began his journey of assimilation with his education. He

was educated at the catholic school in Senegal before his study in Paris up to his PhD degree. He began his career as a teacher in France and joined the French army in the second world war. He was elected as a deputy to the French government with the backing of the socialist party. Senghor was appointed as a delegate minister by De Gaulle for the 5th republic of France and when independence was given to the country, Senghor was elected President.

In Gabon, during election, only the educated and assimilated were invited to participate in the elections. Leon Mba, an assimilated and loyal elite became the first president and had signed a cooperation accord with the French, and had become a “puppet”. Albert Bongo, Mba’s successor was basically put in power as an assimilated elite and again loyal to the republic of France. Houphouët Boigny of Ivory Coast served as a deputy in the French parliament before he became the president.

A second important distinction between French and British post-colonial Africa is the theme of intervention. Britain was less inclined to intervene in the affairs of its former colonies and was content to operate a low-key Africa policy. Although it helped the newly independent states of Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda to put down army mutinies in 1964, it was an unusual incident. France on the other hand maintained a close-knit relationship with its former colonies and has remained the most influential foreign government on the continent. With its policy of assimilation, diplomatic and financial ties between Paris and the capitals of the former colonies were more intimate than Britain’s or other colonies. French relationships were underlined by bonds of mutual trust and friendship as seen in Gabon (Thomson, 2014). Before these bonds and agreements between France and the African countries, there was the colonial pact that forbade French colonies to engage in any foreign trade except with France and this is still reflective with these countries (Tsiwah, 2014).

The French treasury also contributed to this intervention and manipulative dependence. Although British’s former colonies still have some form of dependence on Britain, a common monetary policy was not implemented. The French treasury guaranteed the Communauté Financière d’Africaine (CFA) Franc, giving the member state of the federation a common monetary zone which was a currency tied to the value of the French franc until it was devalued. “Although in effect, members relinquished their financial sovereignty for this privilege, in return they received a degree of monetary stability” that was absent anywhere else in the continent (Thomson, 2014). The devaluation of the CFA franc caused a drastic economy problem for the countries which has taken time to recover from.

Cultural imperialism is another difference between both colonial rule. Though this could also be perceived as a similarity. France imbibed in the Africans their culture and language and to them, an assimilated and educated elite was preferred. Britain on the other hand was not so inclined. The English language was taught which is why the former British colonies are English speaking and the French former colonies are French speaking. British Africa operated predominantly with British law, and in French Africa, France laws were predominant.

Independence for British Africa was struggled for. Because the British colonial masters did not want to grant independence before Britain granted independence in the 1900s- South Africa in 1910. Ghana in

1957 and Kenya in 1963. For former French colonies, they did not have to struggle for independence, they were given. De Gaulle offered independence to find some status to dominate these countries. Independence was given as a gift to the most assimilated Africans. Because they did not have to struggle, a close relationship was maintained between the appointed leaders and France. While British Africa was struggling for independence, French Africa was fighting to establish a federation.

White settlement was an important theme in British Africa. England wanted to exploit resources and create a profitable environment for its settler communities while France wanted to transform the African population within its sphere of influence into French citizens. The white settlers in British Africa became the elite class and the British were encouraged to move to France and lay claims to the territories.

4. Effect of Colonialism on African Conflict

Some research has shown that the majority of the conflicts present in Africa since the independence of the continent have been intra-state conflicts. There is a higher rate of civil wars in African countries than other countries in the international community (Schmidt, 2016). Most of the causes of the conflict have underlying factors traceable to the era of colonialism and the division created within the countries. European colonialism has had a wide range of influence on the development of African countries, one of which is ethnic conflict. The introduction of formal territories in different countries sowed the seeds of discord and conflict within these countries. Though colonialism was eradicated, these former colonies became independent states with these territorial boundaries still intact. Although the frequency and intensity of the conflicts in the different countries vary, it is a common effect in the continent.

The disregard for natural and previously existing boundaries by the colonial powers is a huge factor in this study. Prior to the era of colonialism, these African states were in existence, though not in the forms of states. Ethnic groups were present with different ideologies, religions, cultures and traditional leaderships. With the rise of colonialism, European powers merged these ethnic groups into colonies and ruled over them with both direct and indirect rule. However, the merge of these ethnic groups did not include the existing borders that existed among the colonies. So, ethnic groups with different ideologies and cultures were ruled together and forced to obey the same policies as imposed by colonial powers. The eradication of colonial rule in the 19th century did not eradicate these newly established borders and territories. In fact these colonies were granted independence as states, hence uniting these ethnic groups as one country. Prior to the era of colonialism, Africans had identities and recognised themselves with their ethnic identities. The presence of colonialism did not erase that factor, thus, even as countries now, Africans still recognise themselves with ethnicity.

The suppression of one ethnic group and elevation of the other by colonial powers caused resentment for each other amongst these ethnic groups. For example, the kikuyus and the Luos in Kenya are the two political associations based on these ethnic groups present in the country. The British played these ethnic groups against each other and now, the politics and conflict are based on these ethnicity and tribalism. The different tribal conflicts in Nigeria is another example- the Boko Haram conflict (North and South)

and the Biafran conflict (North and South-East). These conflicts were as a result of the preference of the colonial powers for one tribe over the other.

Another effect of colonialism on African conflict is on the exploitation of one resource over the others. Africa is a continent rich in natural resources. Most African countries have more than one natural resource. Example, Somalia is rich in coal, tin, iron ore and others, Ghana is rich in cocoa, gold, diamond, oil and more, and Nigeria is rich in oil, natural gas, tin and others. These resources were scattered around different regions in the countries. But colonial powers focused on the one resource they needed the most from a country. In Nigeria, they focused on oil, In Ghana, focus was on cocoa. The eradication of colonialism and creation of states made these treasures nationalised and mostly excluded the regions of ownership from receiving the benefits gotten from the resources. These caused major rifts between regions in a state (Kishi, 2014). Example of an African conflict that had elements of resource factor was North and South Sudan's conflict with oil factors present.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, these colonial experiences have played and still play a huge role in the development or underdevelopment of certain countries in Africa. Dependence on Europe still frames the economies of the majority of the African states. While the effect of colonialism is commonly acknowledged in the economies of African countries, it is not the same for the conflicts in the country. Territorial borders and boundaries created by the colonial rulers have caused divisions that amplified ethnic conflict in the continent.

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