

**A HISTORICAL REFLECTION ON THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM  
AND IMPERIALISM IN THE AFRICA SOIL**

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**Abstract**

The subject of colonialism and imperialism has disfigured the social and political life of many African people, particularly as it concerns their culture and their social life. Colonialism and imperialism socioeconomic and political legacy cannot be easily erased in Africa communities. The paper adopts analytical, historical and descriptive approaches, and as well utilized primary and secondary sources. Over the years Africa people continue to apportion blame to the colonialists and thereby hurling recrimination on themselves because of the poor state of Africa economy and the political lapses in many communities. The paper however discovered that the present socioeconomic and political issues can be attributed to African people in many occasions because countries like China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, the United State and Japan were once colonized by some of the western countries. Yet they have a stable economies, improved technology and advanced in all indices of human and capital development. This paper advocates that Africa should map out a reliable strategy on how to exterminate corruption and bad administration because these are the problems bedeviling her economy. Moreover, the work recommends that the government of Africa countries should focus mainly on how to develop the economic, social and education spheres. This will checkmate mass exodus of African youths that are travelling to the west in search of greener pasture and good education. However, African continent can still join the chariot of developed countries if maladministration and other vices that are inimical to economic development are reduced to the barest minimum.

**Keywords:** Colonialist, Underdevelopment, Unemployment, Culture, Social

### **Introduction**

The founding fathers of Pre-independent and the immediate post independent African have contributed immensely to the task of bequeathing political independence of the continent to a large extent. This singular achievement has contributed immensely in Africa political and economic unity and the Pan-African system. Imperialism and colonialism brought negative and positive connotations to Africa countries, particularly countries that were colonized by the Europeans. The legacy of these changes were felt in many dimensions. Some scholars note that it had more negative effects than positives impact particularly as it concerns their social, economic and political lifestyle of the continent. This development relies on the views of different people particularly as it concerns the subject, because some see colonialism as a blessing while others termed it as a curse to the continent of Africa. Many scholars that see colonialism as a blessing commented that it has contributed in technological innovation; civilization of Africa people, infrastructural development and medical innovations. Some theories on colonialism and imperialism buttress the fact that the Colonialists came to socialized and developed Africa people, while other theories supported the fact that the Europeans came to rape and exploit Africa. This is because the poor nature of Africa economy, social and political downturn can be traced to the aftermath of imperialism and colonialism.

In the 15th century, many European powers established colonies in Africa, and Asia. They operated on the policy of mercantilism, designed to strengthen the home economy at the expense of Africa people. They were allowed to trade only with the mother country. By the middle of 19th century, the British Empire gave up mercantilism and trade restrictions. This led to the introduction of the principle of free trade, with little restriction.

The activities of the colonialists contributed to the major wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century particularly the World War 1 & II. The war in the Pacific was caused by Japan's efforts to create a colonial empire that sought to conquer the existing empires held by the British, French, and the Dutch. The war in Europe and North Africa was caused partially by Germany and Italy's efforts to create colonial empires that sought to conquer existing British, French and Russian colonial empires in these areas. After World War II decolonization progressed rapidly. This was caused by several reasons. First, the Japanese victories in the Pacific War showed Indians, Chinese, and other subject peoples that the colonial powers were not invincible. Second, many colonial powers were significantly weakened by World War II. Dozens of independence movements and global

politics solidarity projects such as the Nonaligned Movement were instrumental in the decolonization efforts of former colonies. These included significant wars of independence fought in Indonesia, Vietnam, Algeria, and Kenya. Eventually, the European powers pressured by the United States and Soviets—resigned themselves to decolonization.

Nkrumah maintains that the neo-colonialism of the present day is the final stage of imperialism (Kwame Nkrumah, 1965, 280). This is because it is only when neo-colonialism has been extirpated that monopoly capitalism will be forced into a head-on crash with the working class in each of the monopoly capitalist countries where the liquidation of imperialism will be completed. According to Nkrumah, this is also the stage at which imperialism is most dangerous. This is because neo-colonialism constitutes a hot bed for "limited wars." As a result of the development of nuclear weapons limited wars alone are now possible. However, it is in the case of small nations where a decisive effect can be produced by a landing of a few thousand marines or by financing mercenaries that limited war is possible. Acting based on its principle of "divide and rule" neocolonialism obstructs the formation of large nation state units which would render limited wars impossible.

The theories of Imperialism attempts to explain the phenomenon of the militarization of the industrial and economic nations and their conflict over colonies that led to World War I. In the light of this Brewer in his discourse notes;

“Marx did not use the word „Imperialism? nor is there anything in his work that corresponds at all exactly to the concepts of imperialism advanced by later Marxist writers. He did, of course, have a theory of capitalism, and its development and his work contain extensive if rather scattered, coverage of the impact of capitalism on non-European societies. Unlike many of his successors, Marx saw the relative backwardness of the nonEuropean world, and its subjection to European masters, as a transient stage in the formation of a wholly capitalist world economy. Marxist writers have drawn on various elements of Marx's theory in their work on Imperialism. They have not, in general, based their analysis of Imperialism on Marx's writings on Colonies” (A. Brewer, 2001, 25-26).

Marx argued that Capitalism is a principle that exist and develop on its own, without the need to expand into surrounding pre-capitalist societies. Capitalism emerged in a wider pre-capitalist world. According to, Marx's *Theory of Origins of Capitalism*, and its expansion at the expense of other modes of production in (A. Brewer, 2001, 25-26.) Marx did not have a generic term to describe the rule of a more advanced nation-state over a

more backward area. We have used the term colonialism, which has been widely adopted since Ancient Greece. When Marx himself used this term it was usually to refer to European settlement in areas from which the indigenous inhabitants had been expelled (A. Brewer, 2001, 25-26).

Marx's asserted that the economic foundation ultimately governs the social, political and intellectual life-processes, in general, is one of the most controversial aspects of his work (A. Brewer, 2001, 24-27). He insisted and based on the need for abstraction. Society is too complex to be grasped as a totality, an integrated whole, in a single step. Instead, we must isolate the simplest and most fundamental social relations and build up an abstract representation of how they work and how they fit together (A. Brewer, 2001, 25-26)

### **The concept of Imperialism and Colonialism**

In most occasions it is argued that colonialism and imperialism have a nexus. But in actual sense both have different meaning and applications.

**Imperialism:** Imperialism is often confused with colonialism. It has been argued that each has their different definition. However, colonialism means invasion of a particular domain. (Young Robert, 2015, 54.) It also implies in modern usage as a degree of geographic separation between the colony and the imperial power. In the light of this Edward Said notes that colonialism refers to the 'implanting of settlements on a distant territory, (Gilmartin Mary, 2018). This is the reason that made some western countries to be involved in the game of colonization, while many reside in their respective countries. Imperialism and colonialism dictate the political and economic advantage over a land and the indigenous populations they control, yet scholars sometimes find it difficult to illustrate the difference between the two (*Painter Joe et al, 2009*). Imperialism and colonialism focus on the suppression of *another country's economy and political activities. It also means* political and monetary dominance, either formally or informally. The meaning of imperialism is to create an empire, by conquering the other state's lands and therefore increasing its dominance.

Imperialism, on the other hand, is the act of acquiring or holding colonies. One country exercises power over another, whether through settlement, sovereignty, or indirect mechanisms of control. It does not necessarily involve the movement of people, but rather a control of resources (Sarah Bishop, et al, 4).

The term 'imperialism', which was coined in 1858 to mean 'despotism', changed in 1881 to take on the meaning 'principle or spirit of empire; advocacy of imperial interests' in 1881 (24 Clayton,

P. 1996, 9-32). The Age of Imperialism, a period beginning around 1760, saw European industrializing nations, engaging in the process of colonizing, influencing, and annexing other parts of the world

(John Haywood, 2018). The 19th century episodes included the "Scramble for Africa." (Stephen Howe, ed. 2018)

**Imperialism** is a policy that involves a nation extending its power by the acquisition of lands by purchase, diplomacy or military force.

**Colonialism:** This is seen to be the architect that how to initiates dominating areas and then after that such domain will be imperialized. Colonialism result when the imperial nation starts a conquest over an area and then eventually rule the areas which the previous nation had controlled. Its core meaning is the exploitation of the valuable assets and supplies of the nation that was conquered and the conquering nation then gaining the benefits from the spoils of the war (Painter Joe, 2009). More so colonialism is the builder and preserver of the colonial possessions in an area by a population coming from a foreign region. (Painter Joe, 2009). It can completely change the existing social structure, physical structure and economics of an area; it is not unusual that the characteristics of the conquering peoples are inherited by the conquered indigenous populations (Painter Joe, 2009). Few colonies remain remote from their mother country. Thus, most will eventually establish a separate nationality or remain under complete control of their mother colony (Hobson Imperialism, 2018). By way of origin colonialism classically began in the Americas with European invasion, occupation, and exploitation (A. Quijano, 2000, 533-580). It was originally centered on economic and social exploitation. Its economic and political motives were most obvious at the beginning; the cultural and psychological motives integral to it all along became more intense and manifest later (A. Quijano, 2000, 533-580). Moreover, the fallout of colonialism is multiple and pervasive; its development and expansion affected the thought, behaviour, and generally the life of colonized peoples. Colonialism is often misunderstood or narrowly defined. Some mistakenly confine it to either a geographic area or an era. Others, convinced that colonialism is outmoded and passé, view it as a system that no longer operative in Africa

and generally in the world (*Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 2015, Vol. 3(1), 239–256).

### **Selected Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism in Africa**

Colonialism and imperialism have a long term impact on the African continent in the social, political and economic spheres. The social, economic and political life of African people were badly affected to an extent. Though positively according to some scholars it has impacted on the people of Africa particularly in the social cadre and otherwise. The Europeans initiated some aspects of technology in Africa which served as a starting point to various innovations in the provision of farming tools for maize and other crop production. They built more infrastructures like medical facilities, transport and communication network and schools. They also established plantations for the growing of cash crops like cocoa, coffee, tea, rubber and cotton. Numerous African people were taught English, French and Portuguese languages in European-style schools, which contributed in easy communication between the colonialist and African people thus enabling colonization.

Economically, there is inequality visible in some of the countries in Africa, which can be traced to imperialism and colonialism. The incorporation of Africa into the global capitalist economy instituted economic inequality between the global south and the global north. While African countries remained the producers of agricultural produce and raw materials the West became manufacturers of finished products they return for sale in African at exorbitant prices. It remains one of the negative impacts of that continues to affect Africa's development. This lacuna impeded economic development which has made Africa to continue to depend on the West in this aspect.

The African people that were sold to the Europeans as slaves would have contributed their quota to a large extent in the development of African continent. Resources of many colonies were exported to the West. A large number of resources were exported which continues to affect many African nations. The British Empire and other colonial powers extracted, looted and sold a lot of unique minerals and artefacts belonging to the African people. The exploitation of land and natural resources of the colonized communities disfigured many ethnic groups. This development has left a long lasting effect on the African people. At the arrival of colonialists, they took over the fertile land of the African communities, thereby living little acre for them to cultivate. This connotes the fact that some African lands could no longer yield as such in the future, even if those with the power to do so had decided to revert to the old farming methods and products because the

soil had lost fertility. In addition, there was also a loss of land. The colonialist took over the land that belonged to locals, depriving these African people of the farms and property they once owned. The local population was forced to live and work where the colonizers allowed. They had no say over what was farmed and what was charged for the product.

On the social sphere, imperialism and colonialism affected the culture of Africa people. Africa people see themselves as equal to one another, but the West introduced discrimination which many Africans imbibed and adopted. The Europeans created social differences through classes, racism and taxation in most African communities that never existed before colonialism. Many African that were sold into slavery have lost their identity. It is impossible to deny the fact that colonized societies became brutal because of the slave trade. A lot of Africans became agents for slave trading companies all over the world. They helped the British slave traders to kidnap their kin and turn them into slaves. Kidnapping activities in many African societies started during this era of colonization. There was also the loss of the identity of the areas that were colonized by the Europeans. When the Europeans arrived, they brought with them many of their traditions, customs and beliefs. The Christian religion was one of the major element and tools of the colonial pacification of the Africans, were committed to educating the African people about the Almighty God and creator, and heaven and hell as repercussions for earthly behaviour, (Andrew Keet , 2018). This contradicted the European Christian credentials as Africans started thinking why they Europeans should enslave them if really they were Christians and Godly. This created resistance to colonial rule and later sacking of colonialism. Notwithstanding, the Christian religion which the European initiated has a long lasting influence on African communities. Despite the fact that some of our women were used and abused during the era by some religious leaders. The colonizers hired women and children to work as laborers for them. The conditions under which the vast majority of them were forced to work were often less than humane. They were frequently abused physically and sexually. An added problem is that women were then less respected by the men in their society and regarded as worthless laborers, (Andrew Keet , 2018).

Sheer migration of the male folks to other communities made women to be acute farmers and laborers. Men were moving away from their rural homes in search of jobs. This resulted in their being without their families for months. The development led to sexual promiscuity as well as a lack of the natural family structure that is so important to the stability of a society. Some of these men had sex with women that were not their wives. This resulted in the pregnancy of many women. The development negated the purity of the gene pool as children born out of wedlock increased in number, unaware of their

fathers' identities and their heritage. This also led to an increase in sexually transmitted diseases,(Andrew Keet , 2018).

Politically, imperialism and colonialism disfigured Africa entity. In this respect Frantz Fanon. Argues, that colonial domination has the power to warp the personal and ethnic identities of natives because it operates under the assumption of perceived superiority (Fanon Frantz, 201). Natives are thus entirely divorced from their ethnic identities, which has been replaced by a desire to emulate their oppressors (Fanon Frantz, 201).

Ethnic manipulation manifested itself beyond the personal and internal spheres. Scott Straus from the University of Wisconsin describes the ethnic identities that partially contributed to the Rwandan genocide. In April 1994, following the assassination of Rwanda's President Juvénal Habyarimana, Hutus of Rwanda turned on their Tutsi neighbors and slaughtered between 500,000 and 800,000 people in just 100 days. While politically this situation was incredibly complex, the influence on the violence cannot be ignored. Before the German colonization of Rwanda, the identities of Hutu and Tutsi were not fixed. Germany ruled Rwanda through the Tutsi dominated monarchy and the Belgians continued this following their takeover. Belgian rule reinforced the difference between Tutsi and Hutu. Tutsis were deemed superior and were propped up as a ruling minority supported by the Belgians, while the Hutu were systematically repressed. The country's power later dramatically shifted following the so-called Hutu Revolution, during which Rwanda gained independence from their colonizers and formed a new Hutu-dominated government. Deep-seated ethnic tensions did not leave with the Belgians. Instead, the new government reinforced the cleavage (Straus Scott 2015).

The most obvious negative political impact is the dependence on the West economically and otherwise. Some were given a chance to take part in the governance of the country, however, they held powers that were either too small or completely irrelevant. The fate of nations was decided without consulting the colonies. The colonialist did not prepare the people for independence, this development results in a lot of civil wars in many independent countries.

Positively, many colonies learnt about a new kind of organized government system from the colonialists. The British Empire brought a new judicial system together with some pieces of democracy with the colonized societies getting along with the system. The British government also helped to write and signed unequal peace treaties amongst ethnic groups. The Europeans at the same time protected Africans from their most devastating



enemy. Colonization made a huge impact in deemphasizing ethnic conflicts in some Africa groups.

### **Conclusion**

The legacies of Imperialism and colonialism, cannot be completely erased in Africa. This is because the foundational social and political connotations continue to influence African people in many areas. Generally, colonialism has not ended, Africa continent has been subject to neocolonialism which almost corroborates with imperialism and colonialism. However, one cannot completely ruled out colonialism because there are good aspect that some Africa people enjoyed. It solves some medical problems among Africa people; it provided more religious opportunities for Christianity in Nigeria; it made many African people to learn European languages and the Europeans also learned more about the culture of Nigerian tribe and the colonialist introduced western education to many communities in African. Colonialism is a blessing and a curse.

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