

The effects of british colonial rule



In today's world, the African subcontinent is seen as a continent in transition towards democracy and development. The nations that inhabit the globe's oldest continent have been referred to in several forms, in reference to their development and governmental state; terms such as “under-developed”, “third world”, and “developing” states, have been commonly used by the West to describe these nations.

Historically, the African continent had been under the control of past European Empirical Powers, where they established major colonies that served them as economic and trade hubs, where the colonizers exploited every available resource on offer in these occupied territories.

The most dominant European imperial colonizers in the African region were those of the French and British Empires; between them, they amassed almost seventy percent of the entire African continent. In this paper I will be particularly focusing on the former British colony of Nigeria, and what effects did former British colonialism have on Nigeria's modern development.

On the eve of colonialism in the African continent, the area of land that we currently know as Nigeria consisted of a diverse amount of ethnic groups, where numbers today claim these groups were around 250 different ethnicities. These various ethnicities were divided into kingdoms, tribes, and emirates; where their division was mainly based upon their geographic locations; those in the north of Nigeria, for instance, were ruled by a caliphate system, due to the natives' contact with the neighboring Arab-Muslim countries.

Nonetheless, despite their division and ethnic differences, all ethnicities shared a common trait, belief, and social values; such as language, culture, tradition and origin. In other words, despite their variances, the natives of Nigeria all valued their common identity.

Things were to change in the 1800's were The European powers began their occupation of Africa. The first British conquest of Nigerian land began in 1851, with Britain's deposition of King Kosoko of Lagos. By 1855, during the Berlin Conference, Nigeria was acknowledged to be under the British sphere of influence in Africa; needless to say that the Berlin Conference of 1885 lacked any African representation.

Through the early 1900's, Nigeria had begun to fall under British occupation, one area after the other. The people of Nigeria heavily resisted British colonialism, especially those of the north. Nevertheless, by 1914, the entirety of Nigeria had succumbed to the British Empire, when Lord Lugard merged the protectorates of the North and South together to form what we now call Nigeria. Some historians and authors have argued that it is at this point in history where the roots of Nigeria's current societal difficulties have begun. Claiming that Nigeria is an artificial creation by the former British Empire, in order to facilitate and exert their political and economic dominance.

The British began by introducing many economic reforms to their Nigerian colony, reforms that they have never experienced before. These reforms were established by the British occupiers in order to generate further revenue to pay the soldiers and officers' wages, as well as maintaining its

army's needs and supplies (such as food, water, ammunition, weaponry, and clothes). Moreover, these reforms helped improve the Empire's general economy, as it pumped the economy with money generated from a new source.

These reforms took place simultaneously and hastily. The British began by alternating the existing tax laws that were in effect during the pre-colonial era (mainly taxes on cattle, land, and poll taxes); were mainly applied in Kingdoms and Caliphates. Nevertheless, the ruling colonial power unified the tax system into one single tax resulting after the Land Ordinance Act in 1904.

Along with the tax reforms, the British also introduced a new monetary system. The new monetary system identified the British pound as the only accepted currency, replacing the past and obsolete barter system; formerly the natives used to exchange copper and iron bars or cowries for other goods.

Furthermore, the British occupiers introduced new land reforms, which aimed at redirecting all the profits from the lands resources into the British Empires economy. This came in the form of nationalizing all land previously owned by the Royal Niger Company; where the company only had managerial and commercial rights, as well as a decent share of royalties derived from mineral exploitation . They divided these lands into two sub-categories, Crown lands, and Public lands. Where the Crown lands represents the lands that contain minerals, while the public lands where mainly agricultural and owned by private individuals and not the state.

These reforms and many more contributed to the alienation as well as the intimidation of the natives of the lands. The natives of Nigeria, or any colony in that fact, were made to feel intimidation and inferiority to the “white-man”. Where the reforms have had considerable effects still present until today.

Nigeria today, suffers from widespread corruption, bureaucracy, and overall poor governance. The nation’s economy does not fare any better, with economic indicators showing that poverty is still on an average high in Nigeria. This can be attributed to the means of which the former British Empire applied its tax policies, where the policies were not only means of extracting surplus from peasants, but served as an intimidating reminder of the colonial ruler. Moreover, the taxation policies were also used to exploit and impoverish the poor peasant, hence breaking them, and driving fear into their values.

Moreover, the British Empire’s method of government in Nigeria was based solely on the complete exploitation of resources available in Nigerian territory, with complete disregard to ethnic diversity and ethnic relations. The division of the territory into a federal system prior to World War II, based upon past regional distinctions, created a huge gap between the different ethnic groups. These distinctions remained even after Nigeria’s independence, and along with ethnic rivalries as well as the sudden struggle for power created a foundation for instability, corruption, and social/civil conflict.

Through time, this led to the disintegration of the social values that held all the various ethnicities together, as well as challenged the Nigerian sense of origin and identity, hence creating tensions that remain to be seen in Nigeria till this day.

In conclusion, the British Empire was one of the greatest, if not the greatest Empire in the worlds' history, yet, as much as we acknowledge the nations' past greatness, we must also acknowledge the nations' failures. The British were very good at conquering, maintaining, exploiting, and continuing their legacies, but the one thing they seemed to have failed at is planting the roots of success in their former colonies. If one were to compare any of the past British colonies (excluding the United States of America), one will come to find similar patterns of failures after these respective colonies have gained independence. With both the British and French Empires controlling over 70 percent of African land in the past, it comes as no shock that the globe's oldest continent, is also the continent with the darkest history, and the least developed.