

---

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

Iliyasu Yakubu Ahmed<sup>1\*</sup>, Chubado Umaru<sup>2</sup> and Rukaiya Yusuf<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>Department of History and International Studies  
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Nigeria  
[yakubuilvasu1988@gmail.com](mailto:yakubuilvasu1988@gmail.com) or [+234\(0\)8136662733](tel:+234(0)8136662733)

<sup>2</sup>DVC's Office, Federal University Gusau, Nigeria  
[chubadoumaru@fugusau.edu.ng](mailto:chubadoumaru@fugusau.edu.ng) or [+234\(0\)7031686161](tel:+234(0)7031686161)

<sup>3</sup>Department of History Federal Collage of Education, Zuba, Nigeria.  
[Rukyusufabdul1987@gmail.com](mailto:Rukyusufabdul1987@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*The European colonization of Africa was effected through invasion and conquest. European military might be used to forcefully crush and defeat the African kingdoms and empires to establish European domination and exploitation. Colonialism is the most famous phase in Africa-Europe relations that was facilitated by the European scramble and partition of Africa during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The main motive of Europeans invasion, occupation and domination of Africa was to exploit African resources and generate economic wealth for their mother country. It was also as a result of change in labour with the use of machine and quest for raw materials that shape the world. Africa being a continent with rich human and natural resources attracted all parts of the world. Lastly, European conquest and colonization of Africa affected economic, political and socio-cultural aspect of Africa. Thus, this study applies historical dialectical analysis to examine the European conquest of Africa.*

**KEYWORDS:** Colonialism, conquest, exploitation, occupation, partition and Africa

## **Introduction**

By the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Africans come into contact with the Europeans and participated in trade. This contact brought about several changes to their economic and socio-political institutions (Adeyeri and Adejuwon, 2012). The European powers embarked on searching for market to sell their finished goods, in order to reduce rivalries among the powers; a conference was called at Berlin Germany in 1884-1885, it was an international conference but only the European powers attended. African states were not invited and had no representatives at the meeting and the main discussion was about the partitioning of the African territories. At the end of that meeting, the powers had signed the treaties of Berlin which granted them to scramble all African states which approved the British to take over Nigerian Kingdoms and empires which since then remained their colony until 1960 (Diana, 1991).

European conquest and occupation of Africa was a series of events that culminated in colonization of the region. Colonialism is the direct domination of one country by another on the basis of state power being in the hand of foreign power. When we talk of colonialism in Africa we are referring to a phenomenon which took place between 1800–1960s. When European powers imposed their influences in most of African nations. However, colonialism began as a result of changes in the mode of production in Europe: i.e. the emergence of industrial revolution (Ake, 1980).

The industrial revolution ushered in a new process of production through machineries in place of the earlier slave-based economy. It was a revolutionary trend in the history of mankind. The need to provide raw materials to lubricate machineries came up with the emergence of the industrial revolution (Ake, 1980). The quest for the investment of the accumulated capital and the need for raw materials led to the colonization of Africa when Europe felt a need to exercise her power into Africa's interior to reorganize the farms mines, and markets for Europe's greater profile. Thus, colonialization of Africa by European powers is for economic, political and social change that will be of benefit to colonial powers (Chubado and Umar, 2021).

## **Conceptual Clarification**

The term colonialism is a broad concept that refers to the project of European political domination from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries that ended with the national liberation movements of the 1960s. Colonialism is the extension of a nation's sovereignty over territory by the establishment beyond its borders. It may be either settler colonies or administrative dependencies in which they ruled indigenous populations directly or displaced. Colonizing nations normally dominate the resources of the colonial territory. They may also try to impose social, cultural and religious structures on the conquered areas. Colonialism as such was inherently a violent process of subjugation, exploitation, extraction and extermination of the society. As an alien system colonialism was a violent process so one would expect that in itself, the establishment of colonialism was violence personified (Amina, 2015).

Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people by another. One of the difficulties in defining colonialism is that it is hard to distinguish it from imperialism. Frequently the two concepts are treated as synonyms. Like colonialism, imperialism also involves political and economic control over a dependent territory. The etymology of the two terms, however, provides some clues about how they differ. The term colony comes from the Latin word "*colonus*" meaning farmer (Kohn, 2011). This root

reminds us that the practice of colonialism usually involved the transfer of population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin. Imperialism, on the other hand, comes from the Latin term *imperium*, meaning to command. Thus, the term imperialism draws attention to the way that one country exercises power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty, or indirect mechanisms of control (Miracle, 1976).

Colonialism is not a modern phenomenon. World history is full of examples of one society gradually expanding by incorporating adjacent territory and settling its people on newly conquered territory. The ancient Greeks set up colonies as did the Romans, the Moors, and the Ottomans, to name just a few of the most famous examples. Colonialism, then, is not restricted to a specific time or place. Nevertheless, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, colonialism changed decisively because of technological developments in navigation that began to connect more remote parts of the world. Fast sailing ships made it possible to reach distant ports and to sustain close ties between the center and colonies. Thus, the modern European colonial project emerged when it became possible to move large numbers of people across the ocean and to maintain political sovereignty in spite of geographical dispersion. This study uses the term colonialism to describe the process of European settlement and political control over the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia (Kohn, 2011).

### **Colonialism and its Impact in Africa**

The major impact of colonialism in African is that it brought about the under development of African territories in many different ways. It is usually argued in favour of colonialism that brought western education and hence western civilization to the shores of Africa which by implication is a positive contribution towards African development. This argument will appear to be true on the surface level or superficially, but if it is subjected to critical analysis, it will reveal the emptiness of colonial education which is partially responsible for the present African underdevelopment. The colonial education was not linked to African culture and therefore could not usher any meaningful development within the African environment. Furthermore, colonial education was bookish with no linkage to technology that will bring about industrial development (Blocker and Steward, 1987).

African States present poor level of technology which is responsible for African underdevelopment had it formation from nature of colonial education. Colonial education was meant to train clerks, interpreters, produce inspectors, artisans among others. Thus will serve as agent of exploitation of the Africa's rich resources. Hence not for development of African continent through production of skillful weapon. Colonial education brought about distortion and disarticulation in African indigenous pattern of education which was rooted in African technology. Before Africa fully embraced colonial education, Africans were good technologist, advancing at their own rate with the resources within their environment (Chinweizu, 1978). For example, Africans were good sculptors, carvers, cloth weavers, blacksmiths, etc. They were able to provide and satisfy the technological need of the various African societies. The introduction of colonial education made Africans to abandon their indigenous technological skills and education in preference to one which mainly emphasizes reading and writing. This was the prelude or foundation for the present poor technological base of African states which has perpetuated their underdevelopment. As we know, education that is not deeply rooted in a people's culture and environment cannot bring about any meaningful technological advancement. This has aptly been shown in the unsuccessful attempt at the so-called technological transfer, which is more of a myth than reality (Cohen and Dnil, 1981).

Another important impact of colonialism in Africa is the disarticulation of their economy. Colonialism distorted African pattern of economic development in many different ways. There was disarticulation in production of goods, markets, traders, transport, provision of social amenities and pattern of urbanization, etc. The colonialists introduced a pattern of international division of labour which was to the disadvantage of Africans (Hallouch, 2018). They assigned to Africa the role of production of raw materials and primary products for use by their industries at home. Africans were not allowed nor encouraged to go into manufacturing. The only industries Africans were encouraged to build were those that would facilitate in the processing of the raw material for export. The African raw materials were bought at a very low price while manufactured goods from abroad were sold at expensive price. The situation accounted for the impoverishment of most Africans (Ejimofor, 1987).

There was also disarticulation in the type of goods produced by Africans. The colonialists compelled Africans to concentrate in the production of goods meant for export. Africans were not encouraged to produce those goods required by the local population. This made many Africans to abandon the production of good items required to feed the teeming and growing population. The effect of this was food shortage and escalation in food prices. The present day situation where Africans now import their food is a carry-over from colonialism. The point being stressed here is that colonialism distorted the satisfaction of local needs in terms of food production and other requirement in preference to production and satisfaction of foreign needs especially the industries (Heyer, 1981).

Colonialism also disarticulated African markets and trades. The traditional or original African marketing centres were distorted by colonialism. Most of the traditional African marketing centres or routes were formed based on local needs. When colonialism came and introduced a different need, this changed the original or traditional marketing centers to new marketing centres because it rendered them irrelevant (Kanu, 1978). Colonialists created new marketing centres and routes where their required raw materials could be easily brought and evacuated back home. This led to the gradual decay or death of most of the original or traditional marketing centres, thereby distorting African pattern of development and urbanization. As we know, most of these traditional African market centres constituted the traditional or original African centres of colonialism (Khapoya, 1971).

### **The Occupation and Reaction of Africa**

The occupation of Africa following the Berlin conference of 1884/1885 was the combination of measures: diplomacy, force and intrigues, etc. The kings and chiefs were forced to sign treaties of protection and trade and gave power to the European. Those who refused lost their positions others were imprisoned and killed (Diana, 1991). Because of the violence involved in the occupation of Africa, Africans naturally took up arms against the invading forces. Series of riots and uprisings were in different parts of Africa but the Maxim gun of the Europeans silenced the Africans were poorly armed. The end result was forceful occupation and colonization of the continent (Chubado and Sani, 2021). By 1900, practically the whole continent came under European domination. The basic difference between the various patterns was that while the British operated indirect rule, the other colonial powers used the direct rule system. All of them made use of African leaders and chiefs in their administrations. Also, each one of them exercised direct control over the administration of their culture as superior to that of the Africans. The Africans on their part assisted the imposition to that of the Africans. The Africans on their part assisted the imposition of foreign rule on their lands (Apata, 1990).

## Patterns of Colonial Rule in Africa

Colonialism or colonial rule simply means the annexation and subsequent domination of one country by another. In case of Africa all the colonial powers came from Western Europe i.e. British, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Belgium. Domination here means total control of political, economic and social affairs of the colony by the colonizing powers (Nielsa, 1992). The following are patterns and policies of colonial rule which include:

1. The British indirect rule system;
2. The French policy of assimilation/association;
3. Portuguese policy of assimilation; and
4. The German and Belgium policies of paternalism.

After sharing out and occupying every bit of African soil, except Ethiopia and Liberia, the European colonizing powers established different forms of government to administer their respective colonies, the patterns of administration adopted by each power is differ from one another (Ake, 1981).

1. British adopted Indirect Rule System: The British nationalists came to Africa to trade and to exploit to the maximum African resources and markets at the minimum cost. Under the system of indirect rule, British had no enough staff to run the administration of her colonies. In addition, there were emirs and chiefs in northern Nigeria who were ruling their people. The advocate of this system was Lord Lugard and it worked well in the north. But Lugard extended the system to the east and west. In the west, the system worked fairly well as they had Obas who run the traditional political system but in the east, there were no centralized authorities consequently rejected. The system therefore failed in the east (Mohammed and Osuala, 2015).
2. The French adopted the policy of Assimilation: Assimilation which means to be part of was a product of the French revolution of 1789. The French developed the idea that they had a mission. To spread French culture and ideas of government to all parts of the world: under the assimilation policy all Africans were entitled to acquire French citizenship after they had received French education and could behave as the French. French local government system was also introduced into Africa.  
In Senegal, for example, four (4) communes were established in the old colony at various periods during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were St. Lovis and Goree in 1872, Refisque in 1880 and Dakar 1887. Africans living outside the communes were known as indignant. An indignant could be forcefully conscripted into the army. He had to take part in forced labour in the construction of roads, railways, public buildings and other public works (Kanu, 1978).
3. The Portuguese just like the French felt that African colonies were extension of Portugal. There were requirements to be met before indigene became an Assimilado. To qualify, a person must have attended and passed out of the official primary school and must be able to speak, read and write Portuguese. He was then issued with an identity card which he was expected to have with him always. Those assimilated were called Assimilado (Kanu, 1978).
4. The Germans adopted a policy of paternalism which was a direct system of administration. It was borne out of the belief in the superiority of European race and culture and those they had a mission to guide Africans to civilization. The colonized Africans were regarded as children whose interest should be protected. Under the system, each colony was divided into districts. There was also a detachment of police to maintain law and order. A large number of Germans were encouraged to settle in Africa especially

in Tanganyika and Cameroon. The government acquired large tracks of land for them. The system was harsh. It led to riots (Ake, 1981).

### **Conclusion**

Colonization of African was not an easy one. The colonialists fought with the chiefs and the African middlemen at the coast before they could penetrate into the hinterland or interior. The reasons for acquisition of colonies by the colonialists as we have earlier mentioned include: the need for raw materials; the search for new market for the metropolitan industries where their surplus manufactured products as a result of the industries revolution could be sold; the need to provide more food for the growing urban industrial population; and the need to find a place where the surplus accumulated profit from the industrial revolution could be invested to make more profit. The African colonies or territories were grouped into different categories. There were colonies that were sources of minerals; colonies for plantation crops; colonies for European settlement and colonies for peasant production. The colonies under the first three categories include Congo, South African, Zimbabwe, etc. the colonies under the last category which is peasant production include Nigeria, Ghana, etc. also some of the colonies were selected as labour reserve while some others were simply trading areas.

## References

- Adeyeri, O. and Adejuwon, K.D. (2012). "The Implications of British Colonial Economic Policies on Nigeria's Development" *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences (IJARMSS)*, Vol. 1, No. 2, [www.garph.co.uk](http://www.garph.co.uk)
- Ake, C. (1980). *Revolutionary Pressure in Africa*. London: Zed Publishers Ltd.
- Ake, C. (1981). *A Political Economy of Africa*. Geria, Longman.
- Amina B.Z. (2015). "Impact of British Colonial Agricultural Policies on Jama'are Emirate, 1900-196": M.A Dissertation, History Department, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Apata, Z. O. (1990). "Lugard and the Creation of Provincial Administration in Northern Nigeria 1900-1918", *African Study Monographs*, Vol. 11, No. 3, <https://doi.org/10.14989/6806>
- Blocker, G. and Steward, D. (1987). *Fundamentals of Philosophy*. New York: The Macmillan Publishers.
- Chinweizu, C.A. (1978). *The East and the Rest of US*. Lagos; Nok Publishers (Nigeria) Ltd.
- Chubado, U. and Sani, A. (2021). "British Conquest of Yola (Adamawa) and Lamido's Resistance: Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development (ZJPAD), Volume. 1, No. 1, (193-200). [www.zjpd.com.ng](http://www.zjpd.com.ng), ISSN (Online): 2756-6633.
- Chubado, U. and Umar, A. A. (2021), "A Study of the Impact of British Colonial Agriculture on Yola Division of Adamawa Province": *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science (Quest Journals)*, Volume 9, Issue 12, (8-12). [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org), ISSN (Online): 2321-9467.
- Cohen, D.I. and Dnil, J. eds. (1981). *Political Economy of Africa*, London: Longman.
- Diana, R. (1991). "Ibo Resistance to British Colonial Power", *a Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0nb0h4gk> (Pp. 3-21).
- Ejimofor, C.O. (1987). *British Colonial Objectives and Policies in Nigeria: the Roots of Conflict*, Onitsha, Nigeria: African FEP Publishers Ltd.
- Heyer, J. et al. (1981). *Rural Development in Tropical Africa* London: Lagos, Macmillan.
- Hallouch, N. (2018). "British Indirect Rule and Islam in Northern Nigeria (1900-1940)": *International Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 2, <https://dx.doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2018.42.24926>
- Kanu, O.U. ed. (1978). *Readings in African Humanities African Cultural Development*. Enugu-Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Khapoya, V.B. (1971). *The Phoenicians*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Kohn, M. (2011). "Colonialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2011 Edition, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/colonialism/>
- Miracle, M.P. (1976). "Underdevelopment of Africa: Comments on Methodology": *History in Africa*, Vol. 3, African Studies Association, (157-162).
- Mohammed, S.A. and Osuala U.S. (2015). "The British Conquest and Resistance of Sokoto Caliphate, 1897-1903: Crisis, Conflicts and Resistance" *Journal of IISTE*, Vol. 22, <http://www.iiste.org>
- Nielsa, K. (1992). "African Resistance to Colonialism in Adamawa", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. viii, No. 1, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, (26-29).