

Colonization of africa



Conquests, colonization, the slave trade, and the spread of consumerist society have shaped and formed the grounds for which developing countries find themselves today. The countries of the developing world subjected to colonialism have been faced with a number of impediments throughout the years which have hindered social and economic growth, and laid the foundation which bred cultural conflict. Colonialism, however, too brought Western civilization and all its attractions to underdeveloped countries during the process of colonialism.

The following essay will highlight the effects of colonialism on the developing world from an economic, political and social perspective. The colonization of Africa has a long history, and can be explained as being set in motion as early as 200 AD, with the migration of Bantu speaking Africans from central Africa to the south of Africa due to the agricultural boom and overpopulation of tribes, known as one of the largest human migrations in history (ref). Following the migration of the Bantu language group was the spread of Islam from 750 - 1500 AD, which was first accepted in West Africa by the Dya'ogo Dynasty.

Following this spread, the establishment of empires throughout the continent transpired which created extensive trade networks throughout North and West Africa, allowing a peaceful medium through which Islam could broaden through the merchant class (Akosua Perbi, 2001). The Trans-Saharan and internal trade occurring in the same time period contributed to the diversity of inhabitants as a result of the ongoing slave trade through Ghana from the 1st to the 16th century. The first stage of European colonialism occurred during 1500 - 1880, and was based on the gold and slave trade.

The Portuguese arrived on the coast of West Africa in 1471 to find a rapid trade in slaves and other goods between Ghana and its neighbouring coastal countries (Akosua Perbi, 2001). Portugal then continued to partake in the trade, and for 100 years were the only European country which traded directly with Ghana and its neighbouring countries (Kimble, 126). Wars often waged between neighbouring countries, with which captives were possessed as slaves and traded in Ghana for gold (Kimble, 126).

The most important phase of colonialism, known as the European scramble for Africa, occurred during the 19th and 20th century following the collapse of the slave trade and the expansion of the European capitalist Industrial Revolution (Iweribor, 2002). It appears that three factors drove the push for European Imperialism, including economic, political and social motives. Driving the economic factor, the demand for assured sources of raw materials and the search for guaranteed markets and profitable investment outlets were the catalysts to the European scramble and the resultant conquest of Africa (Iweribor, 2002).

The political force derived from the impact of inter-European power struggles between Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain too played an important role in the process of colonisation. To exhibit superiority, acquisition of territories around the world including Africa was essential to national pre-eminence. The social factor presented the third major element in the push to colonise. As a result of industrialization, extreme social problems appeared in Europe that included unemployment, poverty, social displacement and homelessness as not all people could be absorbed by the new capitalist industries (Iweribor, 2002).

The acquisition of colonies enabled European countries to send this excess of population into what would then be established as settler-colonies in Algeria, Tunisia, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola and some central African areas like Zimbabwe and Zambia (Iweribor, 1). The interplay of these economic, political and social factors led to the crazed attempts by European agents to declare and establish a share in African territory for trade and claims to control of waterways and commercial routes throughout parts of Africa.

The extremity of the scramble forced the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck to convene a summit of European powers to avoid the possibility of inter-imperialist conflict, known as the Berlin Conference held from November 1884 to February 1885 (Stilwell, 2002). The conference fabricated the Berlin Act, a treaty with provisions to lead the conduct of the European imperialist opposition in Africa. This treaty, drawn up without African participation, provided the grounds for the successive separation, invasion and colonisation of Africa.

It presented European powers an open market for trade that bought more from colonial power than it sold overall (Shillington, 2005). From this stage, African territory was divided randomly between the European countries. France and England had a significant influence in reshaping the colonies. Britain as well as Germany utilized the idea of 'Imperial Monarchy', while the French struggled to incorporate Africans into republican traditions (Grinker, 2010). During this process, some of the local values and institutions were replaced by more modern/western ones.

Furthermore, colonisation obstructed the internal process of state formation and development in Africa, leaving legacies of corruption and political instability (Tangie, 2006). Africa experienced extreme cultural clashes which were resultant from the influence of political, economic, social and religious factors on the indigenous societies of Africa. Along with the occupation, the Europeans brought with them traditions and religions to implement and utilize as a justification for their presence in Africa at the time (Tangie, 2006).

The effects of colonialism can be reflected in the changes touching various aspects including cultures and institutions. The exploitative utilization of Africa as a means of economic prosperity for the superior minority projected Africa as an inferior race. Colonization was a means of displaying racial arrogance that humiliated African leaders and their people (Toyin, 2005). It encouraged competition and conflict between ethnic groups based on the ideals and principles that had been implemented in the various countries. With violence, colonialism created new frontiers and developed new economic and political objectives.

New governments expressed their desire to maintain the colonial boundaries created during the colonisation period, however, it appeared that governmental institutions, good governance skills and experience to rule lacked. These boundaries created back-up zones for guerrilla groups to harass legitimate governments, and also made it impossible for internal unity and identity to be generated among African states (Jacobson, 2007). The imposition of a western system of governance has created many problems that have been difficult to solve over the years.

The western system deviated from the culture and traditions of Africa, which were inherently dictatorial, starting from the family system and ending with the government. A gap was created between the tradition system of governance and that of the Western model, with minimal or no effort made to create a blend between the two. Therefore, as a result, all efforts were towards replacing the traditional systems that were identified as primitive, which veered off from the tradition and cultural norms of the people, contributing to a loss in identity (Jacobson, 2007).

After the end of colonialism, a border dispute has become one of the most critical causes of conflict in Africa, particularly manifested in the boundary disputes between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Nigeria and Cameroon as examples (Teshome, 2009). These lengthy periods of conflict and war, along with famine and droughts detrimentally affected the economy as well as the populations well-being. As a result, the output per head in Africa is the lowest of any major world region, and has expanded slowly only since 1960 (Teshome, 2009).

The negative effects of colonialism on education can be identified in some colonial countries such as Ethiopia. The Ethiopian educational system faced many obstacles due to the history of educational traditions, as for a long period of time religion was spread by Christian and Islamic missionaries. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, the educational system collapsed and the government was forced to rebuild the system from scratch, and by 1974 only 15.3 percent of children were attending primary school.

The main issues were related to the problems of quality, equity and relevance (Teshome, 2009). Another example relating to education is that of

the Senegal case, which illustrates how little is possible when the education system has been affected. According to statistics, two thirds of children enrol in primary school and of that almost a quarter drop out later on (Teshome, 2009). While literacy for children was 49. 1 percent in 2004, in the same year the literacy for adults was only 39. 3 percent (Jacobson, 2007).

Over half of the population are unable to read and write, which means over half of the population are unable to acquire jobs. Although colonialism created various obstacles to economic growth, it too introduced integration to the international system for Africa, abolishing the popular slave trade that existed in Africa preceding colonisation (Siemenssen, 1999). Colonialism also created a rich diversity in Africa, with a mixture of people, languages, religions and customs which has created the ' rainbow nation' that we are identified with today.

The process of colonialism also introduced many Western ideals and practices that are still implemented today that have positively influenced economic growth and social welfare. In conclusion, it can be identified that the effects of colonial rule over African countries has contributed significantly to the issues facing developing countries today in relation to economic growth, education, development as well as war and conflict created through policies and ideals implemented during the process of colonialism by European countries.