

The negative effects of indirect rule on africans essay



Indirect rule was a system of ruling Africans that sought not to displace African authority, but instead to rule through it. It was first used by the British and later adopted by other European powers after they witnessed its success. Indirect rule is largely considered a more humane alternative to its counterpart, direct rule, which placed colonial powers in charge of all aspects of African administration. Despite this, there were numerous problems with indirect rule in both theory and in practice. Ultimately, indirect rule was hopelessly flawed. In 1922, F. D.

Lugard, a colonial officer in Uganda and later Nigeria who came up with the idea of using indirect rule in Africa, published a book titled *Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*. In it, he advocated leaving management of African colonies to Africans, subject to the laws and policies of the British colonial staff. He took this position in part because he believed that European culture could not be adopted by Africans, because they were an inferior people (Lugard 76). This is an extraordinary weakness of the theoretical foundations of indirect rule, as Africans have adapted to European society remarkably well in modern times.

A theory of governance based on the idea that Africans were innately inferior made the entire approach flawed from the onset. Mahmood Mamdani, who likened indirect rule to “decentralized despotism,” argued that “The central claim of indirect rule... that natives are by nature tribal” (Mamdani 10). Not surprisingly, this claim was cited many times as a justification for the myriad human rights violations that occurred under indirect rule. Indirect rule was not established out of concern for the Africans.

It allowed Britain to say that they were colonizing “less advanced people” in order to help improve their lives, as opposed to appearing to be conquerors. It also made Africans less likely to revolt, which was a boon for any colonial power (Gilbert and Reynolds 325). For example, Britain took over Zanzibar in 1890, but, as they were ruling it indirectly, they left the sultan’s government intact, despite it permitting slavery. It was not until 1907, 17 years after the British took over, that slavery was outlawed in Zanzibar (Gilbert and Reynolds 300).

Slavery was not abolished in Northern Nigeria until 1935, despite being held by Great Britain since 1900 (“BBC”). Colonists were clearly more concerned with stability and personal fortune than the inhabitants’ wellbeing. One could still argue that, despite its selfish intentions, indirect rule was good for its subjects. Indeed, it was often idealized as a humane form of governance because of its common juxtaposition with direct rule, which was widely regarded as inhumane. Being a superior alternative to direct rule, though, hardly says anything about how good indirect rule was.

There were numerous signs of unrest in colonies that were indirectly ruled, such as worker strikes in British colonies like the Sierra Leone railway strike of 1926, and the Gambian sailor’s strike of 1929 (Akintola). Sir Lee Stack, the governor general of Sudan was assassinated in Cairo in 1924 (“Country Studies”). Britain had used brutal measures to keep Sudan and Egypt in control, which is what inevitably results when one group claiming to be “superior” forcibly rules another group of people regarded as “inferior.”

Because indirect rule utilized existing African rule, indirect rule was highly ineffective in colonies where there was no centralized system of authority. Warrant chiefs, African rulers propped up by the British, were not generally liked by the communities that they were selected to rule, as was the case in Southern Nigeria (Collins, and Burns). Immediately after Southern Nigeria gained constitutional independence from Britain, thousands of Nigerian women protested against what they considered the Warrant Chief's unjust system of taxation on women in what is known as the Igbo Women's War.

Ultimately, many Warrant Chiefs were forced to resign, and numerous Native Courts were destroyed (Oriji). The colonial elites would often select incompetent and/or cruel locals to lead colonies. Many of those selected were elders who were sympathetic to British interests and who adopted policies that the colonists found favorable, but that the indigenous populations found unfavorable, such as in Southern Nigeria and Kenya (Collins, and Burns).

Because colonial elites and African chiefs drafted written sets of laws that were oftentimes not subject to change, it was difficult for Africans to modify unfavorable laws after they had been written up and declared law by the colonizers. Also, the British colonial elite and African elders wrote the laws, so there was no democratic process in creating law. As a result, the laws generally did not accurately reflect common law in the preceding years (Gilbert, and Reynolds 328). Many new African chiefs, Warrant Chiefs, and Africans in general were not familiar with the concept of taxation.

This led to both incompetence on the side of authority in taxing and anger on the side of the general population being taxed. The only ways that Africans could make these tax payments was to either sell products or work for wages. Colonial authorities would sometimes even permit forced labor. Africans received little in return for their labors and the taxes they paid. They received some funding for schools, but many important benefits, such as electricity, went solely to cities and reached only a few Africans. Furthermore, the money that did go to Africans was sometimes misallocated and did not benefit the very people who paid the taxes.

The whole of taxation in indirectly ruled colonies served to both increase the total amount of time that some Africans worked while simultaneously reducing their standard of living (Bush, and Maltby 5-34). To add even further to the problems of indirect rule, different tribes were granted their own political authority, which resulted in distinct separation from other regions and widened differences among fellow Africans. Many colonial administrators often resorted to playing favorites with different tribes and regions, which occasionally resulted in the development of ethnic division and conflict in later years.

For example, British authorities gave political support to the Ganda, one of Uganda's primary ethnic groups. As a result, the Ganda became very powerful and other ethnic groups began to resent them. Britain also divided the Sudan into two separate territories, a Christian, English-speaking South and a Muslim, Arabic-speaking North, which exacerbated the ethnic divide and potentially contributed to future conflict ("Country Studies"). Colonial

policy, at times, even seemed like it was designed to create conflict between the natives.

In Kenya, colonial policy reflected the idea that the Kikuyu and Maasai were enemies, which was actually complete fiction invented by the British colonial administration (Reader 615). Because of the aforementioned consequences of indirect rule, there is no doubt that the policy was riddled with flaws that hurt the Africans subjected to it. Despite all of the problems for Africans, the policy was fairly successful by British standards. In fact, many other European powers that were operating under direct rule switched to indirect rule because of its lower costs.

Indirect rule was adopted by the French after World War I, the Belgians in the 1930s, and the Portuguese in the 1950s. However, despite the successes of indirect rule as seen from the colonizers, it was unsustainable, as is evident from the fact that all colonizing European governments eventually relinquished control of their colonies to the natives. The idea that Europeans simply had to right to colonize distant lands and rule the natives, albeit indirectly, was by far the most egregious error in the thinking behind this system of rule.

In order to indirectly rule colonies, Britain used lethal force to divide and conquer. From a theoretical perspective, the whole debate about the most effective way to rule Africans is absurd if one does not believe imperialism is justified. This is not to say that Africans would be better off without any contact with Europeans whatsoever. Africans had numerous internal problems, such as the use of human sacrifice and burning "witches" to

death in certain regions of the continent (Reader 558), but Europeans could have assisted them and traded with them without simultaneously exploiting and dominating them.

European treatment of Africans tended to improve over the timeline of history, generally moving from enslavement, to forced labor, to direct rule, to indirect rule, and eventually to African self-governance. Indirect rule was just a stepping stone between complete European domination and African independence. By 1980, virtually the entire continent of Africa had been decolonized through the work of independence movements and indigenous political entities, as well as from pressures within the imperialist powers themselves (Shillington 391).

Frankly, Africans wanted self-rule, and the ultimate flaw with indirect rule was that it was forcibly imposed on Africans, few of whom wanted anything to do with it. References •Akintola, Wyse. *The 1926 Railway Strike and Anglo-Krio Relations: An Interpretation*. Boston: Boston University African Studies Center, 1981. 93-123. Print. •Bush, Barbara, and Joseph Maltby. "Taxation in West Africa: transforming the colonial subject into the "governable person". " *Science Direct* 15. 1 (2004): 5-34. Web. 6 Feb 2011. . •Collins, R. O. and J.

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