

The Colonial Incursion and its impact on Nigeria: A Re-Assessment

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Abstract

This paper is a critical assessment of the colonial incursion and its impact on Nigeria. Secondary sources of data were used for this essay. With the force theory of the state as its compass, and drawing from the insights of the “decolonial epistemic perspective”, the paper contends that colonialism was a violent phenomenon, and colonial rule was imposed on Nigeria against the will of its people. The essay argues that as a crime against humanity, colonialism’s primary goal was the exploitation of Nigeria’s resources, and all the actions or inactions of the colonialists were aimed at the realization of that goal. It is concluded that irrespective of what its supporters regard as its “benefits”, the impact of colonialism on Nigeria and its people was generally destructive.

Keywords: Colonialism, Colonial Rule, Development, Forces

Introduction

“Colonialism was a system of economic exploitation, political repression and cultural oppression. Under the colonial situation, Africans were denied of their human and democratic rights, in addition to being victims of racism and discriminatory practices with regard to economic and social justice”. -Nzongola-Ntalaja (2000, p.3)

The foregoing assertion vividly encapsulates the essence of colonialism, a crime against humanity which westerners committed against most of the countries of the South. This essay examines the colonial incursion and its impact on Nigeria with a view to reiterate the fact that irrespective of what supporters of colonialism regard as its “benefits”, the effects of colonial rule on Nigeria – and indeed Africa – were generally adverse and debilitating. It should be stated *ab initio* that this paper is restricted to highlighting only some of the effects of colonialism on Nigeria as the entire atrocities of the colonial incursion cannot be adequately adumbrated in a short essay such as this.

A large body of literature exists on colonialism and its impact on its victims (Offiong, 1989; Zahar, 1974; Odegowi, 2011; Ayodeji, 2020, Igboin, 2011; Salihu, 2021; Richard,

2018; Izom and Kombo, 2023; Terry-Andrews, 2015; Mamdani, 1996; Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012; Mapuva and Chari, 2010); but as Hirschman (1981 in Mkandawire, 2011, p.18) observed, a social phenomenon vanishes only when it “has been fully explained by a variety of converging approaches and is therefore understood in its majestic inevitability and perhaps even permanence”. Given its overwhelming and devastating consequences for the Nigerian socio-formation, more researches on colonial rule are inevitable.

A part from redirecting attention to the deep-rooted and crippling effects of colonialism on Nigeria, the import of this essay is amplified by the fact that:

...although ‘colonial administrations’ have been almost entirely eradicated and the majority of the periphery is politically organized into independent states, non-European people are still living under European/Euro-American exploitation and domination. The old colonial hierarchies of Europeans versus non-Europeans remain in place and are entangled with the ‘international division of labour’ and accumulation of capital at a world-scale (Grosfoguel, 2007 in Ukwandu, 2017, p. 110).

Furthermore, it is sometimes claimed that there is no reason to keep harping back to Nigeria’s colonial experience decades after the country had gained its independence. However, according to Mabogunje (1999), there are four reasons why any analysis of social knowledge in Nigeria cannot ignore that experience: first, is the importance of recognizing the ultimate purpose of the colonization of Nigeria. This was an attempt to integrate the country into the global capitalist economy, capitalism being a mode of production organized on the basis of very different social and economic integrative principles than what characterized traditional society in Nigeria. Second, the colonial experience greatly determined the direction and pace of institutional changes among the different groups that make up Nigeria. Third, appreciating the import of that experience enables us to realize what still requires to be done and what knowledge we still require to possess to ensure that our society gets the full advantages of the economic system into which the colonial experience had propelled our society. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, revisiting the colonial experience enables us to put in proper perspective the political deprecations of capitalism as an ideological and social system.

Moreover, this essay stresses the necessity to challenge the epistemic imperialism of Western authors and the historical falsehoods and misrepresentations about Nigeria and Africa by friends of colonialism. For instance, as Mazrui (1997 in Olutayo and Omobowale, 2007) asserted, for about two thirds of the twentieth century during the colonial period, the understanding of Africa was inhibited by four great denials, including the denial of history, the denial of science, the denial of poetry, and the denials of

philosophy (including religious philosophy). All these denials were deliberately concocted to justify the iniquities of colonial subjugation.

The fact that the overall development of Nigeria was not the *raison d'être* of colonial rule cannot be overemphasized. Colonialism necessarily negated and alienated a people's natural course of history and it was essentially violent in both nature and operation. A colonial society does not develop by its very nature; it is created for exploitation and history has shown that it is rather underdeveloped (Kwanashie, 2010). Colonial rule was established for the purpose of exploitation of the colony and the colonial system was carefully designed and run for the accomplishment of that objective. The British imposed colonialism upon an unwilling people; they had their purpose for colonizing Nigeria and whatever they did was meant to enhance the colonial enterprise, with the exploitation of the people and their natural resources as their primary goal (Offiong, 1989).

This essay is organized into five sections. Following the introduction is section two where the concept of colonialism is clarified. Section three contains a brief discourse on the theoretical underpinnings of the essay, and the issue with which this paper is preoccupied - that is, a re-assessment of the impact of the colonial incursion on Nigeria - is presented in section four. Section five contains the conclusion.

Understanding Colonialism: What the literature Says

Since this essay focuses its attention primarily on colonial rule and how it affected Nigeria, it is appropriate for the term "colonialism" to be properly clarified. As Ogbanyi (2007 in Obo and Ukor, 2025) rightly states, scholars must try to specify the sense(s) in which they use a term that may have more than one meaning if they hope to be understood.

Colonialism is the direct and overall domination of one country by another on the basis of state power being in the hands of a foreign power (for example, the direct and overall domination of Nigeria by Britain between 1900-1960). It is a phenomenon which is part and parcel of another phenomenon called imperialism and its first objective is to make possible the exploitation of the colonized country. Imperialism, on its part, is the subordination of one country to another in order to maintain a relationship of unequal exchange. The subordination may be military, economic, political, cultural, or some combination of these (Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2013, Ake, 1982 in Obo and Ekpe, 2014).

Colonialism entails the establishment and maintenance of political, economic and social control by one nation over another, often resulting in profound implications for the colonized society, and this form of domination historically involves territorial annexation and the imposition of foreign governance systems aimed at exploiting local resources and labour. Such control not only affected political sovereignty but also deeply influenced

economic structures, cultural practices, and social hierarchies within colonized territories (Izom and Kombo, 2023). According to Offiong (1989), the colonial situation or colonial incursion refers to a condition in which a distinctly different group of people move to a completely territory and impose a new institution, the colonial administration being run by the invaders who establish new rules which they enforce. Under the colonial situation;

...‘humanitarian principles’ become the holy oil with which inhuman treatment and exploitation of the colonized people become sanctified. In other words, colonial rulers seek to cloak their real motive for colonizing the people. They claim to carry the white man’s burden and then seek to deceive the people that the purpose for imposing their rule upon others is to spread civilization-only Europeans had something that could be called civilization (Offiong, 1989, p. 19).

Colonialism is a logical outcome of imperialism and it means foreign political domination and subordination of overseas territories not with the motive of developing them politically and economically but to ensure their effective economic exploitation to the affluence of the metropolises. Colonialism deals with the direct political, social, and economic domination or subjugation of one political entity by another. It usually involves the direct exercise of political control and generally manifests in the adoption of policies aimed at the structural and economic underdevelopment of the colonized territory in such a way that the colonized people are alienated from the products which they produce and forced to engage in economic activities which will benefit the colonizing country. Colonialism, therefore, is characterized by the presence of political institutions which serve the interests of the colonizers, an armed occupation force and a monumental act of hostility which dispenses a great deal of violence as well as political authoritarianism. All these are necessary for it to play its role of centralizing and expropriating surplus from the colonies to the metropolises. It thus institutionalizes the use of coercion to reproduce domination and exploitation through the creation of certain social forces which serve the interests of the metropolises (Akpuru-Aja, 1998; Nna, 2000),

Colonialism involves the establishment and maintenance of foreign rule over a set of people for the purpose of getting maximum economic benefits by the colonizing power (Adeyemi and Adejuwon, 2012 in Ayodeji, 2020). In the words of Ayodeji (2017 in Ayodeji 2020, pp. 144 - 145),

...colonialism itself was a practice of injustice which was used to illustrate the occupation of different territories by foreign powers. The main purpose of colonialism was undisputed: exploit economic resources of the colonizing country.

Colonialism is an oppressive system of direct occupation, domination, and exploitation of one county and its resources by another. Like all forms of imperialism, it is a very

reactionary force which mutilates the full collective personality of its victims, humiliates them in various ways, exploits them viciously, takes undue advantage of their weakness and inhumanly disorients them, thereby distorting their lives. In fact, it denies them any claim to full human existence, using its power to reduce them to a subhuman standard of living. In the process, it destroys their individual and collective genius, rendering them subject to the whims and caprices of the creative genius of other people in a way totally alien to humanity. In its single-minded pursuit of its interests, colonialism throws all caution and morality to the wind, and does not hesitate to use violent instruments and dubious devices to achieve its mission (Nnoli, 2011).

Colonialism was clearly an act of man's inhumanity to man and a criminal enterprise propelled by Westerners' primitive desire for free resources and cheap labour. As Mapuva and Chari (2010, p. 22) put it, "colonialism had its roots in the greed which European countries exhibited towards Africa's untapped natural resources". Colonialism in Africa was therefore predominantly for economic aims: the need to meet the high demand for raw materials for Western European industries; the need to secure areas and territories that could function as markets for European goods that were being produced; and the need to identify and dominate strategic areas/territories for future investments (Ochi, Okeke and Eze, 2023).

From a socio-psychological perspective, the colonial situation was marked by two antagonistic poles: the colonizer and the colonized. The prosperity and privileges of the former were directly based on the exploitation and pauperization of the latter. In order to maintain this condition, the act of oppression must be consistently reproduced, for it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence. The settler owes his existence (that is, his property) to the colonial system (Zahar, 1974., Fanon, 1965 in Zahar, 1974).

A Theoretical Discourse

The force theory of the state is the theoretical framework deployed in this essay. In its simplest form, this theory may be stated thus: "war begat the king" (Appaduria, 2002, p.32). The force theory of the state indicates that the state emerged or originated from the conquering of one group by another. It surmises that with the aid of military or other forms of coercion, the strong subjugated and dominated the weak and created the foundation for the emergence of the state. Therefore, underlying the force theory of the state is the concept of "might is right".

The force theory attributes the origin of the state to the domination of the weak by the strong and powerful. It holds that the emergence of the state is a consequence of the strong establishing their sway over the weak, setting them a specified territory and arrogating to themselves the power of governing (Akindele, Obiyan and Owoeye, 2000).

According to this theory, the state is neither a creation of God nor a result of the irresistible social development; it is primarily the consequence of the forcible subjugation through long and continued warfare among groups (Johari, 2005). As Jenks, a proponent of the force theory states, “historically speaking, there is not the slightest difficulty in proving that all political communities of the modern type owe their existence to successful warfare” (Mahajan, 2013, p.228).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the force theory of the state is apt for this essay as it enhances the understanding of colonialism as a violent phenomenon which entails the forcible occupation of a distinct territory, the exploitation of the territory’s people and resources, and the imposition of an oppressive administration by foreigners. As Aliu (2014) argues, the colonial state was an exogenous entity and a product of conquest established to exploit and suppress Africa and Africans, and this contrasted to a great degree with the evolutionary and revolutionary processes of state formation hinged on governance which were core to pre-colonial Africa. The colonial state, in his view, treated Africans not as citizens with rights but as subjects subservient to the whims and caprices of the state, and this was underscored by the swiftness and ruthlessness with which colonial laws, institutions and structures were unleashed on the people, but deployed to protect the interests of the state and those of its managers.

This essay is also inspired by what Ukwandu (2017, p.105) calls “the decolonial epistemic perspective”, which, in his view, is theoretically informed by a narrative that borrows insights and ideas from the colonial experience and its locus of enunciation is situated in developing countries. This perspective (that is, decoloniality) stresses the dismantling of power relations and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial gender and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the colonial world. It is unique as it shifts the geography of reason and knowledge from the imperial, Western and Eurocentric narratives to the formerly oppressed and colonized people and countries as a point of departure through which issues affecting them can be articulated and formulated. The “decolonial perspective” aims to critique, interrogate, unveil and, if possible, overcome all the racial and class injustices embedded in imperial global designs, and in the process challenges the narrative that European and American epistemologies and methodologies are universal, objective and neutral (Ndlovu-Getsheni, 2013 and Maldonado-Torres, 2006 in Ukwandu, 2017).

Nigeria and the Colonial Incursion: An Impact Assessment

Colonial rule in Nigeria may have had many goals but the overall development of the country was certainly not one of them. Colonialism had nothing to do with humanitarianism; it was established for the purpose of exploitation of the resources of the

colonies. As H.S. Scott, a British colonial official stated, the overall objective of the colonial enterprise was “one of exploitation and development for the people of Britain” (Nnoli, 1978, p.43). Indeed, colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits made in Africa to the West, and this shows that the domination of Europe over Africa retarded the economic development of the continent (Wobo and Orji, 2021).

Colonial incursion into Nigeria did not happen abruptly; it was programmed to take place over a period of time. By 1884 on the eve of the Berlin Conference, British influence had well been established in the Nigerian area. Beginning in 1849 when the British established a consular authority for the Bights of Benin and Bonny, gun-boat diplomacy was adopted to protect their commercial interests against the coastal states, and in 1851 for instance the British decisively intervened in a dynastic dispute in Lagos, and ten years later (1861) took complete possession of the island as a colony (Odegowi, 2011).

The British applied themselves with the same vigour in the Niger Delta where by a series of coercive manipulations they compelled the delta states to do their bidding. From the 1850s, the Niger River became the medium for the spread of British influence to the country’s northern areas. A crucial stage was attained in 1879 when a number of British firms coalesced into one to form the United African Company, which by 1882, changed its name to the National African Company and had begun to nurse political ambitions over the areas of its operations. Connected with the rising influence of the British in Nigeria was the increasing commercial rivalry among the major European powers which took a distinctive political dimension in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference (1885) as each power sought geo-political control to protect its commercial interests (Odegowi, 2011).

The eventual colonial acquisitions, according to Odegowi (2011), were preceded by a treaty-making phase during which the powers signed agreements with the local authorities to formalize their interests. In 1900, the geographical configuration of Nigeria was defined under three political and administrative units, namely, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. In 1906, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were merged under a single administration called the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and in 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, and thus emerged the Nigerian state under one colonial administration.

The colonial incursion was not meant to improve or transform the colonial territories contrary to the claims of the colonizers. As Nwankwo (1989) contends, the primary essence of British colonialism was not the substitution of precolonial political

arrangements with colonial political structure. The essence lay in its destruction of pre-colonial forms of economic activity and the imposition of social relations of unequal exchange which manifested themselves in new authority structures and constitutions. Thus, to understand the actual impact of colonialism on pre-colonial societies is, first and foremost, to appreciate the negative effects of colonial enclave economies on pre-colonial modes of economic activity.

Given its nature, and as an objective relation, colonialism imposes a particular political system and particular ideologies concordant with its objective character. Thus, all colonizers used essentially the same ideology; they all developed similar justification for colonialism, from the same premises, namely that colonialism was beneficial to the colonized in the fundamental sense of improving the quality of their lives. Colonialism became, not self-seeking, not exploitation, but salvation. The very terminology that the colonizers used to describe colonialism reflected the substance of their ideology. Thus, they described the colonies as “protectorates”, implying that the colonial power was really fiduciary and that its essence was the protection of the colonies. The British often preferred to think of colonialism as a “mandate” to help backward peoples, the French, Portuguese and Belgians thought of it as a civilizing mission or “tutelage” (Ake, 1978).

In an attempt to justify imperialism, it was claimed that colonial rule was “beneficial” to the colonized people. It’s stated that “the colonial legacy is not simply a narrative of exploitation” as “Western influence also brought about tangible changes in infrastructure, healthcare, and education” (Abdulquadir, Abdulkadir, Yahyu, and Zubair, 2024, p. 156). In other words, colonialism laid the seeds of the intellectual and material development in Africa. It brought enlightenment where there was ignorance, and it suppressed slavery and other barbaric practices such as pagan worship and cannibalism. Moreover, formal education and modern medicine were brought to people who had limited understanding or control of their physical environment, and the introduction of modern communications, exportable agricultural crops and some new industries provided a foundation for economic development (Micah, Akinwunmi and Aghemelo, 2017).

There is no doubt that everything that was introduced, established or produced was tailored to promote the interests of colonialism. In the words of Marcel (2022, p.378), under colonial rule, “the skeletal and disarticulated infrastructural facilities that were provided were made available to ease exploitation; it built roads, railways and ports to facilitate the collection and export of commodities as well as the import of manufactured goods”. Indeed, the arguments that colonialism laid the foundation for development in colonies are hinged upon an exaggeration and flawed assumption that institutions established in the colonies were capable of stimulating growth. Such arguments are skewed in assessing the true state of colonial institutions because they attempt to credit growth to colonial policies, without equally assessing the havocs wrecked on colonies

(Richard, 2018). Colonial rule caused enormous damage to the Nigerian society and its people. In a profound sense, many of the post-independence socio-political and economic formations and malformations are a direct consequence of the state-building and economic integration as processes began under colonial rule. But, as Osaghae (2002) reasons, this is not to heap all the problems of the post-colonial state and society on colonial rule, although Nigerians disenchanted with the inadequacies of power and resource allocation in the country have continued to refer to “the mistake of 1914”, that is, the decision by the British colonial authorities to amalgamate the North and South, whose groups had little in common.

Colonialism unleashed varying forms of racism on the population. For instance, British impression of Nigerians as an inferior people created some form of apartheid between the colonizer and the colonized so that even when the British in their treaties claim to aim to protect Nigeria and prosper her, British officials found it rather disgusting to even live among Nigerians. Thus, in many parts of colonial Nigeria, it was not unusual to find British officials living in well – constructed houses with neatly – paved lawns sited far away from Nigerian settlements which were essentially deplorable shanties. This was the basis for Nigeria’s enclave development (Nwokedi, Obasi and Aroh, 2023). According to Mapuva and Chari (2010), the process of parceling out Africa among European nations heralded colonial rule which ensued with the principal purpose of expropriating Africa’s resources, during which indigenous people were ill-treated and taken as second grade human beings, and were deprived of their basic rights and freedoms with limited access to resources in their respective countries. Much of the deprivation and ill-treatment was commonplace in the provision of cheap labour, which translated into high poverty levels as the colonizers enforced perpetual provision of labour on the background of meagre remuneration that made Africans mortgaged on the mines and fields where they were tasked to work.

In order to successfully penetrate most parts of Nigeria – and indeed Africa, and in line with the sinister motives of the colonialists, the strategy of grand deception was used by the Europeans. For instance, prior to the formal colonization of Africa, imperial agents landed on the continent with pieces of paper, which sought signatures, or a simple mark X, to be appended on the dotted line. Trustingly and unsuspectingly, the African chiefs signed the so-called “treaties”. By such strokes of a pen, the African rulers, made to believe by the foreigners that the “treaties” amounted to agreements of protection against foes or hostile forces, had unwittingly transferred their rights of land ownership to foreign powers. To these powers, the signed agreements, even though secured under false pretense, conferred on the conquistadors the full range of property rights (Timamy, 2007).

The impact of the colonial incursion on indigenous culture was massively disruptive. Colonial rule was an imposition that unleashed deadly blows on African culture with the introduction of such values as rugged individualism, corruption, capitalism and oppression. Moreover, colonial rule disrupted the traditional machinery of moral homogeneity and practice; the method of moral inculcation was vitiated, which resulted in the abandonment of traditional norms and values through a systematic depersonalization of the African and paganization of his values. Instead of the cherished communalism which defined the life of the African, for example, a burgeoning societal construct was introduced which alienated and destroyed the organic fabric of the spirit of we-feeling (Igboin, 2011). As Aliu (2014, p.60) puts it, “many cherished indigenous institutions, values, cultures, and structures of pre-colonial African society with the tendency to undermine the exploitative objective of colonialism were either subtly replaced or violently repressed”.

It is instructive to note that colonial administrators often exploited the multi ethnic composition of their possessions by driving a divisive ethnic wedge between them in a bid to control and rule them. The policy of “divide and rule” thus set in motion a potentially dangerous series of events that sowed the seeds of ethnic discord and xenophobia between hitherto peacefully co-existing communities. Not only were multi-ethnic differences deliberately heightened and idiosyncrasies palpably activated, but the colonial government consciously, but covertly fanned the fires of mistrust and suspicion which they helped trigger in an adverse direction in the first place. Not that the communities were unaware of their ethnicity and cultural distinctiveness; what was different under the colonial environment was the fact that the sense of ethnic consciousness assumed an ominous and xenophobic twist in its composite ramifications (Timamy, 2007). In Nigeria, the colonialists deliberately sowed the seeds of discord and disharmony among different sections of the country. Harold Smith (cited in Ayodeji, 2020, pp. 157-158), a colonial official, appeared to confirm this point when he stated:

...Nigeria was my duty post. When we assessed Nigeria, this was what we found in the southern region: strength, intelligence, determination to succeed, well-established history, complex but focused life style, great hope and aspirations... the East is good in business and technology, the west is good in administration and commerce, law and medicine, but it was a pity we planned our agenda to give power “at all cost” to the northerners. They seemed to be submissive and silly of a kind. Our mission was accomplished by destroying the opposition at all forms. The west led in the fight for the independence, and was punished for asking for freedom. They will not rule Nigeria!

According to Mabogunje (1999), our colonial experience could be seen as a major rupture in the trajectory of our societal development; it has certainly pushed us out of the pre-capitalist on to a capitalist path. But there is enough evidence that the colonial administration could not undertake nor was it in its interest to promote our transformation to a full-fledged capitalist society. But, as Mabogunje (1999, p.16) puts it,

Perhaps the most serious consequence of the colonial rupture and its uncompleted transition is the moral confusion that it inflicted on our society. In place of traditional self-confidence, our people were reduced to a state of imitative dependence, a highly degraded state associated not only with an inability to promote self-reliant economic development but also with the loss of cultural and psychological integrity.

The establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria and other parts of Africa had tremendous adverse effects on the economies of these territories. In fact, to even think as some supporters of colonialism are inclined to do, that colonialism neither dislocated nor disoriented pre-capitalist economies in Africa is just to be unfair to history. It is unimaginable how the many decades of European political and economic domination of Africa would have no adverse economic and technological effects. The irony of this inclination becomes clearer against the practice of capital accumulation in the metropolises and periphery. In Western Europe, the state promoted the virtues of freedom of economic enterprise; local initiatives and creativity were encouraged and protected by the state. To the contrary, in the periphery, the colonial state was hostile and disoriented the development freedom of economic enterprise. Local industrial and technological development was discouraged. Local bourgeoisie were oppressed and suppressed, and unskilled labour and cheap natural economic resources were exploited by sheer brutal force to the greater affluence of the metropolises (Akpuru Aja, 1998).

Colonialism, far from developing the colonies, underdeveloped them to a point which made it difficult for genuine development to take place in these territories even after achieving political independence. It created dependent economies whose structures and situations were fashioned along the lines of the metropolitan centre with no regards to the history and culture of the people. Colonialism was a product of capitalist expansion and competition and colonies that were created by European powers were a manifestation of the complete alienation of a pre-capitalist socio-economic formation to metropolitan capitalist state. Colonies were a means of unhindered economic exploitation under finance capital. The essence of colony was not the development of the people; it was not for their benefit (Kwanashie, 2010).

According to Nnoli (2011), in Nigeria, colonial economic domination destroyed economic independence of the local population, rendering them powerless to reorganize

internal and external economic activities in ways they deemed necessary for their welfare. As a result, in his words, the pride, self-esteem and sense of dignity of the population were lowered, thereby reducing national morale, confidence and desire of the people to apply national resources to their progress. They were alienated from the new colonial economy and its excessive focus on profits, marginalization of local needs and consumption habits, and destruction of the technological infrastructure of the people were alien to the local population.

The dominant motives of colonialism in Nigeria were simply to use the country as an agricultural estate to produce raw materials for British factories, and thereby generate some purchasing power to enable Nigerians to buy the manufactured products of those same factories. Both objectives would ensure the transfer of economic surplus from Nigeria to Britain. The actual processes of primary production included cash-cropping, forestry and mining. The production of cash-crops was left largely to peasant farmers, both because they were more efficient than the few plantation planters, and because Indirect Rule required minimal disruption of traditional land-tenure. But forestry and mining which were less tedious, lucrative and more capital-intensive were dominated by the British. Indeed, colonialism turned millions of traditionally self-sufficient peasants into rubber-tappers, coffee-growers, tin miners, tea-pickers and then subjected this new agricultural mining proletariat to the incomprehensible vagaries of world commodity fluctuations (Onimode, 1983; Heilbroner, 1960 cited in Saro-Wiwa, 1995). In sum, “colonialism converted self-reliant subsistence economies into outposts of Europe that exported agricultural products, minerals, and timber, and imported manufactured goods. Mining, logging, and cash – crop production destroyed forest, dispossessed local communities, and dramatically altered the ecosystems of the colonized territories” (Wobo and Orji, 2021, p.334).

The colonizers could not have been able to exploit the people without the instrumentality of the people themselves; thus, they introduced forced labour. People were forcibly removed from their homes to work in the mines and plantations for the Europeans. Another way was by introducing the hated head tax, which had to be paid for in British currency. This had the effect of forcing villagers to go out in urban centers to seek jobs from Europeans who alone possessed the required currency to give out (Offiong, 1989). In Nigeria, colonialism disrupted the organic interdependence in the various pre-colonial political entities which it agglomerated into one political unit. The colonialists decided what crops were needed in the European industries and if they were already produced in Nigeria, they encouraged increased production. If not, and the conditions were favourable, they introduced them from outside. For example, the development of the soap industry in Britain required vegetable oil such as palm oil, palm kernel oil, groundnut oil and oil from copra. Since palm oil was considered one of the best of such oils, its

production in Southern Nigeria was accelerated. Similarly, increased output of groundnut, the source of groundnut oil, was promoted. The requisite oil was exported for use in the Sunlight, Lux, Lifebuoy, and Vim Soap factories in Britain and other soap factories in the West. Nigeria and other African colonies were forced to send their raw materials only to Europe by the colonialists whereas in the pre-colonial era. European middlemen exchanged European goods for African goods. And the cultivation of cash crops (cotton, coffee, cocoa, rubber, etc) for European factories were elevated and encouraged above the production of food crops for the domestic population (Nnoli, 1978, Nwoke, 2010).

Moreover, in order to ensure ready markets for manufactured imports from the metropolis, the colonized people of Nigeria and Africa were programmed to consume imported goods and to export their raw materials. This is the source of the profound disarticulation and distortions and paradox of the colonial and post-colonial economy to this day: it produces what it does not consume (cash crops) and consumes what it does not produce (manufactured goods). It was on these perverse pillars that the colonial regimes erected a global system of unequal capitalist development between the metropolises and Africa. This was how, according to Rodney. Europe underdeveloped Africa. The resources and the surplus of the colonies were plundered systematically for the development of the metropolises and African countries became underdeveloped while the metropolises developed rapidly even beyond the capacity of their domestic resources (Onimode, 2000, Nwoke, 2010).

Conclusion

This essay focuses attention on the impact of British colonialism on Nigeria and its people, and this is essentially because as Tharoor (2002 in Richard, 2018, p.13) points out, “we will not create a better world in the 21st century by forgetting what happened in the 19th and most of the 20th centuries”. Colonial rule was an unjust system designed and established primarily to promote and protect the economic and other interests of the colonizers.

The colonial enterprise in Africa was designed to establish administrative structures that facilitated efficient economic exploitation and not intended to promote political development or transformative change for the benefit of the colonized territories. This exploitation laid the foundation for many of the economic and political challenges African countries face today. This therefore implies that it is important for our understanding of why African economies have stagnated all these years to recognize that the non-reversal of some of the institutions and structures put in place in the colonial era continue to pose serious problems. (Musa, Awudu and Elijah, 2025, Kwanashie, 2010)

It is important to stress that colonial rule had a long list of priorities., but the development or transformation of the colony was not on that list. Irrespective of what admirers of the colonial incursion regard as its advantages to the people of Affrica, it should be noted that:

whatever benefits may have accrued to Africans were nothing but residues after the gastronomic appetite of the imperial masters had been satisfied. Even the missionaries who are credited with the introduction of education did not do this because they simply wanted to introduce education for its own sake. It was a good weapon for conversion (Offiong, 1989, p.21).

From the preceding passages, it is difficult to disagreed with the view that “it would be an act of the most brazen fraud to weigh the paltry social amenities provided during the colonial epoch against the exploitation, and to arrive at the conclusion that the good outweighed the bad” (Micah, Akinwunmi and Aghemelo, 2017, 1.12). Indeed, any discourse on the developmental shortcomings in Nigeria and Africa that excludes a methodical and systematic x-ray of the immensely disruptive and deeply-crippling impact of colonialism on them is flawed. It is difficult to even understand the crises of underdevelopment in these states without having an idea of the ineffably huge adverse effects... of man’s inhumanity-to-man which colonialism represented (Obo and Ekpe, 2021, pp.39-40).

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