RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICA: A CAUSE FOR INTRASTATE AND INTERSTATE CONFLICTS

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Abstract:
This study deals with the legacy of colonialism in Africa. Most importantly, it stresses on the contribution of colonial legacy in the contemporary African problems. Accordingly, the findings of the study show that the arbitrary colonial division of African borders contributed a lot for the contemporary African problems. The blind partition of African borders caused the disintegration of same ethnic groups into different countries and the merging together of different ethnic groups into same countries. This, in turn, resulted in several intrastate and interstate conflicts. Rwanda, Nigeria and Sudan can be taken as typical examples for the first case while Kenya-Somalia and Ethio-Somalia conflicts for the second case. At the top of that, the recent Arab Revolution that occurred in the North Africa, particularly in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt attributed, inter alia, to the brutal experience with their colonial masters.

Keywords: Border, Colonialism, Intrastate conflict, Interstate conflict.

1. Introduction
This study deals with the legacy of colonialism in the contemporary Africa. The central argument of this study is that colonialism has contributed a lot for different problems of the contemporary Africa. The objective of this paper is, therefore, analyzing the contribution of the legacy of colonialism in the contemporary African problems. To this end, secondary sources such as books, journal articles, reports, periodicals, and website source are utilized.

For the sake of convenience, the study is organized in the following manner. Firstly, the study discusses about colonialism in Africa. Under this, it deals with the partition of Africa, the exploitative nature of colonialism, and the resistances to colonial powers in brief. Secondly, the study deals with the legacy of colonialism in the contemporary Africa, which is the major theme of the study. Accordingly, it examines intrastate and interstate conflicts which emanated from the colonial arbitrary division of the continent. Besides, the study also explains the North Africa’s Arab Revolution, particularly incidents in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, vis-à-vis the brutal colonial experiences.

2. Colonialism in Africa
First of all, Europeans encroached into Africa as slave traders since the 15th century until the era of colonialism. After the exploitation of Africa through slavery for roughly four thousand years it was replaced with exploitation through colonialism. Hence, though Europeans ended slave trade their interest in Africa remained intact. The Industrial Revolution which was emerged in Britain and subsequently in other parts of the world had played a pivotal role in the termination of slave trade and beginning of colonialism. Industrial revolution in Europe accelerated production so that needed more raw materials and markets. This, in turn, again turned the face of Europeans to Africa to supply both raw materials and new markets for their surplus products. Therefore, colonialism came out of the need of European countries to have direct political control over their colonies so as to ensure the protection of their economic interest.

As the main objective of European countries was to satisfy their economic interest, each of them competed to get the biggest and the richest colonies. Consequently, to avoid intra European war colonialists held conference at Berlin in 1884-1885 for peaceful partitioning of Africa (Thomson, 2010:25). Accordingly, the continent was divided in the following manner save Ethiopia and Liberia. North, west and central Africa given to France; great part of west, east, central and southern Africa also given to Britain; Portugal took the territories of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-
Bissau; Congo was given to King Leopold of Belgium; Italy forged control over Libya, Eritrea and part of Somalia; Spain also controlled north Morocco, the Spanish Sahara and Spanish Guinea; and, Germany took areas in the south-west and the east of the continent as well as the Cameroon and Togoland (ibid: 12).

The scramble for Africa at the aforementioned Conference and other succeeding formation of many small countries in Africa was based on pure imperialist greed and voracious quest for wealth (Baah, 2003:1). This resulted in arbitrary division of its people without taking into account social cohesion which had kept Africans together for long period of time (ibid). Africans were not consulted; rather, they were blindly divided to satisfy the selfish interest of those imperialists. Hence, colonialism was primarily intended to exploit the continent and send back profits to the imperialists’ home country (Rodney, 1973:231).

African labor was well exploited to serve the imperialists’ interest. As clearly stated in Rodney (1973:232-233), Africans were brutally exploited because the colonizers had complete control of political power by shattering any opposition as well as using racial justification that Africans are inferiors so that deserve lower wage. As a result, the wage paid for their labor was not even enough to serve their daily necessities. On the contrary, imperialists highly benefited from forced and unfairly paid labor of blacks. Nwanosike and Onyije (2011:46) asserted that decisiveness of the short period of colonialism and its negative consequences for Africa spring mainly from the fact that Africa lost power. This is true that power is the ability to defend one’s interests and if necessary impose one’s will by any means available but when one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society that in itself is a form of underdevelopment (ibid). Imperialists control political power in Africa so that exercised their control over the deprived indigenous people and imposed their interest thereon.

Resources were extracted from the continent to the home land. There were huge mining operations across different parts of the continent. Accordingly, resources like gold in South Africa, phosphates, oil, lead, zinc, manganese, and iron ore in North Africa were extracted from the continent (Rodney, 1973: 237-238). They employed whatever violent means to exploit the land as well as other resources of the continent while claiming as if they were civilizing the uncivilized, dark and backward continent. The brutal, oppressive, inhumane and exploitative relation with Africans was the order of the days. Consequently, Europeans effectively subordinated Africans by depriving them political sovereignty, economic independence and even mental liberation. They effectively harness the resource and send back the profit they got from unequal and brutally enforced economic relations with their colonies so that contributed to the development of Europe at the expense of the blacks.

The colonial encroachments into Africa were not accepted with silence in the part of African countries. Rather, imperialists had encountered strong resistance across several states of a continent. They were encountered with well organized army, for instance, the Ashanti and Matabele of Zimbabwe against British rule; challenge against French in Sudan and Dahomey; Libya against Italy; but, all these exacerbated the violence and resulted in more destruction, murder, torture, looting, rape and death (Afisi, 2009:65).

Likewise, Great Britain encountered with serious challenge in its colony, Kenya. For instance, as a result of maltreatment of blacks by British administrators and landowners, the Kikuyu Association that is considered to have been Africa’s first political party emerged as a counter protest (Leakey, 2002:89). Tanganyikan African Nationalist Union (TANU) in Tanganyika, now Tanzania, was also another challenge to Britain (ibid: 91).

As a result of the oppressive rule of colonizers, African countries continued to resist. Following the process of decolonization, majority of African countries got their independence in the 1960s and later colonialism was ended with the liberation of South Africa from the racial segregation in 1994. Nonetheless, its legacy remains to adversely influence the contemporary Africa.

### 3. The Legacy of Colonialism in the Contemporary Africa

The Europeans oppressed black Africans in different ways; first as a slave trader and later as a colonizer. Colonizers, after brutally and inhumanely treating black Africans, left the continent with long lasting chronic negative consequences. In this connection, Mazrui wrote that “almost everything wrong that has gone in Africa is the fault of colonialism and imperialism” (Ayittey, 2002:2). The central tenet of this study is, therefore, examining the negative effect of the legacy of colonialism in the contemporary African situations.
One of the major colonial legacies which served as sources of many African problems is boundary. The borders of African states were made in the Berlin conference of peaceful partitioning of Africa by those who were strange to the continent based on their interest without taking into account the very interest and realities of African people (Afisi, 2009:64; Thomson, 2010:14). They simply divided the continent to avoid intra-European war without analyzing the culture, language, ethnicity, and nature of indigenous black Africans. Thus, they arbitrarily divided the boundary of states across the continent. As a result of this, different heterogeneous groups having different language, ethnicity and culture were merged together and at the same time people having common language, ethnicity and culture were also disintegrated. More significantly, Leakey (2002:94) explained that some traditionally hostile groups of people were assigned to the same colony and at the same time some other groups having longstanding peaceful coexistence were separated by porous boundary of the colonizers. This unjust carving of the continent by the Europeans remained to be the root for the postcolonial conflicts in Africa (Kidane, 2011: 19 & Afisi, 2009:65). This is due to the fact that African states are the creation of external colonial powers regardless of their realities. Consequently, the occurrence of various conflicts across the continent has become a common practice.

For the sake of convenience, the following part discusses different violent conflicts which have occurred as a result of arbitrary division of boundaries by taking typical country cases. Accordingly, conflicts are identified as intra and inter-state conflicts which are emanated from boundary related problem and subsequent fragmentation and amalgamation of ethnic groups.

3.1. Intra-state Conflicts
European countries, for the sake of avoiding intra-Europe conflict, imposed far reaching effect of intra-state and inter-state conflicts through their selfishly motivated invisible demarcation of African boundary. The arbitrary division of ethnic communities and the subsequent occurrence of ethnic violence are the legacies of colonialism which ignored cultural differences during the creation of artificial state borders (Alemazung, 2010:65). While colonial powers partitioned the continent, they failed to take into account the nature of ethnic groups so that different ethnic conflicts are put together in the same countries of the continent. Accordingly, different African countries experienced intra-state ethnic conflicts. In this connection, Nguendi (2012:1) noted that “many intra-state conflicts in Africa have been sparked by the forceful fusion of incompatible national groups into one state by the imposition of artificial boundaries by colonial powers”. The following are some of the countries which suffered from it.

3.1.1. Rwanda
It is well remembered that the devastating and most deadly ethnic conflict in the African states is the Rwandan ethnic violence which resulted in the loss of several thousands of life. As Alemazung (2010:66) noted “one of the worst examples of colonialism founded ethnic rivalry and consequential conflicts is the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda which was characterized by the attempted extermination of the Tutsi and moderate Hutu races in the country”. This was the result of the deliberate act of the colonizer (Belgium) through creating superiority and inferiority among the two ethnic groups which later resulted in destructive genocide by the Hutu against Tutsi in the form of revenge (ibid). The violent conflict between Hutu and Tutsi of Rwanda which led to such a destructive genocide was, thus, a result of communication gap between the two tribes (Afisi, 2009:64). The colonial powers created a disparity between groups by making superiority of one over the other for their own selfish interest. Thus, the differences got widen and widen thereby blocking communication and mutual understanding and hastening the outbreak of conflict among such ethnic groups. This is really what was manifested in the Rwanda genocide. This shows how far the outgoing colonial rule left behind its long lasting adverse effect to the contemporary Africa. In general, as Nguendi (2012:6) asserts it is the blind fusion of two incompatible ethnic groups which resulted in the most devastating massacre of Rwanda in 1994. The loss of the life of huge number of population was, thus, the byproduct of the colonial rule.

3.1.2. Nigeria
Nigeria is also one of the countries which are arbitrarily bounded. According to Afisi (2009:64), Nigeria embraces more than two hundred ethnic groups and languages having divergent interest in terms of social, political as well as economic aspects. Osinubi and Osinubi (2006:108) also clearly stated that:

“The three regions in which Nigeria was divided at independence were each dominated by a majority tribe or ethnic group constituting about two thirds of the regional population: the Hausa–Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Ibo in the Eastern Region. The remainder of the population in each region consisted of a number of minority tribes with their own separate culture and languages”.

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Nigeria is as diverse as this. It is the colonial power which deliberately and systematically divided the Nigerian people and provided conducive environment to the outbreak of ethnic tension in the country (ibid: 2006:101). These more diverse ethnic groups with more divergent interests experienced various conflicts as well as several deaths and displacements. In other words, the political history of Nigeria is civil wars and violent conflicts among different tribes. Thus, the legacy of colonialism has played an important role in these hostilities.

And, in expressing the extent, it is further noted that “from Warri in the South to Zango-Kataf and Kafanchan in the North and from Aguleri- Umuleri in the East to Ife-Modakeke in the West, neighboring communities have pounce on each other with destructive fury justified by longstanding rivalries (ibid: 2006:108).” Therefore, it is possible to safely say that the colonial legacy has a central place in the ethnic violence of the country and the continent at large.

Moreover, Jacob and Saad (2011:32) noted that religious motivated conflicts between the northerners and non northerners are also traced back to the early days of colonialism. Besides this, the colonial’s tactic of divide and rule as well as making discrimination among the groups by favoring one over the other specially to the northern, and making them not to rise against the colonials still inherited by the northerners in treating others (ibid:34-35).

At the top of all, the current continuing influence of Boko Haram in the northern part of the country has also its foundation in the legacy of colonialism (Ahokeg, 2012:51). Hence, colonialism left the country with continuing tensions. Putting it differently, the adverse effect of colonialism is still with Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

### 3.1.3. Sudan

The other good typical example of intra-state conflict which is caused by blind amalgamation of two incompatible ethnic groups is Sudan’s conflict. Sudan was under the colonial rule of Britain which joined the two distinctive ethnic groups and administered differently providing priority and favors for one over the other for the sake of its effective control. In this regard, Nguendi (2012:8) best stated the way British ruled the country as follows.

> “The overall British policy in the Sudan amounted to what Mapenda and Saki have described as a policy of ‘differential modernization’, which consisted of giving preference to some communities and geographical areas of the colonial entity at the expense of others, with the objective of dividing to better control. The end result of this was that on the eve of independence, Sudan was a very divided country, de-facto split into a more educated, more skilled and more politically empowered Muslim-Arabic north and a less educated, less-skilled and less politically empowered Christian and Animist black South.”

This discriminatory policy of the colonizer created sharp disparities among the two groups. As a result, they experienced a long and deadly civil war in the region up until the birth of Republic of South Sudan in the recent past. The northern Muslim ethnic group government of Khartoum using its power forcefully imposed fundamentalist political Islam on the southern black. This religious superiority/domination brought civil war which lasted for a long period of time (Sisay, 2006:6). This two ethnic/religious groups experienced a deadly civil wars which brought the creation of the Republic of South Sudan. Thus, the contribution of the legacy of its ex-colonizer’s brutal and discriminatory rule is at the center of such hostilities.

### 3.2. Inter-state Conflicts

The legacy of colonialism is not limited to intra-state conflicts across the continent. It also contributed to the outbreak of inter-state conflicts due to the fragmentation of same ethnic groups into different countries. Thus, the following are some typical examples of inter-state conflicts which emanated from the disintegration of same ethnic groups.

#### 3.2.1. Kenya -Somalia Conflict

Arbitrary boundary and subsequent fragmentation of ethnic groups also caused the inter-state conflicts across several states of the continent. One notable example is the conflict of Kenya and Somalia where the segment of ethnic groups of the latter unfortunately merged into the former. This is the reason for a long tension between the two states. Thomson (2010:25) noted that north-eastern Kenya has a large ethnic Somali population, many of whom identify more with their ethnic origins rather than the Kenyan state, and the Somali certainly wished to make this part of Kenya become Somali sovereign territory. The Somali ethnic groups are not fused with only Kenya but also
other neighbor countries which created Somali irredentism aiming at controlling those Somali inhabited parts of the neighboring countries. This further resulted in different guerrilla wars in those provinces. Accordingly, the Shifta wars, being supported by the Somali state, in Kenya’s Somali-inhabited north eastern province were took place so as to unite all Somali-inhabited areas in the region under the Somali state (Kidane, 2011: 13). The Kenyan government having inherited this contentious boundary encountered with such irredentist wars. In return, Kenyan government making alliance with neighboring other country (Ethiopia) engaged in the support of the Somali insurgent groups to secure the territorial integrity of the country (ibid: 13-14). Thus, it is this arbitrary fragmentation of the Somali ethnic groups across several states that contributed to the turmoil in the Horn of Africa region. Having the logic of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’ each of these countries fought each other by supporting each other’s dissident groups. Therefore, the imperial boundary and its fragmentation of ethnic groups resulted in such a persisting violence.

As Thomson (2010:25) noted, there are still many Somalis living in Kenya who owe their political loyalties more to their relatives in Somalia than to the Kenyan government. Therefore, from this one can deduce that the legacy of colonialism has still the potential to create future conflicts among those concerned countries.

3.2.2. Ethiopia-Somalia Conflicts

The Ethiopia-Somalia conflicts are also attributed to the effect of colonialism. The Somali irredentism which aimed at creating Greater Somalia by incorporating Somali speaking groups in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya is also a concern for Ethiopia. As Richards and Bekele (2011:17-18) stated Somalian region has been center of competition and clash among different groups since time immemorial having the causal factor, *inter alia*, the legacies of European colonialism that has influenced the history of conflict in the region. It is further articulated that the creation of colonial boundaries disintegrated substantial Somali populations to live outside of Somalia (in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti) so that the countries have been inextricably linked (ibid: 17-18). The disintegration of its people forced Somalia to continuously strive to regain them by clashing with neighbor countries, in this case Ethiopia. The Ogaden war which happened from 1977-1978 is one devastating war which cannot be left unmentioned in the Ethiopia-Somalia relations. This war was occurred as a result of the ambition of Somalia to create Greater Somalia by taking the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and other Somali inhabited areas of the country (Richards and Bekele, 2011:21; Nguendi, 2012:8). The more recent Ethiopian intervention and station in Somalia for a certain years as well as Ethiopian support of the insurgents serve as best manifestation of its struggle to contain the irredentists who aspire to gain Ogaden.

As Kidane (2011: 21) asserted these two countries fought three major wars, the first one was over Somalia’s claims to the Somali-inhabited Ogaden region of Ethiopia, which stayed from 1961 to 1967 as low intensity conflict. The second Ethiopia-Somalia war was also fought from 1977-1978 for the same reason. The third war between the two countries occurred between 2006 and 2009 where Ethiopia took proactive measure fearing the aspiration of Islamic Courts Union to unite all Somalis under one state as a threat to its stability and territorial integrity. Hence, these all wars were fought to restore the departed Somali segments.

In a nutshell, the arbitrary boundary and subsequent fragmentation of Somali ethnic groups across the aforementioned states contributed to the hostility of the region as a whole besides the two countries’ conflicts. Thus, colonialism has a lot to do with inter-state conflicts in Africa which still persist.

3.3. The North Africa’s Arab Revolution

The wave of Arab uprising that began in Tunisia in December 2010 rapidly spread into many countries and overthrew some autocratic regimes. The Arab spring, particularly incidents in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, can also be associated with their colonial experiences. Though imperialists had withdrawn, these states were not completely free from their imperialists’ influence; rather it is simply a minor move from direct rule to indirect one. The increased level of influence from outside resulted in the rise of dictatorship in those North African countries (Morris, 2012:14). There has been a continuation of colonial way of creating control and legitimacy and ultimately security through force and political repression at the expense of citizens’ democratic freedoms (ibid).

Military rule of the post independence African states includes those leaders, *inter alia*, Bourguiba of Tunisia and Nasser of Egypt. They like other countries’ leaders promoted military rule. For instance, Egypt was one most important Arab country that has emerged military-led regime (Podeh, 2011:19). These states emerged to be dictatorial shattering any opposition group in the country as well as oppressing the people’s rights and freedoms. In
this connection, Qaddafi in his book "The Green Book" expressed that political party is modern instrument of dictatorial government and the existence of several political parties exacerbate struggle over power and harms public benefits. Likewise, Unsor (2012:1) also described that "Arab countries have for many years under authoritarian and autocratic regimes and oppressive colonial and non-colonial dictatorships, followed by a period of independence distinguished by its military coups and rule by either a single party or a single individual". Hence, their post independence dictatorship is the continuation of their colonial experience.

These Arab countries experienced similar colonial brutal experience. Especially, the Libyan people suffered a lot from one of the most brutal colonial powers in Africa and huge number of people died during this colonial period including 60,000 in Italian concentration camps before the holocaust (Ahmida, 2011:1). In addition, the evil colonial rule remained to exist with the Libyan society and it is this which is the real crux of the revolution (ibid: 2&6).

From the aforementioned issues, therefore, one can understand that like what happened in other African countries Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya had suffered from brutal, oppressive and inhumane treatment of European colonizers. This highly influenced them and thereby inherited their colonial experiences and become authoritarian and ruled by power thirsty military rulers. Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt, and Qaddafi of Libya were those dictator rulers who recently ruled these Arab countries. They gave priority for consolidating their power so as to stay in power by disregarding freedoms, rights and interests of the public. These military rulers deprived the very interest of the people so that the people developed bad sentiment against their rulers. Later on, the situations got worsen and the revolution broke out. This revolution resulted in loss of the life of huge number of population and massive material destructions. Finally, the revolution ended with toppling down those authoritarian rulers, namely Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Qaddafi.

In a nutshell, the revolution in the North Africa shows directly or indirectly the legacy of colonialism besides other contributing factors. Thus, the far reaching effect of colonialism is still apparent in the contemporary African problems.

4. Conclusion
Africa had been under the yoke of colonialism since the 19th century up until the 20th century. In this colonial era, Africa experienced an exploitative, brutal and harsh colonial administration. Colonialism terminated in Africa in 1994. Nonetheless, the physical departure of colonial powers does not make the continent free from the impact of colonialism. Thus, the legacy of brutal colonial rule remains intact.

One major legacy of colonialism is intra and inter-state conflicts which emanated from the arbitrary boundary made by colonial powers. Colonial powers blindly carve up borders of states and thereby merged together different ethnic groups and fragmented same ethnic groups. This caused both intra and inter-state conflicts. Rwanda, Nigeria, and Sudan can be good examples for intra-state conflicts which are resulted from the fusion of incompatible ethnic groups into one country and the favor made to one ethnic group over the other at the time of colonization. The Kenya-Somalia and Ethio-Somalia conflicts are also best examples of inter-state conflicts which emanated from fragmentation of same ethnic groups across several states as the result of the creation of arbitrary boundary. In this case, Somali ethnic groups are dispersed to neighboring countries, namely Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. Thus, the ambition of Somalia to create a Greater Somalia by regaining those Somali ethnic groups in Ethiopia and Kenya has caused the aforementioned interstate conflicts. The recent North Africa’s Arab Revolution is also attributed, inter alia, to the brutal experience with the colonial masters.

References


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