# A Reinterpretation of Colonialism in Africa: Settler and Non-Settler Colonies

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts a reinterpretation of European colonisation of Africa with particular reference to settler and non-settler colonies in Africa. Colonial system whether it is "indirect rule" practiced by the British, the French "assimilation" and "association", German "paternalism", Portuguese "Luso-tropicalism" etc have the same motives and tendencies aimed at exploitation, peripherialisation and pauperisation of the African people in all parameters for their material benefits. The methodological approach adopted in this research is "qualitative method". Secondary source materials have been utilised, which comprised mainly published books that have been critically analysed. In the findings, why some colonies have been inhabited by white settlers while others not and why the settlers did not vacate after independence and the implications of this development in Africa. This paper also attributed most of the present conditions and situations in Africa to be connected to colonial legacies. These include conflicts of different kinds, militancy, social dislocation, complexity in Africa as well as neocolonialism. It has been observed that colonial conquest of Africa resulted in strangulating the African societies and making them dwarf and the bereft of mental initiatives towards societal development.
**Keywords:** Colonialism, Colonies, Europeans, Non-Settler and Settler.

## INTRODUCTION

It is imperative if not necessary to start by defining the concept 'colonialism' which is the basic issue that culminated in to the emergence of the two most important variables (settler and non-settler colonies) that forms the focal point of this chapter.

Like many other concepts in the humanities, colonialism could be perceived differently depending on the subject matter and understanding of an individual; that is to say that there is no single definition of the term. Literally, however, it could be seen as "the exercise of political and economic sovereignty by a country or territory outside its borders" [1]. It is the domination of a weaker nation by a stronger nation in all facets of national life, and by extension, a continued process of capitalism. Colonialism has often been established by military conquest followed by an occupation of a territory and settlement or establishment of colonial rule through varied instruments of administration that places the colonised in a subservient position [1]. In fact, several Greek city-states established colonies in different parts of the World. Alexander the Great of Macedonia for example, conquered many territories and established an empire that encompasses large areas of modern Middle East, Central Asia and Africa [2]. Rome later established a vast colonial empire throughout Western and Southern Europe as well as the Middle East [1]. The Ottoman Empire too had featured prominently as far as colonialism was concerned during her hay-days.

The mercantilist era changed the tide of colonialism when Africa was discovered by the Europeans toward the last quarter of the 15th century as a result of the voyage of discoveries championed by the Portuguese. The discovery of Africa informed the Europeans decision to establish contact with Africans in different ramifications that later evolved into colonialism. At the early beginning of this historical epoch, Britain, France, Portugal and Spain were the forerunners of this venture. During the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, new colonial powers emerged; Belgium, Germany, Russia, Italy and Japan [1]. The emergence of these new actors became known as the era of new imperialism. However, there were few European colonies in Africa before 1880, but by the early 1900, virtually the entire continent was under the control of European powers who were ordained by the Berlin Conference of 1884/5 to partition and/or balkanise Africa among themselves [1].

From the mid 19th to the early part of the 20th century, that period was well known for pacification, when many African states were forcibly made to acknowledge the supremacy of the imperial western hegemony at the expense of their political independence

hitherto they have enjoyed. Nevertheless, the Africans did not submit to the Europeans without resistance but were overwhelmed by the fire-fighting-power of the Europeans [3]. However, considering the wind of change that was blowing across Africa, some of the rulers took a lesson from the antecedents of others and submitted to the Europeans without confrontation.

**Conceptual Explanation**

There were two types of colonies established by the Europeans in Africa during the late 19th and beginning to the middle of 20th centuries. Historians, Political scientists, Sociologists and Anthropologists among others have classified these into settler and non-settler colonies [4]. Non-settler colonies, means those colonies that were not completely inhabited by Europeans. Geographical factor has contributed in the establishment of the Europeans in the settler colonies. Climatic condition in most of the settler colonies was not as harsh as in the non-settler colonies. Also, the land in the settler colonies was fertile and favourable for agricultural production. The colonisers were not by any means willing to stay for too long in the non-settler colonies. This could be due to the environmental factor; unfavourable climate characterised by excessive heat and mosquitoes. Britain and France colonies had the bulk of the non-settler colonies in Africa. Non-settler colonies were seen as entirely new political entities different from the metropolitan countries of Europe but that the Africans needed to be enlightened, a "Dark Continent" which need the support of the Europeans [5]. Britain and France for instance were not all out to remain in their colonies having perceived that decolonisation was a lawful act [6].

Settler colonies on the other hand witnessed the presence of European settlers who left their countries of origin to settle permanently in the colonies. Such types of colonies were found in different parts of Africa, mostly established by Portuguese, French and Britons. In Kenya for instance, there were British settlers who engaged in the "white highlands" agricultural initiation. In the northern and southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia), South West Africa (Namibia), Nyasaland (Malawi) and South Africa Republic, the presence of British settlers was evident [7]. In the case of France, Algeria was the colony where French nationals settled in large number [8]. Portugal was well known for establishing settler colonies in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau which were seen as extension of the metropolitan country elsewhere.

The idea behind the establishment of settler colonies in Africa is not far from the same reasons for the establishment of colonial rule. Economic motives surpassed any other explanation that could be presented. Britain and France were on a transitional stage having been in touch with industrialisation. The two countries were known for their commercial enterprise which cannot be devoid of the new industrial development and as such, commercial intercourse with the outside world was inevitable. For the European powers to procure raw-materials therefore, it became necessary to some extent to further extend their influence beyond their territories. The case of Portugal was different that it had to struggle hard to meet up with the other European nations. Being the poorest, it could be ascertained that Portugal was compelled to occupy Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau in a different colonial approach compared to Britain and France. One important thing to note is that the settlers did not lose their citizenship by emigrating to the colonies [6].

**Administration of the Colonies Compared**

European powers had different forms of administration in their African colonies. The British and French policies of Indirect Rule (British), Assimilation and Association (French) respectively were the most subtle compared to the more stringent and cumbersome German, Belgian and Portuguese paternalism. In the former, the relationship was to provide guidance to the natives while in the latter; it was either a son and father or master and slave. Even where Britain and France had settler colonies, the system remain the same. In the case of the Portuguese, they did not have any non-settler colony in Africa.

Many institutional reforms proved that Britain and France would one day grant independence to their colonies in Africa considering such reforms as: the changes in the balance of representation on the legislative and executive councils; by exchanging the franchise and by localising the public service [6]. In West Africa, for instance, Gold Coast was granted Cabinet Government in 1950 [6]. The British and French also set a time limit for self-government [6]. Dennis Austin was of the view that in terms of transfer of power, British gave unusual emphasis to the local autonomy of the colonial unit [6]. He goes further to say that 'the British Empire was non-integrative; hence were seen as self-governing colonies [6]. According to N. Mansergh [9]:

*The British people have never fundamentally believe in the system of colonial domination but in people governing themselves. And because of this faith in self-government they considered the colonial system as a necessary albeit transitory, especially to lead the uneducated to political maturity.*

Despite the fact that both Britain and France policies made use of traditional institutions in administering their colonies, nevertheless, there were such fundamental differences in their systems [9]. Both powers had little alternative to the use of existing political authorities as a means of governing their colonial possessions. The nature of the position and

power of the chiefs in the two systems was different. In the British colonies such as Nigeria, Gold Coast, Uganda etc., the chiefs were well recognised than in the French territories. The relation between the British political officers and the chiefs was that of adviser and rarely the British political officers intervened [9]. While in the French colonies, the traditional rulers were merely colonial subjects. Very few of the traditional rulers were given due recognition by the French government. These rulers include those of the Northern Cameroon, Niger and upper Volta to mention but a few. However, the Portuguese colonial policy did not recognise the existence of the traditional political institutions because the relation was that of "father and son". Hence, the Portuguese colonies were seen as an extension of their home government that had to be administered directly from the metropole.

The Portuguese settlers came to better themselves materially in Africa [4]. To achieve those objectives of extortion and exploitation, their government promulgated laws defining the areas of economic activities which were open to Africans; in this way cutting off a large proportion of the traditionally subsistence economic activities. Millions of Africans were forced to divert their agricultural production at the expense of the Portuguese economic demands for industrial development of the metropolitan country [4]. Native Africans were systematically forced to grow cotton instead of their own subsistence food crops [4].

Portuguese administration was characterised by series of obnoxious laws aimed at controlling the activities of the Africans in all their colonies. Free movement of African was restricted. Natives must carry along with them special passes whenever and wherever they were to go. They were also prohibited from being seen in public places after certain hours of the day [4]. Native African activities were so restricted that in some cases they could not slaughter their own cattle, sell them, or give them away without special authorisation from the Portuguese authorities. Africans could open bank accounts but could not withdraw their own monies without the permission of the local administrators [4]. Portuguese settlers in Africa are on the top of pyramidal structure in their three African colonies. They subjected Africans to unnecessary socio-economic and political dislocations to which they could not recover up to date. The Portuguese like the French believe in changing the mindset of the Africans culturally. They had a policy which is called "assimilados" similar to the French "assimilation". According to their colonial doctrine, those who assimilated i.e. assimilados were to enjoy the same rights and privileges with those in their metropolitan capital, Lisbon. Portuguese colonial administrators argued that colonialism was egalitarian in nature hoped to develop and civilise Africans.

The reality of colonialism in Africa is not farfetched from economic motives. Other motives postulated were there but secondary. Exploitation of resources in both the settler and non-settler colonies in Africa was characterised by exploitation, peripherialisation and pauperisation; foreign direct investment, infrastructural development, forced labour, production of raw-materials or cash crops, agricultural development were at the mercy and well-being of the metropolitan countries [18]. None of the colonial policies that were not directed to the above mentioned developments. The only disparity is that Britain and France were more liberal compared to Portugal.

**Decolonisation Process**

The process of decolonisation accelerated rapidly in the entire Africa continent after 1945. Britain in particular set the pace for granting her colonies independence starting with India and Pakistan in 1947 respectively [5]. Also, France had relinquished her colonies in West Africa. France and Portugal had to go into confrontation with their subjects (Settler colonies) particularly the case of France in Algeria which ultimately resulted into war [10]. Belgium too was reluctant to grant Congo independence even when the wind of change was blowing across Africa. Decolonisation process started with reforms in the colonies especially in the non-settler colonies. Most of the pioneer nationalists such as Dr Nnamdi Azikwe, Hadj Messali, Kwame Nkurumah, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyate etc did not advocate for self-government at the initial stage, but agitated for socio-political and economic reforms to improve the condition of Africans. The early form of nationalism was consolidated through political parties, newspapers, pressure groups etc.

Dennis Austin's view on the march to freedom was diabolical. He posits that transfer of power by Britain to her dependencies could be seen in thesis, anti thesis and synthesis [6]. This view is not far from the intents of other European powers that had possessions in Africa. In the thesis, the Europeans had already set a time limit within which they will grant independence to colonies, both settler and non-settler. They made some necessary arrangements suitable for transfer of power to Africans. Looking at the anti thesis, it was an irony of their earlier view in terms of self-government. Some of the colonialists would either say some states are too small, too poor or have lacked the manpower for self-government [6]. According to Lennox Boyd [6]:

*…………….we had a hundred years of steady progress in which to bring all our colonial territories to maturity their independence would cause no misgiving but we are now working in terms of a decade or so………..*

However, the synthesis was a catalyst for the colonial system in Africa that has to do with antecedents or developments outside and within Africa

dated back to the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. In fact, by the early 1960s, the tempo of decolonisation has increased in Africa [6]. In essence, Dennis postulation observed that synthesis involve the use of force or coercive means for self-actualisation [8, 11]. It has been argued that some colonies in African were graciously granted independence on a round table conference or on the "platter of gold" while others through armed struggle. Analytically, this assertion goes to show that the settler colonies were those that had to use coercive means to gain independence while the non-settler colonies got it on the platter of gold informed by the colonial situations. In the non-settler colonies the situation was not that critical compared to that in the settler colonies which was characterised by "total exploitation" and brutality. This view is subjective because no African country where lives were not lost in the process of decolonisation. Even if not all, many of the nationalists such as Kwame Nkurumah, Nnamdi Azikwe, Ben Bella, Casely Hyford, Julius Nyerere, Nelson R. Mandela etc have suffered the wrath of colonial tyranny; many were lambasted, castigated, incarcerated and lampooned. Considering the struggles and what the colonialist jettisoned the nationalist, one can rightly say that the notion of independence on the platter of gold was an old idea. To buttress this assertion however, there is the need to flash-back to the antecedents in the non-settler colonies. Riots became eminent in the British colonies of West and East Africa. Among these riots were the Aba Women Riot of 1929 [12] which claimed the lives of about fifty women with the same number fatally injured due to the brutality of the security under the British colonial administration. Other riots were; Accra Riot of 1948 and Buganda Riot of 1953, all as a result of the British socio-economic and political policies [13]. Also in Kenya, there was unrest among the Kikuyu between 1952-6 which turned into a guerilla movement that threatened open revolt, which the British called "Mau Mau" [10]. Belgium also had her share of protest in her colonies. Protest movement became better organised in 1958 up to 1960 in Congo, Burundi and Rwanda [10].

French colonies in North Africa demonstrated some form of violence in their decolonisation processes. In Tunisia, there was guerilla movement; the guerilla fighters were known as *"fellaghas"* numbered about 13,000 that vehemently fought the French forces [8]. The removal of Sultan Mohammed V of Morocco and the imposition of their puppet Sultan Ben Arafa caused serious resentment that necessitated the reinstatement of Mohammed V [8].

France and Portugal faced the Africans revolutionary forces particularly in the settler colonies. The African forces employed guerilla tactics in places like Algeria, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe [10, 8]. The movements were characterised by protest, guerilla actions, riots, hartals, boycotts, suicide bombings and assassinations [6]. Algerian war of independence (1954-1956) commonly referred to as "Algerian Revolution" was the bloodiest revolutionary movement for liberation in Africa. The revolution was spearheaded by the National Liberation Front (FNL) of Hadj Messali, Algerian elite who worked with the French Automobile Company; Renault [8]. During the revolution, nearly half a million Berbers-Arab Algerians were killed while the French army lost not less than 20,000 men [8]. Despite the presence of large number of French forces in Algeria numbering about half a million, they could not contain the situation. The French "eyes and ears" i.e. the native spies or informants of the French police were the first victims. Farms, shops and properties owned by the "colons" were set ablaze.

Most of the British and French colonies got their independence in the 1960s especially those in West Africa. But as regards to the Portuguese colonies they remained under the saddles of colonial rule only to get their independence following stiff resistance and with the support of international communities. However, it could be argued that the success of the independence of Portuguese colonies was not unconnected with the coup that ousted the dictatorial government in Portugal [4].

Furthermore, in some of the settler colonies the colons or white settlers were given considerable recognition. In Rhodesia i.e. northern and southern parts and Nyasaland under British yielded some considerable degree of self-government [11]. The granting of semi-autonomous rule was not without resentment. In southern Rhodesia, the settlers unilaterally declared their independence in 1965 [10, 5]. Before then, there was an advisory council in southern Rhodesia in 1923, followed by northern Rhodesia in 1924 which gave the settlers a share in the administration [5]. South Africa was unique in that there were three different successive struggles at a time; that of the Boers or Afrikaners, the British element who regarded themselves as the English speaking South Africans not as English or British [11], and the native Africans who were mostly regarded as the Bantu stock. Among these groups, the struggle by the latter became the most prolonged which extended to the 1970s and 80s. It was characterised by the same pattern in Algeria, Guinea Bissau and Angola. The ultimate means to self-determination as observed by the nationalist must employ stringent measures [11]. In Southern Africa, the galaxy of nationalists like Robert Sobukwe, Oliva Thambo, Nelson Rolihlala Mandela and Albert Lithuli were all incarcerated for their radical nationalism which produced 'mass-action' of militancy, sabotage and violence [11]. Spills of blood that could not be measured or quantified were lost to the struggle for independence which was actualised between the late 1957 to early part of 1980s [1].

## Colonial Legacies

On a general note, colonialism in the settler or non-settler colonies, Africans had lost their hitherto enjoyed independence and had become subservient to the imperialists. The powers vested in the traditional rulers in great empires, kingdoms and chiefdoms diminished. It is better recognised in the British colonies that in the French territories; the worst being the Portuguese colonies. There was serious alteration in the traditional political institutions, the colonial administrators intervened and thus reducing its glamour. In this regard, there were two issues of concerns: firstly, in the centralised states of Africa, the powers of the rulers of great empires like Oyo, Sokoto Caliphate, Borno, Monomotapa, Buganda, Myamwezi, etc had reduced. The Alaketu of Ketu and the ruler of Zinder were lowered to bearest minimum by the French colonial administrators [14]. Secondly, the non-centralised states of eastern Nigeria and some parts of Kenya among others witnessed innovation, something new that was not part of their tradition. The creation of a central figure other than the lineage-based government was institutionalised. This caused serious resentment by the people before the new traditional authorities could be recognised. Thirdly, the colonial administration set the pace for turmoil, mistrust and misunderstanding among Africans [15]. This could be traced back to the creation of artificial boundaries which brought people from different backgrounds without their consent into mere geographical expression than a nation. The root of discontent could be seen where the colonialists favored one particular group over another. In Sierra Leone, the creoles enjoyed honour and emolument than the natives. Larger percentages of the budgetary allocations were expended on them in services such as schools, healthcare, infrastructural development etc [16]. In Rwanda and Burundi, the Hutu and Tutsi were at logger-heads because of the preference to Tutsi ethnic nationalities against the Hutu [17]. Lack of equal rights from the colonial period must have been the cause of civil wars in most parts of the Africa. In addition, the legacies of revolutionary movements and self-determination may be another cause of civil wars in Africa. In many parts of Africa, nationalists and intelligentsia such as Frantz Fanon, Amilca Cabral, Hadj Messali, Habib Bourguiba advocated for violence as a means of change. Therefore, that element of radicalism towards change could be seen as an igniter of conflicts with the aim of changing the status quo. Moreover, the rise of militancy in Africa had its roots from the struggle for liberation in the settler colonies.

Economic imbalance is another impact of the settler and non-settler colonies in Africa. Economics exploitation was the main driver of colonialism. Attention of the colonisers was more focused in areas where there are gains, resources exploitable areas. The areas that attracted the attention of the Europeans witnessed considerable growth and development. These places later become cities with improve conditions of living and become centres of economic activities in Africa. Some of these cities include Kano, Lagos, Port-Harcourt, Accra, Tamale, Takoradi, Kumasi, Abidjan, St. Louis, Rufisque, Johannesbough. Witwatersrand, Kimberley, Freetown, Niamey, Oumdurman, Kampala, Kingshasha, Arusha, Salisbury, etc. The commercial activities and other opportunities in the urban centres led to rural-urban drift. The rural areas thus becoming more backward characterised by illiteracy, lack of infrastructural development, poverty, hunger and anger etc. However, only South Africa was able to be on the track of industrial development in the whole of Africa modeled by the colonialist. None of the colonizers developed their colonies industrially. This had affected Africa in the drive to industrialization in that the cottage industries that would have been developed were technically destroyed, and secondly, Africa has become the market place for the metropolitan country's finished goods.

Development in the settler and non-settler colonies has not been equal. Even between the British and French colonies in West Africa for example, the British territories are more developed. Worst of all, the development is concentric, the cities and commercial centers are more developed. The rural areas which serve as base of African economy received less or no attention by the colonialists and had continued up to the present day despite efforts by national and inter-national governments and non-governmental organizations in ensuring inclusiveness in all facets.

One of the impacts of settler colonies in Africa culminated in the alteration of race relations. Africa is the land of "Blacks or Negroes" and by extension, Arabs. With the establishment of settler colonies, Africa comprised three races; Negroid, Mongloid and Caucasoid respectively. It is a known fact that the white populations of European origin in places like Zimbabwe, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde, and Principe, South Africa etc have no any other place to go other than the countries which they found themselves. This development does not only affect the settler colonies alone. There is cross-breeding among the natives of Africa and the Europeans generally across the continent which produced what is commonly known today as "half-caste". Over the time, the relationship between the native Africans and the settlers worsened particularly with the emergence of the 'Apartheid regime' in South Africa. The apartheid regime is one of the negative impacts on Africa. Africans in their homeland were subjected to different forms of segregation and discrimination which subjected them to acute poverty and underdevelopment.

In the settler colonies, independence was not granted at the same time with the non-settler colonies. Non-settler colonies in Africa started to gain their

independence in 1957. By the 1960s, almost all the non-settler colonies achieved self-government [1]. The colonies that were under Portuguese rule could not achieve their independence until in the middle of the 1970s [1]. However, in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe's struggle took a long time and the country was liberated in 1980 [1].

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this paper has identified and discussed the background to colonialism from the ancient or classical period to the era of new imperialism. The system employed by various European powers in administering their colonies in Africa has been analysed. The pros and cons of each system on African societies have been digested. Important to note, this paper has assessed the nature, characteristics and organisation of colonial rule in settler and non-settler colonies. The legacy of the establishment of settler and non-settler colonies was not without grievous implications on African polities that led to the loss of power of the traditional rulers and independence of African societies, European economic control of Africa, impoverishment of Africans, uneven development, revolutionary movements, wars and conflicts, evolution of complex African societies characterised by different races, establishment of apartheid and elongation of independence more especially in the settler colonies. Moreover, with these, Africa is still battling with the challenges of governance in that no any country is able to conceptualise an ideal system of government suitable for the continent. Neo-colonialism which is another form of domination becomes the new order accompanied by colonial legacies that devoid the conceptualisation of Africa for the Africans and by the Africans.

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