

**EUROPEAN IMPERIALISM AND AFRICA'S
NATURAL RESOURCES:
THE BRITISH ON THE JOS-PLATEAU, NIGERIA
TIN FIELDS, 1902-1960**

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Abstract

The African continent is blessed with an array of assorted natural mineral resources. Although, these have not been properly utilised and transformed to positively impact nor improve upon the lives and wellbeing of the people in particular and the continent in general. The European countries discovered these rich and abundant natural resource-base of the continent and spared no efforts in coercively courting her, thereby making her a 'bride to behold' against all odds. One of the objectives of this papers that it has critically reviewed a wide range of literature and divulged the views put forward by the proponents and opponents of European imperialism in Africa who have written in favour and against its merits and demerits, respectively. It also studied and disclosed that the huge deposits of cassiterite (tin ore), columbite and sundry minerals were the major attraction and essence for the British's conquest and subjugation of the Jos-Plateau people. The finding reveals that the British colonial government and their concerns got unfettered access to these natural mineral resources which they successfully explored and extracted for about sixty years without any reasonable challenge and resistance from the people. This led to the total exploration and exploitation of the labour-force of the Jos-Plateau people and their natural resources. These have left behind a devastated environment with the preponderance of abandoned tin mining ponds and sand dumps. The major sources of data are books and reputedly published journals. The qualitative approach to the study and interpretation of data is used in this article.

Keywords: Jos-Plateau, Imperialism, Natural Resources, Europe, Africa.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe writes that an Igbo proverb tells us that a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body. The rain that beat Africa began four to five hundred years ago, from the 'discovery' of Africa by Europe, through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, to the Berlin Conference of 1885 (Achebe 2012:1). That controversial gathering of the World's leading European powers, statesmen and diplomats precipitated what we now call the scramble for Africa, which created new boundaries that did violence to Africa's ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states. Their knowledge of the vast African hinterland was slight. Hitherto, Europeans had known Africa more as a coastline than a continent. Their presence had been confined mainly to small, isolated enclaves on the coast used for trading purposes (Meredith 2005: 1). Britain was handed the area of West Africa that

would later become Nigeria, like a piece of chocolate cake at a birthday party (Achebe 2012:1). The European interest in Africa was inspired and motivated by Dr David Livingstone, a Scottish explorer born in Scotland in 1818. He believed that commerce and Christianity were the twin solutions to Africa's problems; hence he devoted his time, energy and resources to achieving these (MacLennan 2018: 262).

Some sections of the opening remarks of the Berlin Conference General Act state as follows:

In the Name of God Almighty.

WISHING, in a spirit of good and mutual accord, to regulate the conditions most favourable to the development of trade and civilisation in certain regions of Africa, and to assure all nations (European) the advantages of free navigation on the two chief rivers of Africa (Rivers Congo and Niger) flowing into the Atlantic Ocean (Berlin Conference General Act 1884-1885:1).

The pertinent question that arises from the above quotation is to what extent the majority and generality of the African people benefit from the development of trade and civilisation brought to the continent by the Europeans? It is very obvious that the intension of the European countries was to explore and exploit the cheap, abundant and available labour-force in Africa and the array of assorted natural resources. Little wonder Bill Freund states that the imperial conquest of Africa was undertaken to tap African natural resources in order to help resolve the economic problems of Europe (Freund 1984: 111). Succinctly, the European imperial adventure in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general was essentially an enterprise in exploitation.

The major thrust of this paper is to carry out a critical study of the British imperialism, taking into cognizance the proposing and opposing views of its merits and demerits, the conquest and subjugation of the Jos-Plateau people and the conduct of an era of intensive and expansive tin mining activities.

Conceptual Definition of Imperialism

John Galtung sees imperialism as a relationship based on dominance between two or more collectivises, especially between nations (Galtung, 1971:81). He distinguishes five types of imperialism to include economic, political, military, communication and cultural imperialism (Galtung, 1971:91). Norman Etherington sees imperialism as encompassing all those aggressive foreign strategies and policies which are strictly pursued because of their economic advantages, and not merely the act of the acquisition of physical colonies (Etherington, 1982:386). Gallagher and Robinson defines imperialism as a sufficient political function of the process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy. Its character is largely decided by the various and changing relationships between the political and economic elements of any particular region and time (Gallagher and Robinson, 1976: 59).

The British imperialism culminated into colonialism which is simply defined as the system in which stronger countries (both economically and militarily) maintains foreign colonies for their economic exploitation (Thornton, 1962:336). It is further defined as the seizure of a country or region by imperialists, accompanied by the subjection, brutal exploitation and sometimes annihilation of the local population (Thornton, 1962:336).

Issues and Conundrum of the British Imperialism

The proponents and opponents in favour and against the benefits of European Imperialism that accrued to Africa are succinctly discussed in this section. The Imperialist/Modernisation theory looks at the pre-colonial, social and economic condition of Africa which they said were characterised by inter-ethnic wars, unproductiveness, static, insecurity and lack of the innovation to accumulate wealth and invest. The proponents include scholars like Peter Duignan, Alan McPhee and L.H. Gann. They posit that immense benefits accrued to Africa from the British imperialism. The injection of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) incorporated Africa into the global capitalism which subsequently led to its development and modernisation (Falola and Aderinto 2010:55).

They further argue that the introduction of quality education, western culture and lifestyle including infrastructures like tarred roads, electricity, medical clinics, hospitals, pipe-borne water, railways, schools and other facilities which were non-existent in pre-colonial Africa, are considered as empirical evidence of progress and the civilisation of Africa and Africans brought by the British Colonial government and missionaries (Falola and Aderinto 2010:55).

On the other side, scholars like Bade Onimode, Claude Ake, Segun Osoba and Yusuf Bala Usman who belong to the Marxist/Dependency theory, brought up some arguments which counteracted and criticised the imperialists achievements put forward by the Imperialist/Modernisation theorists. To them, imperialism/colonialism was different phases of European capitalists' exploitation of Africa. The trans-Atlantic slave trade provided the European countries with the imperative human resources needed to industrialise and modernise their economies. While colonialism gave them direct and unfettered access to Africa's natural resources which were used to sustain the achievements of the industrial revolution (Falola and Aderinto 2010:56).

Therefore, imperialism and colonialism are synonymous to brutality, arrogance, forced labour, theft, cruelty, conflicts, coerced proletarianisation, mystification, degraded masses and brainless elites. More so, they posited that the provision of socio-economic infrastructures i.e. tarred roads and railways were not meant for the benefit and improvement of the lives of the African/Nigerian people, but an enhancement to facilitate the exploration and exploitation of the people and their natural resources (Falola and Aderinto 2010:56). In fact, Kwasi Kwarteng states that no other country in the modern world is more a creature of the British Empire than Nigeria. Even the name 'Nigeria' was a consciously invented one, first appearing in an article of the London *Times* on 8 January 1897. Flora Shaw, a journalist and commentator on colonial affairs (later the wife of Lord Frederick Lugard), suggested the name, which she thought would be a good name for the coercive and selfish fusion of the Mohammedan (northern Nigeria) and non-Mohammedan (southern Nigeria) states which had been officially brought together within the confines of the British rule and empire for their socio-economic benefits and administrative convenience (Kwarteng 2011: 273).

The British imperialism got a boost with the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as the colonial Secretary on 29 June 1895 (Kubicek 1969:4). He was a powerful but not a charismatic figure (Chamberlain 1984:155). As British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain delivered a speech in the same year he was appointed and state as follows:

To my mind the cause of bad trade, of want of employment, is clear. It is continual growth of our population at the same time that our trade and industry does not grow, we must find new markets for it. Old markets are getting exhausted, some of them are being closed to us by hostile tariffs, and unless we can find new Countries which will be free to take our goods you may be quite satisfied that lack of employment will continue to be one of the greatest social evils (Chamberlain 1984:155-156).

The above assertion by Joseph Chamberlain further emboldens and gives credence to the argument that British imperialism and search for colonies was motivated by socio-economic benefits and aggrandisement. However, he went on to advocate for the extension of the British Empire and the treatment of the existing empire as an 'undeveloped estate,' which required both planning and investment (Chamberlain 1984:156). Chamberlain further remarked that the development of the British colonies was for the benefit of their population (British) and for the benefit of the greater population which was outside the colonies. This statement was a quasi-moral objection against permitting the natural resources in the colonies i.e. Africa, to be left unattended to if it could be explored and exploited for human uses (Ross 2014:470). Again, the pertinent question which arises from his assertion is that to what extent did the indigenous people of the colonies benefit from the exploration and exploitation of their natural resources when compared to the Europeans i.e. the British people? It was during this period of British imperialism and economic expansion that they conquered and subjugated the people of the Jos-Plateau, Nigeria and its mineral-rich land, which has huge deposits of tin ore, columbite and sundry minerals. This fact was earlier corroborated by Michael Crowder who states that the Jos-Plateau is very rich in tin ore and also produces columbite (Crowder 1962:13).

The imperial powers possessed superior economic and military strength. Therefore, they exploited those whom they controlled and ruled, although they believed that they were doing them a lot of good by genuinely and benevolently expanding European development and civilisation (Taylor 1976:197-198). Walter Rodney argues that the major purpose of European imperialism was for capitalist expansion. The presence of Europeans in Africa was to seek for opportunities to have total control of the abundant natural raw materials, seek for other profitable avenues for business investments and markets for the sale of their finished goods and products (Rodney 1972:150). Some of the abundant natural resources from Africa included diamonds from Sierra Leone and Congo, gold from Ghana and South Africa. Equatorial Africa was a major source of rubber and Sudan was known for cotton production (Hopskins 1967:101). While Nigeria was known for the production of coal, groundnuts, cotton, tin, rubber, cocoa, palm kernel, very rich and arable farmlands among others .

However, Patrick O' Brien argues that it is a wrong assumption that British and European imperialism and industrialisation were successful because they had relied on the spoils/benefits of mercantilism. It is inherently and completely implausible to assume that British imperialism and industrialisation proceeded and succeeded at the expense of African, Latin American and Asian economies (O'Brien 1988:164). Eileen Sullivan posits that John Mills and his co-liberals argue that Britain did not obtain any special benefit from its control of trade monopoly in the colonies. Instead, the relationship between Britain and her colonies caused inefficiency and imbalance in the British economic system. A disproportionate

aggregate capital was sunk and invested in the colonial trade to the detriment of home (British) markets and international trade with other nations (Sullivan 1983:600).

The co-liberals further argues that huge amount of capital was involved in sending and maintaining British experts and administrators to the colonies. Hence, this huge capital was automatically not available to be invested and the profits re-invested into the British economy (Sullivan 1983:601). The large amount of capital that was used for the purpose of colonisation became a capital loss at the British economy, loss of employment opportunities and higher demand for workers and their salaries or wages in Britain (Sullivan 1983:602).

Mills and his co-liberals also states that the political and economic strength of a nation is not determined by the number of colonies under its control. Therefore, Britain did not obtain any remarkable political and economic advantage from its colonies. They concluded that the British colonies were a distinct type of liability, rather than an economic advantage to Britain (Sullivan 1983:602). Cain and Hopkins opine that when Joseph Chamberlain was appointed as the British colonial Secretary in 1895, a firmer line of action was taken towards seeking for new areas and reserving the remaining areas of British interest (Cain and Hopkins 2002:331).

British Expedition on the Jos Plateau

The Jos-Plateau has one of the most beautiful and serene scenery in Nigeria. Though located in a tropical region of the world, it has a near temperate climate. The scenic beauty of the Jos-Plateau was attested to by an author and researcher called Leonard Plotnicov in the early 1960s when he went there for the conduct of a research. Plotnicov stated that the embracing atmosphere of the Jos Plateau leaves a lasting impression on the Europeans as one of the healthiest places in West Africa (Plotnicov 1967:30). Corroborating the statement of Plotnicov, Jonah Madugu states that:

The Jos Plateau as the name implies is what has been described as scenery of beauty that surpasses any other scenery in Nigeria because of the undulating nature of the land and several magnetic masses of hills, which rises to the height of about 4,000 feet to 6,000 feet above sea level, respectively (Madugu 1994:7).

The Jos Plateau is located in the middle belt region of Nigeria. It lies between latitudes 7 degree and 11 degree north and longitudes 7 degree and 25 degree east. It has an average height of 1,200 meters above sea level (Ames 1934: 53). There are two climatic seasons in Jos; the dry and wet seasons. The dry season is usually from November of one year to March of the next year. While the wet or rainy season commences from April to October of the same year. There is an annual rainfall of 6 inches, which results to around 1,500 millimetres (Ames 1934: 53). There were very good reports by the earlier Europeans who visited the Jos Plateau in the early 1900s. For example, C.G. Lush, a renowned mining engineer who visited the Jos Plateau in 1909 stated as follows: "The Jos Plateau enjoyed an excellent climate which is very suitable for Europeans, it has an abundance of water and is probably one of the richest tin deposit in the world" (Freund 1981: 36-37). This was a good account and report which served as an impetus and a source of encouragement to the Europeans who hitherto had their doubts and reservations about their safety and welfare. This is also because Africa was stigmatised as a

'Whiteman's grave' where diseases like malaria abound, and that the people were savages, wild and carnivorous.

In the 1820s, Clapperton saw crude straws of tin ore at the market in Kano. It was however in the 1880s that an attempt was made by the British traders to locate the actual source of the metal (tin). Furthermore, the existence of locally produced tin straws came to the attention of William Wallace of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) who had been sent to establish a trading post on the Benue at Lokoja in Nigeria. However, by 1902, the source and location of the tin was proved to be the Jos-Plateau or Berom land, as the case maybe. Therefore, the colonial military outfit initially known as Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) and later called the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was deployed to play a major role in the conquest, subjugation and pacification of the perceived hostile people (Morrison 1976: 44-45). The first act of government-company collusion was the brutal conquest of the Jos-Plateau and adjacent areas. The essence was to make them safe for the tin miners.

The first person to be appointed and saddled with the onerous task of leading the investigation into the presence of tin on the Jos-Plateau was Mr George R. Nicolaus, a qualified Mining Engineer who studied in Cornwall at the Camborne School of Mines. The succinct account of Nicolaus' expedition as written by him state as follows:

In March 1902 I was chosen to proceed to Nigeria to endeavour to locate the deposits from which a small tonnage of pure tin metal (99.9%) in the form of thin straw shaped 15 Inch stalks filtered through to the Mediterranean and East African ports. My appointment was sponsored by Sir George Taubman Goldie, Lord Scarborough, Sir John Kirk, Chairman and Directors of the former Royal Niger Company, whose charter was cancelled by the British government. It was during these negotiations, late in 1900, that the Niger Company insisted on retaining the charter clause which gave them 50% gross of all Nigerian mineral resources (Nicolaus 1954).

Corroborating the account of George R. Nicolaus, Henry Williams Laws who came to the Jos-Plateau in 1903 stated during the 50th anniversary celebration of his first visit in 1953 organised by the Nigerian chamber of mines thus:

Before attempting to describe the high Jos-Plateau as I found it I ought to give you some idea of the background to this venture. Before 1900 the Royal Niger Company had been buying small quantities of smelted tin in faggot form and of 90% purity which rumour said came from somewhere north of the Benue River. With this in mind Sir George Taubman Goldie, then Governor of the company, on drawing up the terms with Joseph Chamberlain (British Colonial Secretary) for relinquishing the charter reserved a half share of the mineral rights over a large area lying to the north of and between the Niger and Benue Rivers. By 1902 the origin of this mineral had been narrowed down to Badiko in Bauchi province. Lord Scarborough who was my chief for many years, decided it was time to look into this mineral business and invited George

Nicolaus, a very old friend of mine from early Australian days, to go to Badiko in Bauchi province and investigate the possibilities. With a strong escort he preceded to that place via Zaria province, the maps at that time showing a large blank area marked “inhabited by savage cannibals” in a direct line from Loko on the Benue. He found that Badiko was merely the market centre where the trade in cassiterite (tin) was handled by butchers. Nicolaus then found that nearly all the black tin came from the Delimi River (Jos-Plateau/Berom land). Making a camp there he made a quick dash along that river through Naraguta hills to a point that afterwards proved to be pretty close to the northern margin of the Plateau proper. He returned safely to London, and reported the gravels of the Delimi to be rich in tin and well worth a wide mineral survey of the surrounding country (Henry Laws 1953).

The arrival of Henry Williams Laws opened a new vista in the history and fortune of the Jos-Plateau people. This is because he played a pivotal role in the conquest and subjugation of the Jos-Plateau people, especially the Berom people. He had superior fire-power in the Maxim gun compared to the spears, bows and arrows of the indigenous people. This set the basis for the commencement of an era of expansive and intensive tin mining activities on the Jos-Plateau.

Colonial Tin Mining Activities on the Jos Plateau

In 1899, after a long dialogue session and bargaining, the RNC sold out its charters and sovereignty rights to the British government. The activities of the RNC officially came to an end in 1900 when its political administration and activities were taken over by the British Crown (Hoskins 1967: 56). The take-over of RNC gave impetus to the popular saying that the 'flag' has followed 'trade' in British West Africa (Hoskins 1967: 56). It was agreed that the British colonial government would pay half of the royalties and rents it collected to the RNC for the next 99 years. However, the royalties were totally bought out from the RNC by the British colonial government in 1950. The compensation for the sale of its charter and the outright purchase of the royalties, the company received a total amount of over 3million pound sterling (Freund 1982: 7).

A succession of British government officials used diplomacy and coercion in the different parts of Nigeria with the view to reducing the people's opposition and insurrection to the lowest minimum. As early as 1907, the acting High Commissioner of the Northern region of Nigeria, William Wallace (former staff of the Royal Niger Company), wrote that tin mining was an important influence in the British policy of peaceful penetration and in the efforts to gain the confidence of the people and bring them under law and order (Grace 1982: 187). By 1914, there was the successful amalgamation of the different parts, polities and regions into an entity called Nigeria with Britain as the paramount ruler (Tamuno 2001: 393). Therefore, it is pertinent to point out here that tin mining activities on the Jos Plateau preceded the official declaration and formation of the amalgam called Nigeria. Therefore, in 1910, the presence of speculative and productive capital on the Jos-Plateau tin fields encouraged the construction of a light railway (Freund, W.M. 1981: 76).

The railway became known as the Bauchi Light Railway. This was because the British colonial government had erroneously grouped the Jos-Plateau (non Mohammedan) area with Bauchi (Mohammedan) area to form the Bauchi-Plateau Province. However, the railway was not connected to the town of Bauchi. The rail line continued to progress until Jos-Plateau was linked to the Port Harcourt rail line in 1927 by standard gauge. When the rail line was finally closed down in 1957, some of the tracks and line-side apparatus as well as two locomotives and three carriages were donated to the Jos Museum to form the basis of a collection of artefacts connected with the development of the tin mining industry on the Jos Plateau (National Museum 1982).

In 1911, the Governor of northern Nigeria reported that the exploitation of the tin fields has already attained very important proportions. He said that by March, there were more than fifty companies and syndicates interested in the tin mining business, with a total investment of over 2.5 million pound sterling (Grace 1982: 187). However, the Governor was worried that the exaggerated hopes and over-capitalisation would harm the tin fields. The boom increased in 1912, when there were eighty two companies and syndicates (Grace 1982: 187).

By January 1912, the Nigerian tin shares were the most actively traded stocks in the city of London (Phimister 2008: 29). By 1913, one hundred and twenty tin mining companies had a paper investment of 6.8 million pound sterling in the Nigerian tin venture. Some two hundred multinational companies had invested the sum of 10 million pound sterling by 1914, the same year that the various regions were amalgamated to form the country called Nigeria (Freund 1981: 38). Furthermore, by 1915, the speculative boom had subsided and the number of companies was down to sixty eight. The onset of the First World War (1914-1918) disrupted the tin mining activities. There was a short-lived recession during the first few months of the war, when some multinational companies' ceased operations and others cut down their input and output to a manageable level (Grace 1982: 183). This similarly happened during the Second World War (1939-1945).

The multinational tin mining companies, British colonial government and their concerns recorded very huge amount of pound sterling as profits from their monopolistic control of the tin mining activities on the Jos-Plateau. This is attested to by Melanie Torrent who states that from 1860 to 1913, Britain witnessed a rise in her overall assets outside Europe from below 1,000 million pound sterling from the early 1870s to about 2,000 million pound sterling by 1900. This rise reached 4,000 million pound sterling by 1913. In fact, 44 per cent of the world's total foreign investment within this period was in the hands of the British (Torrent 2012: 23-24). However, the Jos-Plateau people were side-lined and did not profit from the tin mining activities on their ancestral land. Rather, they are left with abandoned tin mining ponds and other relics of the mining activities which are very visible till this moment. Little wonder that the book titled 'British Colonial Theories' states that the British colonial government used its colonies as source of raw materials, markets and outlets for surplus capital among others (Klaus 1963: 228-230).

Apart from the total exploitation of the natural resources on the Jos-Plateau, the people were coerced to become proletariats on the tin fields. The strategies adopted by the British colonial government to coerce the people to work on the tin fields are the seizure and confiscation of the people's land where it was declared as crown land, the destruction of the people's tin smelting furnaces, the introduction of Exclusive Prospecting License, the

introduction of the British currency and the imposition of heavy taxation (Dalyop 2018). Within this period, the Jos-Plateau area had the highest amount of colonial taxes. This was intentional and the essence was to cajole and coerce the people to go and work on the tin fields in order to earn the money needed for the payment of their taxes (Dalyop 2019).

It is pertinent to state that the colonial government conscripted and encouraged the influx of labourers into the Jos-Plateau tin fields. These have culminated into a serious settler-indigene crisis on the Jos-Plateau till this moment. Writing in 1921, Lord Frederick Lugard said that from the point of view of the administrator it was necessary to classify the people of tropical Africa into three groups, according to their social organisation i.e. the primitive tribes, the advanced communities and the Europeanised Africans (Burns 1972: 26-26). Such a division connotes a recipe for segregation, conflict and crisis.

Conclusion

The European exploitation of the African continent and its people has been dynamic and amoebic, taking different shapes and nomenclatures at different times. The major imperialistic and exploitative periods started from the slave trade, transformed to the so-called legitimate trade, then colonialism, neo-colonialism and currently globalisation. Despite her enormous human and natural mineral resources, the African continent is still wallowing in abject poverty and penury.

Therefore, this paper concludes that the African leaders at all levels must think futuristically and harness the continent's humongous resources (both human and material) for the benefit of the people, despite the history of European exploitation and manipulation, instead of going '*cup-in-hand*' soliciting for aids and loans that only entangles and further shackles the people. If the leaders fail in this regard, then the African continent will remain poverty-stricken, backward, a source of raw materials, market for finished products and subservient to the other continents.

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