

An Impact Assessment of the Vestiges of Colonial Administration on African Institutions: A Study of the Nigeria Railway System

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Abstract

Evidence of colonial vestiges and legacies on African institutions are too glaring to be overlooked as they dot virtually every sphere of life in the society. This study examined the impact of these colonial legacies/administration on African institutions with Nigeria as a point of reference. Data was sourced from secondary materials which include books, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers, the internet, etc. The 'theory of dependency' (Prebisch, 1950) was adopted as the theoretical framework while leveraging on the technique of content analysis in its methodology. Results indicated that the colonial masters left certain legacies in the Nigeria Railway System that are difficult to erase as such legacies have constituted the traditional modus operandi in the system. The legacies have slowed the pace of development on the Railway System and need to be erased through reforms. Hence, this paper suggested reforms in the Nigerian Railway System by the government.

Keywords: *Vestiges, Colonial administration, African institutions, Legacies, Reforms.*

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Background to the Study

The direct and overall domination of a country by another on the basis of state power being in the hands of a foreign power is referred to as colonialism. It is a phenomenon which started as a result of changes in the mode of production in Europe (i.e. the emergence of industrial revolution). The phenomenon was a revolutionary trend in the history of mankind which ushered in a new process of production in place of the earlier slave-based economy. Colonialism has as its primary objectives, political domination and exploitation of the colonized economy. Thus, as slavery and the slave trade had fulfilled their basic function of providing the primitive capital, Europe saw the need to reach out to other parts of the world. Africa became vulnerable. Hence, the quest for raw materials and the investment of the accumulated capital following the industrial revolution, led to the colonization of Africa. Nigeria witnessed the domination by the British between 1900-1960.

It has been observed, Olowu (1994) that, the colonial administrations,

Laid down the boundaries of the state, supplied it with governing instrumentalities such as the constitution, governance systems, bureaucratization and educational tools as well as the interconnectivity of African continent with the international economy in a centre-periphery affiliation.

It is in the above vein that, Rodney (1972-32) posited that, “during the colonial period, the forms of political subordination and administrative decisions which the metropolis ensured in Africa were obvious”. Thus, among African states, colonialism has been a pivotal and determinant factor in the development of the contemporary public institutions owing to the fact that it laid down the boundaries of the state.

During the colonial rule, the major powers on the continent set up administrative machineries. The British and the Germans employed local rulers while the French on the other hand, virtually destroyed all indigenous political systems and established their own networks of administrators. Thus, governmental and legal structures bore the marks of the colonial era. This legacy is extended to the present day in all spheres of the societal activities. As a matter of fact, the weakness of postcolonial nations have been attributed to colonialism as the various colonial administrations left legacies in various sectors of the African economies which are quite evident among present day sectors and institutions. Nigeria is one African nation that can always be cited as an instance. Being one of the largest economies on the continent, her colonial masters meticulously left indelible prints in some of her economic institutions including the 'Railway'. It is in this vein that this paper attempts to examine the impact of the legacies of the British colonial masters on the Nigeria Railway System. Specifically, this paper sets out to ascertain the administrative structure/facilities bequeathed on the contemporary Railway system in Nigeria by the colonial administration. The study will also attempt an appraisal of the effect of these administrative structures/machinery on the performance of the Nigeria Railways over the last two decades (20 years). Therefore, the paper will find answers to two research questions.

- (a) What legacies/structures did the British colonial administrators leave behind in Nigeria?

- (b) To what extent have the legacies/structures of the British impacted on the performance of the post-independence Railway System in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Literature

Colony: A colony in political science is a territory subject to a form of foreign rule. The concept of a colony in ancient Greece refers to a home away from home. The city that founds a colony is referred to as its metropolis ('mother city'). According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2021), "a colony is a territory subject to a form of foreign rule". Though dominated by the foreign colonizers, colonies remain separate from the administration of the original country of the colonizers; the metropolitan state (or mother country).

Administration: Any activity geared towards bringing humans (resources) and materials together for the purpose of attaining the goal of an organization is referred to as administration. Simon, Smithbury, Thompson (1950), believe that, "Administration can be defined as the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish common goals". The above view underscores the word 'cooperation' as the first key element. Human activity is cooperative if it influences or facilitates the attainment of a goal which would not be achieved in the absence of coordinated efforts.

Institution: Human societies are characterized by more or less complex and overlapping networks of regular complex social interactions and practices which may be one of economic, political or cultural. These interactions require agreed and predictable rules that constitute the way of doing things. Such sets of rules constitute institutions. For instance, language may be observed as an institution. Institutions are neither static nor neutral. North (1990), observes

Economic activity whether silent barter, the operation of stock markets, the conditions for opening a new business or obtaining credit – is shaped by the 'rules of the game' which forbid some forms of behavior and encourage others; the form which such rules take may either hinder or promote growth.

Durkheim (1938), observed that 'social science is 'the science of institutions, of their genesis and their functioning'. In essence, institutions refer to established ways of doing things. In this vein, Ingram and Clay (2000) defined "institutions as the rules combined with their enforcement mechanisms, that constrain the choices of actors".

Legacy: Legacy has to do with leaving something behind. For an individual, it refers to what one would be remembered for. Marcoux (2001), views legacy as "the idea of leaving something behind which is intimately tied up with image maintenance and trying to control how one will be remembered".

Bureaucracy: The concept of bureaucracy underscores a particular type of organization in which tasks are divided among technical experts who devote their full working capacity to the organization and whose activities are coordinated by rational rule, hierarchy. In the words of Pollit (2008), "Max Weber proposed the concept of Bureaucracy in a context in which he

considers rationalization of society as inevitable, causing a growing impersonality in the social relationship, disenchantment of the world (Aron, 1994; Giddens; 1997). Paiva (2014), adding his voice, observed that, 'bureaucracy is the 'phenomenon of affirmation of the rationalization of the world'. As a concept, it is generally, 'associated with very negative features of organizations such as delays in operation, action centred on opaque standards, excessive requests for documentation, or even countless difficulties in meeting users or customers' requests (Godoi, Silva, and Cardoso, 2017). It is an “unavoidable notion, both in common language an even organizational analysis, even if in the critical sense” (Aug, 206).

System: A system has various inputs which go through certain processes to produce certain outputs, that together attain an overall set goal for the system. This is to suggest that a system consists of an organized collection of parts (subsystems) which are highly integrated to attain an utmost goal. This in an organization that is made up of many components/parts which function together, the organization's performance is disrupted as soon as one of the constituent parts is removed or dislodged. The Webster's dictionary defines a system as “a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole”. The word system emanates from the Greek word “systema” which implies the organized relationship among the functioning units.

Empirical Literature

Past and current works on the impact of colonial administration on African institutions

Table 1: This section presents past and current works related to African institutions and the effect of colonial administration in a tabular format as follows:

Name of researcher(s), study title/timeframe of study	Geographical scope and content covered	Data source and analytical tools	Findings/recommendations/conclusion.
Gareth (2020). African Development and colonial legacies	Africa: The study covered the entire African continent. It was a review on how colonial rule and African actions during the colonial period affected the resources and institutional settings for subsequent economic development south of Sahara. It covered a period of 50 years.	Data was sourced from secondary materials-books, journals, articles, newspapers, etc. Analysis was by comparison of dynamics of development between 1900 and 50 years after.	The paper ended up arguing that a greater determinant of the differential evolution of poverty, welfare and structural change emanating from the impact of French and British rule was the contrast between “settler” and “peasant” economies.
Valentin (2011). Colonial legacy and Institutional Development: The cases of Botswana and Nigeria	Botswana and Nigeria: The thesis investigated the influence of colonial rule on the institutional development of two former British colonies. Period was not specified.	Data was sourced from secondary materials. It applied a theoretical model of institutional legitimacy based on the theoretical work of Douglas North and Oliver Williamson.	Findings highlight the persistence of pre-colonial informal institutions grounded in cultural norms and beliefs of the local populations. Also, pre-existing levels of urbanization, constraints on political power and integration in colonial labour markets have been factors which influenced the transfer of European institutions.
Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2018) Historical legacies and African Development	Africa: Historical Legacies and African Development. From the colonial period in reverse order.	Secondary sources and historical analysis employing a variety of techniques for identification, and mostly exploiting within country variation, the recent literature documented including the historical origins of Africa's regional comparative development.	There are important advances on measurement with the digitization of colonial and even precolonial sources. There is a genuine effort to advance on causation.
Heldring and Robinan (2012). Colonialism and economic development in Africa.	Sub-Saharan Africa: The impact of colonialism on development in sub-Saharan Africa.	Secondary materials were the sources of the data. Historical analysis was employed.	The paper concluded that the case for the pessimists about the impact of colonialism on development is far stronger than the case for the optimists. It advanced the argument that Africa was poor, technologically backward and poorly developed in the first half of the 19 th century just like Japan and other parts of the world. Today, Japan is developed and advanced in technology.
Martins, R. M. (2017) Impact of Colonial legacy on Development and Innovation in Africa.	Africa: The Impact of colonial legacy on Development and Innovation in Africa. The thesis sought to join two economic subjects which are rarely treated together – Economic history and Innovation Economics. The empirical setting covered 35 states is a span of 29 years-and aims at revealing the consequences of shocks on the cultural, institutional and economic set up of colonized economies.	Data used in the study was sourced from different empirical contributions two stages were involved- the first relied on cross-sectional comparative statistics allowing for direct comparison between outcomes of colonialism. The second relied on both cross-sectional and temporal data gathered in a panel from 1980 to 2009. British and African colonies make up most of the sample	The main finding of the paper is that political and social transformations during the colonial period had a significant effect on the post-colonial institutions.
Baruah, N. G. (2017) Colonial legacies: Shaping African Cities	African: Anglophone and Francophone African Cities in Comparison	The study utilized three epochs of land cover data – 1900, 200, and 2014. The data were constructed from the Global Human Settlement Layer (GHSL) – a new global information baseline describing the spatial evolution of the built environment. In applying the data, there was a sample base of 333 cities, of which 106 are former Francophone cities, 227 former Anglophone cities, with the latter including 122 Nigerian cities.	Anglophone cities are more sprawled. Anglophone cities have about 70% more leapfrog patches, a number that is robust to a broader experiment and many experiments with definitions and relevant cuts on the data in terms of samples. There is a consequence of having greater leapfrog development. Such areas are less likely to receive connections to public utilities, such as electricity, piped water, city sewers, and phone landlines.

Source: Authors computation, 2021

Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory (Prebisch, 1950)

Dependency theory is a mixture of various theories which include – world systems theory, historical structure theory and the neo-Marxist theory. Collectively, these theories contrast modernization theory an earlier theory of state development which ceded much of its explanatory ground during the 1960s and even the 1970s following U.S. interventionist challenges overseas, as well as problems associated with race relations, economic inflation, and the decline of the U.S dollar. The theory holds that,

- (a) “Economically, the outcome of development is continued underdevelopment”.
- (b) Socially, the outcome is inequality and conflict, and
- (c) Politically, the outcome is the reinforcement of authoritarian government.

Brown (1985) succinctly posits that, “there is no single coherent body of thought that can be described as “dependency” theory. Rather, various theorists stress the key notion that some countries are conditioned in their development by their dependence on other countries (or economies).

Research Methodology

In this study, data obtained form secondary materials are analyzed using the technique of content analysis. The analysis runs in the following order:

Research Question One (1): What (administrative/bureaucratic) legacies did the British colonial administration leave behind with the Nigeria Railway Corporation?

The first-point to note about the Nigerian Railway System is that the corporation was established by the British Colonial administration in 1898. Its management, infrastructure and operations were tailored along the British Railways as its model. So important was the rail project to the colonial administration that rail transport development was sometime almost at the same level in both the centre and the periphery. Hence, Elechi (1998) observes that the colonial government sustained administrative cohesion among the various units using the railway organization. The study by Akwara, Udaw, Ezirim (2014) maintains that,

Fifty three years after Nigeria's independence, her railway system remains part of British colonial legacy in transport development history. Sustainable development in the Nigeria Railway system is recommended. A contemporary model of British Railway was established and nurtured to serve colonial transport and logistic interest.

The paper observed that buildings, machines and the gamut of railroad network are principally acquisitions of colonial administration. In a similar development, Okoye, Pongou and Yokossi (2016), carried out an investigation on the 'Dispensability of New Transportation Technologies: Evidence from Colonial Railroads in Nigeria'. The results showed that the railways as established and constructed by the British colonial administration in Nigeria, has large long-standing impacts on individual and local development in the north, but virtually no impact in the south neither in the short run nor in the long-run.

Research Question Two (2): To what extent has the colonial legacies affected the Nigeria Railway system?

Most of what exists as railway network in Nigeria, can be seen as colonial heritage. The railroad constructed in 1898 stretched from Iddo to Otta, a distance of 34 kilometers. By 1930, some major towns like Ilorin, Jebba, Minna, Gusau, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Makurdi and Zaria had been linked. A total of 3,505 kilometers network of single-track railway constituted the major functional stretch in the country. These facilities enabled the railway to serve the bulk distance haulage need in the country and made the railway the most effective and efficient means of evacuating agricultural and mineral produce from the hinterland to the seaports even years after Nigeria became independent. The earlier mentioned study by Akwara and Udaw (2014) concluded that even 53 years after Nigeria's independence, the Railway system still remained part of British colonial legacy in transport development history. This is as the study maintained, due to the fact that the contemporary model of British railway was established and nurtured to serve colonial transport and logistic interests. Thus, the railways in Nigeria was only established due to its strategic and capacity advantages. A study by Adeoye (2019), revealed that “the colonial economy in every colonial territory, was structured to improve the economies of the metropolises. It was then necessary that an efficient transportation system be established as an avenue for exploitation of the periphery. This service has been rendered for long by the railway system in Nigeria. Hence, the system had very negative impacts.

A study by Igwe (2015) which carried out “an examination of the nexus between modern transport infrastructure and socioeconomic growth in colonial Eastern Nigeria noted that;

Modern transport infrastructure in Eastern Nigeria was vital as it was thought as the surest way 'to open up the vast hinterlands of the region to civilization'. Consequently, colonial government laid emphasis on rail, roads, and harbor development, and these boosted its desired strategy for the economic exploitation of the vast resources of the region.

The above studies reveal that many scholars are conversant with British Colonial economic policies in its overseas territories, particularly Nigeria. The policies all aimed at serving the interest of the colonial masters – as they were not ready to expend the British tax payer's money on the development of the colonies. This goes far explaining the extent of development of the periphery and institutions there off. Perhaps, an empirical support on the impact of the colonial legacies on African (Nigerian) institutions is the study by Ezeogidi (2020) which carried out a 'historical appraisal of the development index in colonial and independent Nigeria'. The study underscores the fact that, though the British colonialists brought development in Nigeria in its modern phase through radicalization of such factors of modernity like education, health facilities, paid employment, road and railway infrastructure, etc. it stressed the belief of Afrocentric scholars that the major aim of British economic policies in Nigeria was to expropriate, and repatriate capital to her mother country. That is to say that the expansionism of Britain to Africa nay Nigeria was guided by high level capitalism aimed at advancing her course at discomfiture and exploitation of Nigerian natives.

Findings

This study revealed a number of facts as follows:

1. African institutions have not found it easy to part with some colonial legacies banqueted on them by their colonial masters.
2. In Nigeria, the British administration constructed the first rail way lines as early as 1898. They also built roads, health facilities, schools, etc. These institutions are in many parts of the country till date.
3. The institutions put in place by the colonial masters were meant to fast-track the exploitation of the periphery to the advantage of the home governments.
4. In the Eastern part o the country, the colonial administration believed that modern transport infrastructure was the surest way 'to open up the vast hinterlands of the region to civilization'.
5. Many scholars are clear on the British economic policy on Africa, particularly Nigeria.
6. The British colonialists are extremely meticulous about cursion over the expenditure of the home country's tax-payer's money in the colonies.
7. Over 53 years after independence, the Nigerian Railway System still rests on the structures and machinery established by the colonial administration

Conclusion

It is a statement of fact that the primary motive of colonialism in Africa was purely for economic gains. To achieve such economic gains, there was the need to establish basic infrastructures. Thus, the colonial authorities in Africa were aware of the essentiality of infrastructural development towards achieving maximum political, social and economic stronghold on the African soil. This is why Lawal (1997) asserted that, “colonial economic policy sought to modernize local transport system, the distributive system, money and banking, distribution and use of land and labour with the objective of expanding export production and distribution of European manufactured goods”. Lugard (1922) also observed that, “the material development of Africa may be summed up in one word – “Transport”. Thus, the Nigeria Railway Corporation is at the centre of the transportation system due to its ability and capacity to handle bulk/large consignment of goods. It must be underscored that the British colonial administration brought about the development of certain institutions and construction of infrastructure – such as roads, etc. However, the infrastructures were neglected to a point where their contribution to the economy began to plummet.

Suggestions

1. The word moribund has been used in some circles to describe the state of facilities/infrastructures established by colonial administrations in Africa. Efforts should be geared towards modernizing such facilities/structures to activate them by various governments.
2. The Federal Government should add more rail lines in the eastern parts of the country as the people in the area are known to be more business-like.
3. Some of the facilities established by the colonialists should be scrapped entirely. This is more so for all facilities which still provide the channel of exploitation and siphoning of funds from these former colonies.

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