



BETWEEN CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF COLONIAL

DOMINATION IN NIGERIA: LESSON FOR NIGERIA IN A GLOBAL AGE

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the causes and consequences of colonial domination in Nigeria. Nigeria being a 'gift' to Britain from the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, was conquered by the British led by Sir Goldie of the Royal Niger Company and later by Frederick John Lugard before the close of the 19th century. By 1897, the fall of the Benin kingdom was imminent, the activities of the British through

treaties and diplomatic offensives enabled them to secure most of the territories that today constitute Nigeria. Its conquest was motivated

by economic

desires,

especially to

exploit the

expansion of

quality rubber

plantations,

palm produce,

and many other

items of trade

in large

quantities in

the area.

Colonialism

was officially

implemented in 1900

despite annexing Lagos

in 1861 and declaring the

Oil River protectorate in

1884. The colonial rule

lasted for six long

decades that ended in

1960 which is the object

Keywords:

Colonial,

Domination,

Colonialism,

Exploitation,

Nigeria.

of this paper. Attention is given to the causes and consequences as historical methodology is used through to the conclusion.

Introduction

Colonialism or colonial domination meant conquest and control of the colonized by invaders. In doing this, the invaders had to subjugate the land and be brought under absolute control of the people. In most cases, this might involve violent struggle in the form of conquest and resistance between the two. While the invaders struggled to occupy, conquer, and control, the victims had to defend their land and sovereignty as “no society has willingly accepted foreign domination”, (Crowder, 1968). Nigeria, no doubt, represents a unique entity evidenced in its multiethnic character, which has variously been estimated to be between 250 and 370 (see Appendix 1, Map of Nigeria). With an estimated population of about 200 million. Nigeria has been battling with structures of colonial domination even after over six decades of independence, (Olodi, 2011). Discussion on causes and consequences of colonial domination in Nigeria has generated a lot of perceptions and a continuous appraisal and reappraisal will be required to enable a holistic historical process of the cause and consequences. Colonialism or rather colonial domination is explained as a system or policy of annexing and partial or full political control over another nation. It could also be defined as implanting off settlement on a distant territory, (Egbefo, 2012). Africa became the target of the European nations as the religious and political crisis worsened in Europe. The Europeans were anxious to move out of their land and look for opportunities overseas. The Renaissance had started the end of their feudal system and the introduction of gunpowder, currency, printing press, navigation (navigation became a science), and the understanding that the earth is spherical. These triggered the ambition of the Europeans to look out for other places and other opportunities (Abe and Adamu, 2021). These issues will not be considered as direct causes of colonial domination in Nigeria as the paper will look at the ‘pull’ factors more than the

‘push’ factors with the aim of analyzing institutional and structural issues in Nigeria towards national development. The analysis in the paper will also aver that both causes and consequences of colonial domination in Nigeria are systemic and designed by the ‘victors’ (the colonial invaders), (Marx, 1962).

The Contact with Europe

The first European contact with Nigeria was circa 1485 by the Great Benin Empire: Southern Nigeria. The Portuguese explorers in about 1485 reached Benin and created a strong mercantile relationship with the Edo people, trading tropical products such as ivory, peppers, and palm oil with the Portuguese for European goods such as manila and guns. In the early 16th century, the Oba sent an ambassador to Lisbon, and the king of Portugal sent Christian missionaries to Benin City. Some residents of Benin City could still speak pidgin Portuguese in the late 19th century. The first English expedition was in 1553, and significant trading developed between England and Benin based on the export of ivory, palm oil, and pepper. Visitors in the 16th and 17th centuries brought back to Europe tales of "Great Benin", a fabulous city of noble buildings, ruled over by a powerful king. However, the Oba began to suspect Britain of larger colony designs and ceased communications with the British until the British Expedition in 1896-97 which resulted in a weakened Benin Empire, (Abe and Adamu, 2021). A 17th-century Dutch engraving from Olfert Dapper's *Nauwkeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaansche Gewesten*, published in Amsterdam in 1668 wrote:

The king's palace or court is a square and is as large as the town of Haarlem and surrounded by a special wall, like that which encircles the town. It is divided into many magnificent palaces, houses, and apartments of the courtiers, and comprises beautiful and long square galleries, about as large as the Exchange at Amsterdam, but one larger than another, resting on wooden pillars, from top to bottom covered with

cast copper, on which are engraved the pictures of their war exploits and battles...(Connah, 1975, pp.115).

The annexation of Lagos in 1861 further motivated the British to conquer other lands in Nigeria up to the Northern part of Nigeria which were amalgamated in 1914 as a single colony.

Causes of the Colonial Domination in Nigeria

The colonial domination in Africa with Nigeria as a case is driven by Economic, political, and religious factors. If colonies were maintained for exploitation and prestige, it might require only a bit of expertise and analysis to unravel the intent and extent of the whole process.

Search for Trade Routes

A search for a trade route was a major factor in the discussion of the causes of the colonial domination of Nigeria. The Ottoman Empire had levied huge taxes on the routes around the waterways of the Baltic, Black Sea, and Mediterranean. To avoid the heavy tax and possible conflict, the Europeans search for alternatives. Drainages and rivers around Nigeria factorized the penetration of the Europeans into the territory of the area. An effort to sail to the 'Far East' was rewarded by the success of sailing around and across Africa to connect Asia, India, and China to Europe. The exposure of Africa to these 'sailors' opened up Africa to conquest and colonial domination before the close of the 19th century, Crowder, 1968).

Prestige and Political Struggle

Political competition ensued in Europe during and after the Age of Enlightenment. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars had given birth to the power struggle and political interest in having more territories under the guise of becoming a 'leader' in Europe. The religious belief system has been questioned by the age of reason and the Europeans began to

question the old regime and order. This led to confrontation and political competition with the resultant effect of wanting more territory for national prestige and honour. This could be seen as a remote cause yet must be considered important with its twin effect of colonialism and imperialism in Africa and Nigeria as a case, (Ikime, 1977).

The Industrial Revolution

Prince Henry the navigator among other Europeans had made navigation a science. The Industrial Revolution created steaming engines and ships for navigation. This had a dual cause of massive production that would need a large market and also a need to return people who were taken to Europe as slaves back to Africa as the need for human labour was replaced by machines. Slaves taken to Europe were returned and required to be integrated into their motherland to harness the environment for the use of the colonial invaders, (Abe and Adamu, 2021). Railways became a breakthrough for movement and were constructed as a means of carrying agricultural produce even as quinine was produced to tackle malaria in tropical Nigeria, (Crowder, 1968). This served a dual purpose as raw materials were needed for the new industries and vice versa, the manufactured goods needed a big market to sustain the industries. The inventions sprang up which also made war more destructive and gave the Europeans the anxiety to want a trial and people to be conquered.

The Berlin Conference

It was at the Berlin Conference that the European powers formalized and negotiated the claims to territories in Africa. The Conference started on November 15 and was concluded on the 26th of February 1885. It was for the partition and scramble for Africa which was the reason for also calling it the Berlin West Africa Conference. Nigeria was ceded to the British for exploitation and domination. This opened the operation of the Royal Niger Company which played a huge role in the conquest of the Nigerian territory

and people. The Company later sold its holdings to the British for a sum of 865, 000 dollars, (Nicol, 1956).

The Factor of River Niger

Mungo Park was in awe of the majestic nature of the Niger River as he lament its litany: ‘I saw with infinite pleasure the great object of my mission; the long sought for, majestic Niger, glittering to the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing slowly to the eastward’, (Nicol, 1956). As the third longest river in Africa stretching to 2, 500 thousand miles with its main source in Guinea of about 150 miles away from the Atlantic Ocean. The Niger River flows east into the Sahara Desert. The discovery was known in 1796 when Mungo Park, a Scottish explorer observed the flowing direction to be eastward and sharply turned right to southeast back to the sea. Mungo Park's second exploration of the Niger River in 1805 exposed part of Nigeria's area as he reached Bussa having lost many of his men. This was a landmark in the exploration and exploitation of the Nigeria area as further exploration was done by the Lander brothers and this was a factor in the colonial domination of the area, (Nicol, 1956).

Royal Niger Company and Treaties of Protection

The British mercantile company operated in the lower valley of the River Niger, It was the RNC that extended and helped in the conquest of the territories in Nigeria. By 1885, George Goldie led the National African Company of combined and amalgamated British companies to draft and sign treaties with the Northern Nigerian Emir of Sokoto, and other Emirs to protect the area from German aggression. By 1886, the company acquired a charter of incorporation as the Royal Niger Company with a mandate to administer trade across the land from Niger Delta to Benue and far north. The company cemented trade relationships with the people and started the exploitation of the area before its charter was revoked in the year 1899 which set the pace for the colonial rule of the area, (Ikime, 1977).

Economic Viability, Exploitation, and Market Expansion

The Industrial Revolution had made the production of goods flood the European market, and the market search became a strategic measure to keep their industries working. British set the pace with the steam engines and coal fire while the USA surpassed the achievement of the British as the replication of the revolution further heightened aggression for the market. Attention was turned to Africa and the British seized the chance to lay this huge burden on her colonies as Nigeria became a major supplier of raw material and served as a market for the manufactured goods, (Ikime, 1977).

Fragmentation among the Peoples of Nigeria and the Conquest

The people of the area were not having a central power nor united as a force to stand against the external aggression. This was a major factor in the conquest of the area and the people.

The Conquest of the Southern Part of Nigeria

The people of the Nigeria area were not united even in the face of having a common enemy. The Yoruba were at war with each other before the Kiriji War that started in 1877 where the people divided into two factions against each other. The Kiriji War or Ekiti-Parapo War lasted for sixteen years until the intervention of the British in 1893. This civil war was a major avenue for the British to penetrate and later overrun the area and take control of the Southwestern part of Nigeria, (Samuel, 1921). The Benin People of the South-South were raided at the popular Benin Massacre of 1987 where the land was looted by the British. At the close of the nineteenth century, the Yoruba wars and British influence extended as far as Ondo, one of the western neighbors and allies of Benin and with the proclamation of February 5, 1886, the right bank of Benin River became the eastern boundary of the Colony of Lagos. (Lagos, known to the Benin's as *Eko* was said to have been one of the vassal state and military comp of Benin kingdom). To the east, the Royal Niger

Company was advancing into the western Igbo and northern eastern Edo areas from its administrative headquarters at Asaba, a town once within Benin's sphere of influence, (David, 1976).

The Itsekiri served as middlemen for some of Benin's trade in the riverine areas. For example, they were well placed to trade with the Ijebu and some other Yoruba people living on the banks of the River Niger Creeks. Some Ijebu cloth passed through the hands of Itsekiri traders. A number of them also lived at Ughoton, the Benin port, and traded with Benin traders and the Oba's agent. Such Itsekiri had to pay the duties imposed by the Oba and generally accepted other terms imposed on Benin traders. In 1892, however, Chief Nana, Itsekiri ruler demanded some trade concessions and even preferences for the risk, his people take as middlemen trans-versing the dangerous River Niger to supply goods demanded by the Benin's. The request was not granted instead the trade agents of Oba Ovonramwen increased trade duties. Chief Nana retaliated by prohibiting all trade between the Itsekiri and Benin kingdom and forbade the supply of cooking salt, one of the food condiments highly demanded by the Benin traders, after a few months, the embargo was raised and trade was resumed. Early in the following year, Oba Ovonramwen stopped trade, because the Itsekiri were reported to have cheated the Benins. He thus demanded twenty thousand corrugated iron sheets from the Itsekiri chiefs before he would allow trade to be resumed. Some Benin and Itsekiri traders resident in Lagos and Ijebu Ode went to see the Oba on the advice of Consul General Moore, to start a rubber industry, the kingdoms abounding resources. They made presents to the Oba to the value of over thirty pounds, but the result of their mission was nil. This action of the Oba annoyed the British agents, (David, 1976).

Meanwhile, there is a need for us to be informed that the events which later culminated in the attack of Benin have been attached to the evolution of British West African policy in 1875, the year which marked the beginning of their need for territorial expansion and even regarded then as a late development in British imperial policy. The argument advanced by the British

for territorial expansion in Africa was that primarily the establishment of interior protectorates was a reaction to French and German Expansionist policy in Africa a tradition of interest in preserving and pre-empting existing and potential markets, (David, 1976).

Some of the provisions of the treaty were fundamentally opposed to the sovereignty of the Benin kingdom. Articles IV and V made it compulsory for the Oba, of Benin to accept the advice of the consul in matters of internal and external policy. Article VI laid down that the trade of the kingdom was to be liberalized, and thrown open to everyone. Article VIII made it compulsory for the king and the state to give protection to Europeans and their property in any part of Benin. In every way, the treaty was against the interests of Benin. Yet the treaty had been signed by the chiefs even though the Oba himself had refused to touch the pen, (David, 1976).

The contents of the treaty suggest the degree of British interest in the Benin territory which the Oba of Benin was forced to recognize. The opening of free trade to the Europeans and the protection of those involved in the trade was one of the interests the Oba and his chiefs must have detested. It is doubtful if the contents were properly interpreted to the Oba nor did he expect such a treaty. There were similar treaties forced down the throat of some African rulers of the period, which were used by the European powers in Africa as evidence of their sphere of influence. Such treaties were legally acceptable in European diplomatic negotiations. As for the Oba and his chiefs, treaty or no treaty, if trade with the Europeans must go on, it must be to his dictates. According to Chief Samson Okosun, Oba Ovonramwen became angry when winds got to the palace in 1895, and the Acting Consul General Ralph Moor recommended that as the first opportunity, steps should be taken for opening up the Benin country if necessary by force which raised the hopes of the representatives of the major trading firms who have been facing several sanctions and monopoly on cash produce placed by the Oba even as far as to the interior. Between 1892 when the treaty was signed and 1896 when crisis developed, the reports of traders and the vice-consul were always against the

Oba of Benin. For one thing, the Oba continued to control Benin trade in the usual way. The Itsekiri had to pay the trade tax or else face stoppage of their trade in Benin territory. Naturally, they complained to the vice-consul. The Oba continued to place a ban on trade in articles of royal monopoly. This continued to annoy the British so they began to argue as early as 1895 that to improve the trade of this part of the protectorate, the power of the Oba of Benin must be destroyed. The crisis had to wait till 1896 largely because the British were busy with Chief Nana Ebrohimi of Itsekiri in 1894 and with the adamant Brass people in 1895, (Olaitan, 1956).

The Conquest of the Benin Kingdom

While some scholars still fuel the debate that the reasons which motivated the British encroachment on Benin was more of economic interest, the *Casus-belli* for the conquest of Benin, in February 1897 was the attack by some Benin warriors on a British espionage team of Acting Consul General Phillips, which comprised nine other Europeans and 280 carriers most of whom were of the Niger Coast Protectorate Force. The mission was a disaster for the British team. Except for Captain Alan Boisragon and Mr Locke, all the members of the party fell before the fusillade of Benin soldiers. When the news of the presence of the British at Ughoton reached the palace, the Oba summoned his chiefs in an emergency meeting to consult with them because the Oba was anxious that Benin should not attack the British even though he for saw that the British party meant no good. It was toward the end of the meeting, that a chief, resident at Ughoton came to inform the Oba about the attack. He condemned the actions of his chiefs and severely blamed the war commander and his deputy for their return. According to sources, he consulted with some of the chiefs and reminded them of the inevitable consequences, (Olaitan, 1956).

On the 10th of January, 1897, Sir, Major R.D., the Consul General was sent to Nigeria to declare war on the Benin kingdom. On 10th February 1897, a military column of blue jackets marines, the Niger Coast Protectorate Troops, and the

Native Scouts landed in Warri for the attack on Benin City. Gwatto to the west was first attacked followed by Sakponba on the Jamieson River to the east of the capital. Simultaneously a desperate fight took place at Ughoton with the naval troops which attempted to attack Benin City through Gwatto but failed. In the attack many British and Benin soldiers were killed, and the survivors retreated and sailed away. Two other British detachments bombarded Benin City and destroyed part of the palace. On 17th February repeated bombardments led to the destruction of the king's palace and several parts of the city with several Benin warriors abounding their leaders by escaping into the bush for safety. After the Oba's arrest and trial for the massacre of Consul Phillips and his entourage in September. 1897, Oba Ovonramwen was not found guilty but sentenced to be banished from his kingdom for life to Old Calabar where he stayed until his death in 1914, (David, 1976).

The Conquest of the Northern Nigeria

The British occupation of Northern Nigeria started with the conquest of Bida and Ilorin in 1897. The justification given for the conquest of the two southern Emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate according to Goldie was the inability of the Emirs to recognize and reconcile with the Royal Niger Company order, hence the attack. The Northern people of Nigeria were divided into different emirates and had subgroups under the Emirate system. The Nupe, the Hausa, and The Fulani among other groups had their structured and well-organized political system with the Sokoto Caliphate as the strongest. The British conquered them piecemeal, moving from one emirate to another as the emirates were not willing to fight as one people, (Falola, 1984). The Emirates of the Hausa states fought in isolation just the Nupe people, as Sokoto was the last to put up a fight of resistance and finally collapsed in 1903, (Falola, 1984).

Colonial Domination in Nigeria

To wreck the colony was the idea of over-exploiting the human capability and natural resources. Looking at the circumstances without prejudice or

sentiment, one will be able to justify the word of the colonists “parasites” as a perfect description of who they are. Attempting to justify their actions, colonialists stereotyped natives as savages and referred to “natives’ “pre-colonial barbarism.” The British proclaimed that British culture was the ideal for “natives” to emulate and used violence and divide-and-conquer strategies to keep the people down. Fanon advocated violence against the settlers as a way for colonized people to regain their sense of self-respect. Although he was a psychiatrist, Fanon did not show that such violence would be psychologically liberating. Instead, he cited cases in which such violence led to psychological degeneration, (Fanon, 1990). The Nigerian areas were amalgamated in 1914 for administrative convenience and Fredrick John Lugard introduced indirect rule to enable effective administration of the people. Colonial policies and economy were introduced to exploit the people as taxes were introduced with the forceful production of the ‘cash crops’ at the detriment of food crops, (Falola, 1984). The resultant consequence of this cash crop could still be related to the food crisis six decades after the independence of 1960.

After the conquest of Nigeria in the twentieth century, the British colonialists began a systematic policy reorganizing the area to serve British colonial interests. The total imposition and consolidation of a new economic structure. It was meant for the altering of the traditional economy Nigeria practiced for centuries. The colonial economic imposition includes the introduction of colonial currency, taxation, and social and economic infrastructure among others, (Peter, 1978).

Lord Fredrick Lugard was quite open on the question of objectives. He did not equivocate when he stated that:

Let it be admitted at the onset that European brains, capital, and energy have been, and never will be, expended in developing the resources of Africa from the motive of pure philanthropy; that Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her industrial classes, and the native races in their progress

to a higher plane; that the benefits can be made reciprocal, and that it is the aim and desire of the civilized administration to fulfill this dual mandate, (Lugard, 1965).

The British approach to colonialism in Nigeria was therefore much influenced by Lord Lugard's writing in the *Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa and political Memoranda*, (Lugard, 1965).

Consequences of the Colonial Domination in Nigeria

These perpetrators of ethnocentrism had planned and prepared for a mechanism like ethnocentrism before decolonization. *'The settler's town is strongly built, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown, and hardly thought about,* (Fanon, 1990). This area is the description of the area where whites stayed. The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, people by men of evil repute, they are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, men lie there on top of each other and their huts are built on top of the other.

As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation is not enough, the "settlers" paint the "natives" as a sort of quintessence of evil. "Native" society is not simply described as a society lacking in values, it is not enough for the colonists to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in the colonial world. The native is declared as insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values but also the negative of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values and in this sense, he is evil. He is the corrosive element that destroys all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with the beauty of morality, he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces, (Fanon, 1990).

These mechanisms include conceptualizing religion as giving all away in submission to the imperial power that has introduced it. Churches in the colonies were the white people's churches and the foreigners' churches. She does not call the native to god's way but to the way of the "master", or the oppressor, (Fanon, 1990).

Power as a Factor in World Affairs: Power is important not only to aid the exercise of a state's sovereignty but also to give capability and credibility to a nation's positions. Nigeria is, however, deficient in both the tangible and the intangible elements of power, and this has, in turn, imposed limits on what states in Africa can do in world Affairs. This incapacity is both a legacy of colonialism as well as what Nigerian political leaders did with what was handed over to them, (Peter, 1978).

The present world order has its foundations in the past. The Greek civilization atrophied and was succeeded by the Roman era; the latter gave birth to European supremacy, during which the British Empire was uniquely "Great". France on the other hand failed to achieve comparative regional or world hegemony at that time, even when it tried to achieve it militarily during the 19th Century. European rivalry in the late 19th century and the impact of the two World Wars which that contest for power produced eroded the European phase in world domination, from which American ascendancy sprouted. The curse of colonial domination in Nigeria has reduced the nation to a third-world country, (Olajide, 1981).

Dependent Economy: The central postulate of the penetration thesis is that the combined effect of slavery, colonialism, or rather colonial domination is that it has arrested the process of Nigeria's development, and created a dependent national economy. There is therefore a correlation between these long years of exploitation and Nigeria's marginal position within the present world power structure as manifested in her weakened capacity to make substantive inroads into world politics. Just like every other Third World nation in Africa, Nigeria came to be described as a "nation" that had to enroll

in the international arena cautiously, as it could not speedily cut off the ties with the former colonial invader, (Peter, 1978).

Weak Political Institutions and Dis-articulated Economies

When Nigeria emerged as an independent state it found itself composed of varieties of tribes, social structures, and cultures that were emotionally distant from one another. By extension colonial Nigeria had weak political entities, invested with political independence, but lacked the muscles to assert its sovereignty. It was new to independence and power but was anxious to prove its mettle in the pursuit of national interests. The arbitrary manner in the partition of Africa into states also created problems with the colonial boundaries. The challenge has been how to forge these diverse people into a single nation. More often than not a country becomes an independent state without a nation to provide a foundation. The implications of this pull of centrifugal forces for Nigerian politics are obvious. If the Sudanese political crises are protracted; if Somalia is in turmoil, if the Ivory Coast continues to fester, and if Zimbabwe remains an economic and political nightmare, there is no way Nigeria will not be distracted, or be able to benefit from peace dividends, or indeed, make any meaningful contribution to world peace and security, (Peter, 1978). Nigeria has not fared better in the economic realm, since no nation or society can generate, or sustain economic growth and development in an atmosphere of political crises. Structurally, colonial domination has created a weak economy in Nigeria, ((Michael 1968).

Worse still, the food crises in Nigeria today are evidence that the Malthusian prediction has been fulfilled. Nigeria is currently in the middle of a demographic transition, a situation where rapid population growth and a child-heavy population lead to low per capita income. This translates to a heavy burden on the economy, as democratic transition tends to widen international disparities of wealth and with far-reaching implications for a nation's foreign policy. Therefore, the major challenges facing Nigeria today include: how to create conditions that will promote political and economic

stability by instituting mechanisms for conflict resolution and promoting economic development through equitable global partnership, (Michael 1968).

Conclusion

Ironically, the social and political crisis and the civil war in the Nigerian area before the British conquest and domination have become the other of the day in contemporary Nigeria, six decades after the independence. The colonial domination created boundaries, structures, and institutions for the economic benefit of the British without any consideration of the peculiarities of the colony whatsoever. This has produced many socio-political and economic crises in recent times as the people seem not to have learned from their history. The burden of the colonial invaders on Nigeria could be compared to having a child with kwashiorkor with almost impossibility of living a normal healthy life.

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Appendices

Appendix 1, Map of Nigeria



Source: Adapted from Umar Zubairu, et al, British Colonial Conquest and Population Movement in Northern Nigeria 1897– 1903, *Wukari International Studies Journal*, Vol.6, No.1 (Accessed: 26/12/2024 <http://www.wisjournals.com/>)