

Task: Prepare a history essay on colonization.

Topic: Belgian Colonial Rule in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Type: Thematic Essay

Length: 5 pages

Formatting: MLA

Requirements:

Describe the historical pattern of the Belgian colonial rule in the Democratic Republic of

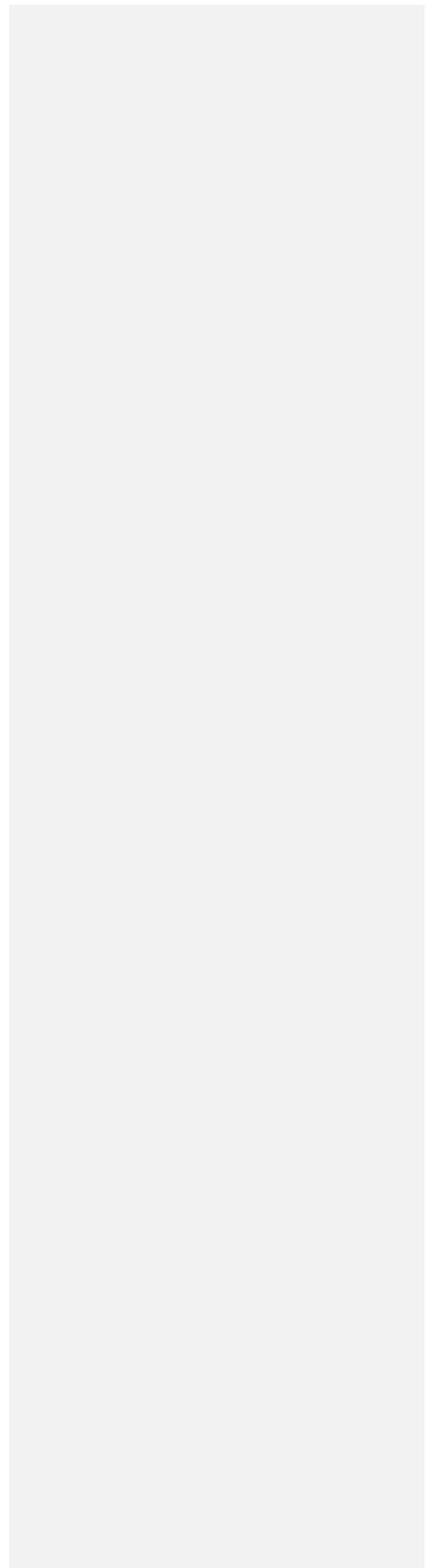
Congo. Use up to 25 sources.

HOW DID THE BELGIAN COLONIAL RULE CONTRIBUTE TO THE TURMOIL IN THE
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Name

Course

Date



Colonization and imperialism were rife in the entire Africa during the 20th century. Many modern African nations were colonies of mainly European nations such as Britain, Belgium, France, Portugal, among other global powers. As a result, Africans underwent maltreatment because of activities of the European powers. Moreover, the continent still experiences socio-political upheavals that are related to the colonial rule. The Democratic Republic of Congo is a large nation in Central Africa that is still suffering from effects of the colonial rule. Despite vast mineral resources and over six decades of independence, the nation is one of the poorest and most unstable in the world. The Belgian colonial rule contributed to the turmoil and instability that the Democratic Republic of Congo is experiencing today.

Events in the Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrate continued destabilization owing to a colonial legacy that was left behind after years of Belgian rule. Though educational facilities and other systems that are necessary for the foundation of a state were present in Congo, the colonial regime made it difficult for the nation to develop like other African states that were under the British or the French rule. Apart from a volatile political nature, the Democratic Republic of Congo is also among African nations that have the lowest standards of education, economic development, and respect for human rights.

Belgium's interest in colonizing the Congo region started with exploration activities by a British journalist and explorer, Henry Morton Stanley, between 1874 and 1877 (McGaffey 1986, 263). Stanley mapped the interior of Africa for the first time in history, and he immediately drew the interest of King Leopold II of Belgium upon his return to Europe. Motivated by a desire to create a colonial empire, King Leopold made Stanley his agent in Africa by sending him back in 1879 to build Belgian outposts and roads (Meeuwis 2011, 1285). Stanley made use of force and

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persuasion to compel illiterate African chiefs to give away their land to Leopold II. In 1884, he returned with treaties that gave King Leopold the right of ownership to vast areas of land in the Congo before the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 that marked the start of the scramble and partition of Africa (Meeuwis 2011, 1287). In 1885, the region was proclaimed the Congo Free State under the sole ownership of king Leopold II.

King Leopold's force that established a regime in the Congo comprised over 19,000 soldiers who were mostly Africans under the command of White Belgian officers (McGaffey 1986, 263). The force secured vast territories because it easily subdued spear-wielding Africans who attempted to oppose them. The Belgian regime was founded on forced labor since Africans were compelled to process timber and carry other goods such as ivory to their colonial masters. Rubber also became a valuable commodity of trade for the Belgians in the early 1890s. Unlike other rubber plantations that required at least 15 years to mature, King Leopold II found huge plantations at his disposal that grew wild in the tropical Congo forests.

Furthermore, missionaries in the Congo Free State set up stations that were used to change religious beliefs of local populations and introduced formal education. However, many of the missionaries were appalled by the system of forced labor and brutal treatment of Africans. People like Alice Harris from Britain and William Morison from the United States documented the Belgian atrocities against Africans, but they were put on trial for libel (Young 1978, 183). Even though Leopold claimed to be conducting trade in the Congo Free State, British agent, Edmund Den Morel, and other officials observed that his ships did not carry any merchandise on return trips to Africa (Carole 1993, 243). More proof of forced labor and other horrific tales of mistreatment of Africans reached Europe as Belgium continued to rule the region.

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Eventually, Leopold was forced by the Belgian Parliament to relinquish ownership of the Congo Free State to the Belgian state in 1908 (Carole 1993, 243). The Congo was then divided into 24 districts with a governor-general as the highest colonial officer. However, residents of the Congo had no say in the administration because political activities were not permitted. The economy also shifted towards mining of cobalt, diamond, gold, as well as cash crop farming. Peasants were coerced into cultivation of cash crops such as cotton coffee and groundnuts. The forced economic activities were an extension of Belgium's colonial rule.

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The Congo attained independence in 1960 with Joseph Kasavubu as the President and Patrice Lumumba as the Prime Minister (Meeuwis 2011, 1284). However, Belgian forces that were still operating in the region played a significant role in initial post-independence chaos. For instance, Katanga's strongman, Moise Tshombe, was supported by Belgian forces in his secessionist quest (Meeuwis 2011, 1282). Eventually, Joseph Mobutu Sese Seko overthrew the government to set up a dictatorship that lasted till 1997.

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Results of Belgian Rule in the Congo

Weak Economic Support Structures

The Congo Free State that was established by King Leopold II of Belgium did little to establish vibrant economic and infrastructural support systems in the colonized areas. Instead, the Belgian government set up an administrative structure that promoted colonial rule at the expense of national or societal interests of locals. Leopold specialized in extraction of timber and rubber from the Congo even though he had promised to make the colony a free trade zone. As a result, African communities were isolated and impoverished under the colonial rule.

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Some communities such as the Mbole people from Yaotike region resisted Belgian traders, as well as their widespread looting of resources (Likaka 1994, 589). The Mbole organized a series of raids against Belgian factories that were situated in the Lokilo area from as early as 1897 to the 1960s. Because of the colonial regime's practices, the Democratic Republic of Congo is characterized by poor road networks and lack of electricity in most parts of the country. Moreover, huge deposits of minerals such as diamond, gold, and rubber does not benefit the population. In contrast, the resources are a cause of conflict between the government and rebel factions.

Divisive Educational Policies

The Belgian colonial government did not take the responsibility of running educational institutions that were entirely left in the hands of missionaries. Additionally, the language policy in Congo between 1880 and 1960 was marred by disagreements on the use of Dutch/French options, as well as African languages. As a result, the regime had to address linguistic tensions between Dutch and French-speaking masses in the colony. Initially, local African languages were mainly used in elementary educational classes, but the move was widely perceived by Africans as a method of denying them opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

In the run up to independence in the early 1960s, the Belgians attempted to apply a bilingual colonial policy, but the French overpowered the Dutch in compelling locals to use their language. As a result, Dutch-speaking Congolese felt disenfranchised since their right to live and work in different environments was curtailed. The unstable Belgian language policy further contributed to socio-economic inequalities in Congo as the young nation struggled for

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independence. By 1963, the region had only 16 university graduates in a population of over ten million people (Carole 1993, 243). As a result, the Democratic Republic of Congo has higher illiteracy levels than other colonized African nations.

Lack of Sound Political and Administrative Systems

The Belgian colonial governance revolved around slavery, imperialism, and violation of human rights. Colonies were also characterized by civil strife, particularly in the post-colonial period. For instance, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo are formerly Belgian colonies that experience political instability even after gaining independence (Young 1978, 171). The culture of violence and uprisings has characterized the socio-political landscape in the Democratic Republic of Congo for many years. For instance, the Shaba Uprising in Kolwezi that was organized by the National Pour La Liberation du Congo (FNLC) in 1978 resulted into death of thousands of people before it was stopped by Franco-Belgian intervention (Likaka 1994, 589).

In conclusion, the Belgian rule in the Democratic Republic of Congo severely affected the nation's political, social, and economic stability. The country has a long history of political upheavals in the form of coups as a result of weak administrative and economic structures that were inherited from the colonial regime. The Congo also experiences multiple socio-economic challenges that are compounded by humanitarian crises such as starvation and constant inter-factionary rebel clashes. Moreover, the colonial administration left the nation with groups that constantly challenge the legitimacy of governments as evidenced in the ouster of Mobutu Sese Seko, as well as assassination of Patrice Lumumba and Laurent Kabila. The Democratic Republic

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of Congo's post-independence socio-economic, political, and humanitarian tribulations are, therefore, effects of Belgian rule during the colonial era.

References

- Carole, Collins. 1993. "The Cold War Comes to Africa: Cordier and the 1960 Congo Crisis." *Journal of International Affairs*, 47(1): 243.
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Overall Impression

This is not the worst paper in my life, but still I cannot say that I am satisfied with its quality.