

The effects of african colonialism essay sample

[Government](#), [Colonialism](#)



More than three decades after the majority of the African nations declared their independence, there remains, still, no consensus on the legacy of colonialism. With most of Africa still struggling to stand on its own, the rattle of debate continues as to what exactly the effects of colonialism were on Africa. Colonialism had torn apart formerly neighborly kingdoms, yet it had also created relationships between tribes which had not previously existed. It had introduced Africa to the industrial age, but it exploited Africa's resources for European countries' profit. [Formal medicine and education was established, but only to the elite few] Those who contend that colonialism made no positive impact share the simple-minded vision of those who claim that presence of Europeans completely saved Africa. While the murky waters of good and evil, right and wrong, blanket Africa's colonial past, the imposition of the foreign rule and its effects on the economical and political futures of her inhabitants far outweigh the positive aspects brought about through colonialism.

One casualty of colonialism in Africa did not surface until after the African countries declared their independence: self-sustainability. Although politically independent, African countries were not financially capable of taking on the demands of running a country, forcing them to ask for help in the form of military, money (loans), technology, and markets for trade. However, like many countries which find themselves in this type position, the countries of Africa have had a very difficult time shedding off their international dependence. Today, Africa pays more money every year in loan interest payments to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group (IMF/WB) than it receives loans from them, often depriving the

inhabitants of those countries from obtaining the necessities of life. This financial dependency allows the IMF/WB to impose Structural Adjustment Plans upon the African nations.

These adjustments, however, are not always in the best interest of the African people, largely consisting of privatization programs that result in deteriorating health, education, an inability to develop infrastructure, and in general, lower living standards. African countries in this situation are said to be in a “ neocolonial” phase - “ a new form of imperial rule stage managed by the colonial powers to give the colonized the illusion of freedom.” This implies that western powers still have some control over the African nations both willing and involuntary. The main theory supporting this idea stems from Marxist economists who claim that poor countries are structured to provide support for international capitalism of larger countries through natural resources. This obviously poses a problem for those inhabitants living in those African countries who are not benefiting from this philosophy of government. Essentially, the rich are getting richer and the poorer are getting poorer.

The colonial era also introduced social and demographic changes in Africa that indirectly affects the economy positively such as the introduction of education (formal), literacy expansion, urbanization, and hospitals. Birth rates have increased and the death rates have dropped in many African nations as a result of colonialism. New levels of technology that had never been seen in Africa before were introduced such as electricity, telecommunications also as a result of colonialism. However, new forms of

inequality arose when the colonial powers left, between traditional and modern economics, upper class and lower, urban and rural, where there had not been before colonialism. Therefore, modern Africa fails to see the small positive economical effects of colonialism due to the overshadowing of the negative effects.

There was not much that changed in the government following the fall of colonial rule, except that laws were tinkered with such that they favored a different select (rich) Instead being ruled by Europeans, Africans adopted a form of government that had been around before colonist even landed. This idea is called the " Big Man" government. In Africa, " a politician has to show that he has escaped from ordinary life: that he is a ' Big Man', powerful and a rich benefactor far above the people whose support he seeks." By colonialists not teaching Africans the ways of a democratic government, it allowed the rich people and their friends to have complete control over their entire government. For all that the colonialists had changed in the lives of the Africans they encountered, they failed to teach them how to be self-sustainable in the new world that the Europeans had created around them.

In disrupting pre-colonial boundaries that worked for Africans and imposing foreign models, colonialism laid the seeds of political crisis. The colonialists' haphazard redrawing of the map of Africa was done without consideration for established borders, resulting in ethnic conflicts that to this day continue to destabilize the continent. The new countries were artificially created, with many being too small to be viable. Less than a third of the countries in Africa have populations of more than 10 million. Western multi-

party democracy imposed by colonial powers polarized African societies, such as in the case of in Rwanda with the Tutsis and the Hutus.

African people were also frequently divided among several colonial states and different tribes were pushed together whose culture and political values were different. Furthermore, leaders that were put in place by the European countries in the post-colonial era “ became embroiled in wars, some with each other...” This clash between leaders made it impossible to have any type of harmony between sides. Thus, the colonists’ insistence in redrawing the borders between African kingdoms has contributed to the continued social and political unrest on the continent.

The argument that colonialism was an entirely positive occurrence necessarily implies that modernization was a desirable outcome for African societies. The argument ignores the possibility that simplicity is preferable over complexity. Before colonialism, Africans had to worry about matters of life such as whether their next harvest of yams would provide enough food for the family or if the rainy season would come too late. Although pre-colonial Africa may have been less materially developed than other regions of the world, her inhabitants were as equally self-sufficient. They had societies just as the Europeans had societies. They had art just as the Europeans had art. They were as happy as any other civilization at that time. Yet the happiness they enjoyed was fleeting, fundamentally altered by the influx of technology. Ordinary Africans during pre-colonial times simply had little idea what the outside world had in store for them.

The idea that colonialism was done to civilize the population is a myth - the system was pushed by Europe's economic and political self-interests. However, to meet their economic and administrative needs colonial powers built some infrastructure, like railway to carry exports, and they educated a few Africans to help them run the colonies. But nowhere in Africa were positive contributions made to any large extent. Africa's poor gained little or nothing from colonialism. But its rich, usually linked to European countries, bloomed as a result of it. African millionaires today certainly owe their fortune to colonialism. Without opportunities created by the linking of Africa to the western world, it is unlikely that indigenous ruling classes would have gotten themselves from a fairly poor level of wealth to a modern bourgeoisie level. This separation of economic status between the masses further increased the instability of the country.

What is undeniable, however, is that it was an imposition of foreign rule, a dictatorial regime that denied peoples' right of self determination. It resulted in death, pain and humiliation to millions of its victims. Thus, despite some benefits brought about by colonialism, the negative effect it had on the economics and politics of the African countries, the overall consequences were not positive.