

Alex Khoper

African Politics

Adibe, Clement

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Question 1

The “Scramble for Africa” could not have been better timed than during the industrialization of Europe. Under such slogans as ending slavery and civilizing the barbarians, the Europeans marched into Africa to divide the wealth of a continent. It was a dual mandate for “protecting and civilizing” Africa, while at the same time exploiting it. Through chartered companies, the governments at home were able to profit, while those companies exercised political, as well as military control of the Africans. The support for such profits and manipulation of Africa was driven by nothing other than public patriotism and nationalism. This patriotism during a time of technological development and accumulation of wealth by rivaling European countries was leading to war. Fortunately, Africa was seen as fair game where great powers of Europe could play without stepping on each others toes. Laying aside their ambitions in Europe; France, Germany, Italy, along with Britain emerged as major claimants of African “colonies.” Through the use of treaties, which were completely misinterpreted by local

chiefs, these countries were able to amass huge quantities of land. In return, they claimed to modernize the Africans by introducing laws and policies, which were influenced by racism and greed. And while encouraging the natives to educate themselves, to cultivate and eventually become European citizens, they were not given the same rights as white Europeans. Colonization of Africa was driven by self-indulgence and the need to make money, while disguising it by claims of being “protectorates and trustees of backward races” and the barbarians, who would only be treated as such through racist policies and practices.

The relationship between Britain and Africa was that of trade partners in the early 19th century. Great Britain possessed a few lands in Africa, mostly supplying oils and other food sources. The land was typically used by explorers, merchants, and missionaries and no major conflicts with the natives had arisen. With the industrialization of Europe, other nations began to militarize and imperialize. Britain was more concerned with its trade with East Indies and Asia and had not yet realized the potential of Africa. Its motives were strategic and defensive. While other motives did exist, such as to colonize, to search for new markets and materials, to attain world prestige, to convert natives to Christianity, and to spread their style of government, the main motives still remained to protect existing land

holdings. They would not have to wait long to change their objective as other European nations were beginning to be interested in Africa as well. They decided that Africa was too rich a land to leave untapped. In response, Britain began to turn trade agreements into stronger and more formal protectorates and even colonies. Britain's imperialist involvement in the partition and scramble for Africa was a response to the actions of French and German, among others.

Britain struck first and most fiercest, easily gaining control of numerous rich lands by overpowering the natives with military technology and organization. By 1910, Britain was in full control of Egypt, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, East Africa, Sierra Leone, and most of the Sub-Saharan Africa. British holdings were strategically planned to include the lands with the most amounts of natural resources and positioning that could possibly allow for the invasion of others' holdings in the future. They were also very strategic in its ruling of its colonies. They racistly and oppressively controlled each colony, implementing 2 main political structures; the Direct and Indirect systems of government. These included chartered companies, as well as the appointments of local chiefs or the Lieutenant-Governors, who were all under orders of the British government.

Lord Lugard described such colonial ambitions toward Africa as "dual mandate." The first being the mandate to

the indigenous population, which was the idea of promoting the welfare and advancement of colonial people. The next was the mandate to the rest of the world, which involved the development of Africa and its participation in the world market. According to Lugard, there were 9 reasons for colonization. Under such motives, the British entered colonial Africa.

The first of these bases was geo-strategy. It was the need for Britain to protect its routes to the Indian Empire and at the same time to counter the aggression and imperial motives of France and Germany. Emigration was another reason for colonizing Africa, as more and more Europeans were buying land in Africa. They needed protection from their home governments. The reason, under which most European countries entered Africa, was to end slavery. As Britain outlawed slavery in 1830's, Africa was still troubled by slave-trading wars. This was seen as humanitarian and not exploitation goals and nobody questioned it twice. Another motivation for their involvement was to protect the British missionaries already stationed in Africa. It was another way to make sure Christianity would dominate the region, which led to the next goal of the British, under which it gave them ideological justification. That was "mission civilisatrice," translated to civilizing mission. Britain claimed to colonize Africa to rid it of barbarism and "to promote their moral and educational progress."

Conceivably the real grounds for infiltrating the African continent lay in the last 4 ideas. Britain had been the most dominant power in Europe for centuries before the industrial revolution. As other European nations began to catch up to the dominance of Britain, there was nothing left but pride or vanity. It was a race to see who could gain more in the least amount of time. At the same time, the British had to worry about protecting the chiefs in the already acquired lands. Had they allowed the radicals to gain control, it may have led to an internal revolt resulting in bloodshed and loss of land and profits. Finally, the British wanted to promote and extend their style of government and capitalism, as well as introduce a system of taxation, which would result in more profit.

There were many dimensions to the British colonization of Africa. Only those intentions that promised modernity in Africa were heard by the people in Europe. The real reasons were not. Under such circumstances, the British, along with other European nations were able to penetrate and exploit Africa for what it was.

Unlike Britain, other European countries did not always hide their true intentions for Africa. France and Germany wanted to acquire tropical possessions just because they were seen as "colonisable." Yet, the European nations struggled with the idea of exercising their dominance over the natives. Their "sphere of influence" was limited to certain areas, which they found to be not enough. With the

Act of Berlin, it was agreed that only by retaining real occupation would they be able to maintain order, protect foreigners, and control the natives (p.13).” This way the Europeans could do more “good” than “bad.” The interest in Africa would soon pay off as the continent was rich in natural and raw materials, as well as agricultural superiority.

The British rule of Africa, for the most part, was characterized as indirect rule, unlike the one of France and Germany. This way a colonial official was more of an advisor than direct ruler. Those still in charge, or at least under orders from Britain, yet familiar to the natives would still be the traditional chiefs. In areas where there weren't any chiefs, they were created, which led to many conflicts and non-development. People would see these chiefs as puppets, refusing to cooperate and not eager for change. These, among other approaches led to bigger racial divisions and racist policies.

There were 3 main policies implemented in British colonies. The first was the policy of differentiation. It had to do with a “separate legal and political system for whites and Africans (<http://husky1.stmarys.ca>).” The Africans were exempted from European law, making them second-class citizens in their own land. Although, there were procedures by which they could upgrade to European status, such measures were too difficult for most. Under such

policy, laws were passed which benefited the whites over the natives.

The next policy was the policy of assimilation and no differentiation, which was a new liberal struggle “to eliminate differences in legal status based on colour (<http://husky1.stmarys.ca>).” As more and more territories and their large populations were annexed, the problem had to be addressed on a larger scale. This included rapid assimilation through Christianity, schools, and hospitals. There was also the policy of indirect rule and no assimilation, which dealt with the idea of white advisors in legal matters without any direct control or participation. It was a way to civilize the natives without any direct involvement.

Throughout colonial Africa, policies were introduced, which were racist in nature and which led to racist practices. The idea of “civilizing” in itself is racist. When we add in King Leopold to the picture, it becomes even worse. With his brutal methods of murder, starvation, decapitation and kidnapping for ransom he was able to control the population of Congo which he used for his own personal profit. He gave the natives no rights and they were treated as animals, instead of as human beings.

Such policies and practices impacted Africa on many levels. By forcing Africa into the world economy and later withdrawing its support, Britain, along with many others, forced the destruction of traditional social, economic,

political, and cultural structures of African nations. The sense of community and family spirit was replaced by competition and individualism and further increased ethnic conflicts due to uneven development strategies. Colonization divided Africa into regional and territorial boundaries and decimated African populations. It created economic dependency on the industrialized nations along with general underdevelopment and poverty. Most importantly, it institutionalized national and international racism against Africans and peoples of African descent.

There were not only negative effects due to colonization. Some of the positive effects were modernization and development of industry, particularly transportation. The improvement of education and health systems was another. The rise of nationalism gave Africans a sense of one culture which had to be represented through art and political and economic involvement in today's globalization.

Question 2

During colonization of Africa, European nations acted in a very unilateral, self-concerning environment. There were not many checks and balances between nations and that's why many atrocities took place in African colonies. One of them was Congo. Before E.D. Morel opened the eyes of the world to the events taking place in Congo, many believed that the sole purpose of white Europe even being in Africa was to stop slave trade and to civilize the barbarians. What they didn't know was that Africa contained massive quantities of natural resources, in addition to many exotic foods.

The advantage in technology of the Europeans was no match for the Africans, who were seen as cheap or in some cases free labor. This was exploited by King Leopold, who had no mercy for the natives. He thought his crimes would go unpunished and he invested lots of money to make sure of just that. He, along with many others refused to understand the culture and traditions of the natives. They were not used to the political and social structure of tribes and families. They were interested in enforcing democracy, which was their own promotion of capitalism. The treatment of Africans and their cultures during colonialism has played a big role on their ongoing struggle to find a place within today's global environment.

Today's Africa is no different than the one during colonialism. The rulers of African nations today, while not white, follow the same pattern as those during colonialism. Many of them run their countries as their own personal playgrounds. The same atrocities that went on during colonialism are still going on today. It's also not clear whether the African nations are trying to find their own place in world politics and economics or just trying to satisfy the needs of the West.

There needs to be more pressure applied on Africa to democratize. The problem lays in the absolute rule and military rule of many African countries. Unless the West gets involved, many more people will die for no good cause. We cannot turn Africa into the old colonized Congo. Everyone ignored King Leopold during his totalitarian rule over Congo where the population reduced by half during his rule. No one wanted to know what was really going on in Congo and those that suffered were the people. The same is going on in all of Africa today and the world cannot stand by and learn of the mistreatment and neglect some time in the future.

The international community needs to come together to address such issues as AIDS, malnutrition, starvation and many other problems concerning Africa. Real democracy needs to find a way so that Africa can join the rest of the world in searching for better way of life for its people.

Before colonialism, the African society was organized and based on traditional values. It had not been introduced to mass religion, nor was there a need for nationalism or one culture. Basically, there was no need to modernize. It was a very rich civilization due to many diversities and social structures. Friendship and brotherhood were the main elements of this society, where work was considered as a value and where mutual help was a responsibility. People lived according to traditional values. The elders were seen as the detainers of such values and much respect and honor was given to them. They were in charge of the traditional and moral education of children. The family structure consisted of the father representing the head of the household, being able to choose a husband for his daughter, responsible for hunting and supplying the family with food. Everyone felt as part of a big community where any child could be disciplined by anyone else.

This traditionalistic way of life began to change with the colonization of Africa. New ideas and ways began to penetrate the continent; some forcefully and some not. Africa was pushed into the world economy and had to fight to modernize. New technology, and the new way of thinking began to dominate the way of life. The method of living, speaking, and behaving was beginning to change as well. These new concepts were seen as threats to traditional values. People were being exposed to other cultures

through newly introduced education and the advancement in technology and communication. People were forced to work many hours to support the family. In Congo, during colonialism, families were taken as ransom in order to force men to leave for work for months at a time. The sense of one family was on the decline as parents were not part of their kids' everyday lives.

Art became more and more important. It was a way to save and represent the history of the people. It served and still serves as a representation of national identity. Yet, Diawara argues that there is no other choice but to modernize and to do that means to put art and religion on the back burner. He believes that Africa needs to democratize and let go of the old traditional ways. At least put them in museums and galleries for admiration but concentrate on giving people freedom from oppressive traditions and religions. He stresses the need to advance in technology and democracy, in order to help the African nations in their struggle.

Cultural globalization has reached the shores of African and its people are no longer interested in preserving old traditions or a sense of family. It's all about making money and looking out for themselves. The tales and stories once told by the elderly are replaced by movies and TV shows. Parents and kids work to support the family and find no time to sit together and talk. Those are the consequences of globalization and individualism.

The political change in Africa has taken on a similar path. The need for wealth and dominance over others is what drives many African countries today. There is a wide division between rich and poor, as well as those who welcome change and those that despise it. Diawara talks about how people welcomed him once he came back. They saw him as an outsider, who was no longer one of them. He described the kids going to the bathroom right in front of his hotel, as well as their unwillingness to blame their own government for their misfortunes. He portrays people who are proud of their cultures and traditions, not willing to satisfy the west. Most consider art as the only true African possession, not yet taken by the west. And while they make it for cultural value and representation, the same pieces are sold in the west for millions of dollars. That is why most of them refuse to sell it for profit. Diawara illustrates those in Africa blaming everything on Europe and the United States; for the decline in traditional value to all other misfortunes of colonialism. He depicts them as people not wanting to change.

Those that come back to Africa, such as Diawara, see it in a different light. The so-called Afro-pessimism forces them to blame the African governments for not moving forward. The other blame is with religion, which takes traditional values and turns them into fanatic and radical ideas.

No matter who is to blame, one thing is clear. Africa can't turn back the clock. They don't have a choice other than to modernize and democratize. It has to start with the people and the leaders who need to realize that they are all in it together. Only then, will they be able to set aside all differences and move forward.

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