



**Lessons for Leadership  
from North America  
and East Africa:  
Contextualizing  
Post-colonial Historical  
Hindrances and Tribal  
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# Lessons for Leadership from North America and East Africa: Contextualizing Post-colonial Historical Hindrances and Tribal Discordance

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## ABSTRACT

*As indigenous and native people of post-colonial societies worldwide continue to lag socio-economically throughout the world, a historical look at some of the root causes is necessary for leaders to comprehend issues that they are facing. The search for explanations requires a focus on the sickness of inner warring and conflict that expands outward from within small family units to clans and tribes. This sickness as much a symptom of the greater problem of colonial history as it is a problem unto itself. So, it is important to review and understand the causes in order to tackle the problem, and to learn from different experiences. The first peoples of the Americas have a long history of oppression that helps to explain much of what happened in the areas that were colonized later. This paper will compare some of the shared historical challenges and post-colonial trauma of North America and East Africa and investigate positive paths to build peaceful and prosperous societies.*

**Keywords:** *Africa, Americas, Colonialism, Economic Development, Indigenous people, North America, Post-Colonial studies*

## INTRODUCTION

In many ways, leaders are often busy with issues as they arise in urgent daily real-time crises, and issues that require immediate attention. While going through daily decision making, an area that leaders far too often neglect to consider is to consider bigger issues, and underlying root causes of various situations that cause problems, misunderstanding and tension. Geopolitical perspectives are effectively ways of understanding (as Professor Kurth puts it) the “realities and mentalities of the localities” (McDougall, 2014). Therefore, it is critical to gaining a fuller understanding of what is happening today by having a grasp of the historical context. Everything that occurs today (newspapers accounts) came from the roots of the flow and legacy of history. Situations arising today, even if the spark is contemporary, have historical contexts. To gain a better appreciation of the context, leads to better decision making, after all according to Robert Strauss, geopolitical situations today leads to understanding the balance of tomorrow. (Granieri, 2015)

One of the biggest geopolitical considerations (geopolitics, the starting point being rooted in geography and maps) are those of destructive conflicts, often rooted in social groupings that have long historical ties. It is important that humans throughout the world need to fight against and resist destructive tribalism. Destructive tribalism is defined as the group mentality that pits one group against another, creating what is known geopolitically as “exclusivism” (that is the feeling of love and compassion that extends not to a state but a tribe, clan or sectarian group) (Kaplan, 2012). This pitting of one group against another through exclusivism creates cleavages between the various groups, and has a tendency to divide societies further and further until even divisions within and between families become evident (Helin, 2011). This type of problem, particularly amongst peoples of a post-colonial system, is rooted in history. While tribalism and grouping together were critical to early human survival, it later exacerbated problems that led to issues today. After all, (as stated earlier) the current rise of ISIS along with other purveyors of terrorism all over the world are more often than not the results of historical divisions. These separations of peace are almost always marked by the current and historical influences of larger actors in the international scene.

Growing up in Canada as a First Nations person (previously referred to as “Indian”), it is striking to see similarities between East Africa and the First Nations of North America. Prior to European contact Canada, a vast geographic area, was comprised of numerous nations and over 50 different linguistic groups. While the climate and harsh living conditions prevented the population density to develop as much as in more temperate climates, both advanced social hierarchies and diplomacy in and amongst nations were established. (Churchill 2001, Helin 2006, 2011) All across Africa similar social structures established that maintained human interaction between varying groups. (Meredith, 2005 & 2014, Clark, 1991) And, as in the past, there are similarities with present day issues that arise with striking similarity between the two regions of the world: far apart geographically, yet tied through historical parallels and contemporary challenges.

### **Theoretical Historical Perspective Literature Review**

The major land masses of the “New Worlds” will, for this paper be mostly limited to mostly Northern North America and East Africa (though other areas will be brought in). The irony of the use of the word “New World” is that the European explorers were “discovering” areas that had been occupied by people for tens of thousands of years (in the Americas) and the cradle of civilization and where humanity originated in Africa. (Churchill, 2001) These discoveries were better described as takeovers and appropriations (Churchill, 2001) which took place much earlier in the Americas than in Africa at 300-400 years earlier. The countries involved were not always the same, but similar in their execution: the removal or subjugation of the original inhabitants. (Clark, 1991)

Tools that worked well in the Americas, iron, gunpowder and disease, were greatly advanced by the time it was time to move to Africa. (Diamond, 2005) And, the results were just as dramatic: quick capitulation by the locals. The seeming omnipresence of the

invading forces quickly and efficiently terrified and overwhelmed the local populace. (Diamond, 2005; Clark, 1991; Reybrouck, 2013) And due to the fact that the areas to be divided up was coordinated thousands of kilometers away in Europe atrocities that took place were easily denied by the colonial powers. (Hoschild, 1999) At the Berlin Conference of 1885, the Belgian king, Leopold referred to Africa as *the magnificent cake*, as he wanted a big slice. (Hoschild, 1999) Thus there were no considerations made for local inhabitants of the area at all, just as it had been in the Americas. (Reybrouck, 2014) The Middle East Sykes-Picot Line was another example of the more recent deals that took place with no consideration for those who originally lived in the place that was divided (as the Ottoman Empire declined and the earlier demonization of the Arabs by Europeans made this an easy process). These completely arbitrary lines that were first drawn up to divide the Middle East in 1916 are still affecting the region today. (Yergin, 2009)

The main colonizers in the Americas were the Spanish and the Portuguese in South America and the French and British, in North America. (Diamond, 2005) But, in Africa it started with the Arab 'traders' (along with the Portuguese) who were joined by the nations from the original list above, followed by the (newly formed) Belgium, Italy and Germany and the Netherlands (though, the Dutch were also in the Americas as well but in a limited way). (Clark, 1991) As the last of the areas to be appropriated, Africa was largely divided up at the Berlin Congress where there the competing governments could then create artificial boundaries, most of which hold today. (Hoschild, 1999) As a result of this "solution" by and for the Europeans who were in Berlin and later in Brussels a variety of issues were created that would cause a huge hangover for those forced to comply with the newly created borders. (Meredith, 2014) The most egregious example of these issues can be seen in the nations that evolved from the former colonies of Belgium, as they were left in very bad shape by any metric (and this includes Rwanda through 1994). (Hoschild 1999; Prunier 1995)

Throughout colonial history those in power have had their own self-interests at play when creating political boundaries at all levels, from national boundaries down through tribal and even individual. (Meredith, 2014) These differences inevitably create economic hurdles that are very challenging to cross. (Helin, 2006) It is, however, through self-governance and unity that economic success will allow for peace for all involved, from the average person through state actors. (Helin, 2011) As the East Africa Community continues to proceed towards fruition and the economic benefits are realized, other traditionally subjugated peoples such as Native North Americans can take these successes as lessons to overcome their own problems that, while half a world away, are very similar in any number of metrics. It is only from the historical perspective that we can understand the current challenges. William Faulkner stated that "The past is dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner, 1950/1975) With that in mind, next there will be a brief review and examination of where we (First Nations of Canada and the aboriginal peoples of Africa) came from and why it is important to overcome this history.

The astronomer Carl Sagan reminds us that in order to understand the present we need to know the past. There are two ways of traditionally classifying colonial societies in the academic discourse: colonies of settlement and colonies of occupation. Canada is clearly the former and Rwanda the latter, with Kenya traditionally falling in between (Ashcroft, Garath, Tiffin, 2007). There are striking similarities between the problems that the groups of original people on both continents have; largely due to issues that have arisen after colonization.

## **Empirical Review**

There are a number of issues in present day Canada that are relevant when speaking of tribalism which haunt that segment (the native groups) of the population that are still attempting to overcome the post-colonial trauma that they had endured while under the rule of the leadership of the British. (Helin, 2006 & 2011) In reality, it was not only the British, but also the French, Portuguese and Spanish who had colonies in the Americas. There is, however, evidence that the first North Americans had arrived across the Bering Strait from Asia at least 10,000 years before the first Europeans attempted to find routes to India and discovered it. When Columbus first came to the New World in 1492, there was an estimated 100 million inhabitants in both North and South America. Within 300 years of Columbus' arrival that population had been reduced to less than 10% of its original size, to approximately 1.8 million. During that time there were a number of factors that had taken place that reduced the population so dramatically. (Churchill, 2001) Included in this were disease, war, and division of the native populations. (Churchill, 2001; Diamond, 2005) There are reports of the Spanish as well as the French who had deliberately poisoned the local population in order to clear the human settlements and allow for the colonizers to be able to move on to the lands that were originally inhabited by Native Americans. (Churchill, 2001)

As successful as the European colonies in North America were, colonizers in Africa had a much more difficult time as the natives were of a much stronger constitution and therefore tended to survive disease more effectively than in North America (where the deaths by disease often reached to the millions). However, the makeup of the international borders (for the most part, taken at the Berlin Conference of 1885) was done in a similarly haphazard way as was it done in all of the colonized areas in the centuries before. (Hochschild, 1999) There were the issues of governing the territories that were acquired in the conferences, and these were always a challenge for colonial administrators to overcome. So, the way for them to find solutions was to return to the history books for inspiration. Even though war and disease did not destroy all of the natives in the Americas, the survivors then had to face cultural genocide that the Europeans had attempted on the much smaller population (as illustrated with the dramatic declines).

It is a little-known fact that many of the African administrators turned to Canada to study the best ways to subjugate native populations. The custom of putting them into various townships, called reservations in Canada, as well as forcing that they, the natives, had appropriate documentation in order to limit and restrict their movement within the

country. (Engler, 2013) In Canada, the reservation system was very effective in restricting movement of the Native groups. (Helin, 2006) This was compounded by the fact that most of the lands that were left for natives were in the inaccessible far North and were thus not of interest for most of the (European) populace. (Helin, 2011) In addition, the card system was an effective way to subjugate all members and to categorize those who were within that system. In Kenya, the similar system, the *luau* system was an even more effective system than the one that it was modeled on, the Canadian system.

Further to this was the issue of division. After all, it is very easy to divide a population after giving them certain rights and privileges, particularly if those rights are over other tribes in that society. This form of tribalism would allow the overseers to get the native groups to have conflict against one another and amongst themselves. This is an extremely effective way of divide and conquer and was used throughout the colonies. Lastly, it has been blamed as a primary vector that has pushed many into today's "Indian Politics": a term used internally by Native groups in Canada and America to describe debilitating dysfunction, at the political level. (Miller, 1998)

The African philosophy of communal values (known by its Southern African name *Ubuntu*) was similarly used against the tribes in Africa to help further the European colonization as it was in the Americas (Perry, 2015). Within the values of the people residing in a pre-contact era, were a large number of similarities (Diamond, 2005& 2013). As an election year rolls around it is very common to see in Canada where certain clans or groups will vote along partisan lines for their own leaders. Similar things are seen within Kenya. This is an unfortunate hangover from the days of the colonized being overseen by the colonial administrators. So effective, in fact, that it still runs down today. If one were to look at how the divisions of tribalism have ended up becoming a major source of problems then it is easy to see. As the Hon. Kaparo says, "We have a country called Kenya, but not a community called Kenya" (2016). Kenyans do put forth the image of a united nation internationally, as during the Olympic games, but at other times they maintain their local, regional loyalties to the detriment of the nation state as a whole.

To illustrate the drawbacks of tribalism, it is fitting to list a Canadian First Nations parable that was relayed in a speech by a tribal elder (Richard Miller, Sr.), which is rather sad, yet illustrative of how divisive behavior can become.

*There are two crab fishermen in the bay, and the bay is populated by two types of crabs. There are the Indian crabs at one end, who are rather tribal and clannish; and Jewish crabs at the other end, who see themselves as one big nation, willing to help each other. As the fishermen went out in the morning, they each had their crab traps ready, and buckets to fill, and went to opposite ends of the bay. At the end of the morning, both of the fishermen returned to the beach, each with a bucket about half full of crabs. They both set their buckets down on the beach, and decided to go to lunch. When they came back, they were astonished to see the Indian crab bucket still half full, but the Jewish crab bucket empty.*

*What had happened?*

*In typical tribal mentality, as soon as one crab from the Indian bucket started to climb up and get ahead, the other crabs grabbed it and pulled it back into the bucket. This continued until all the crabs were subdued and decided to await their fate – the cooking pot. On the other hand, the Jewish crabs all helped each other to escape. As soon as one got to the top of the crab bucket, it reached down to assist the next one, helping each other until every single crab had left the bucket and returned to the safety of the bay.*

Miller later stated that “While this is a parable, it is often the case that whenever there is a group who are very tribal and who dislike seeing others get ahead, they tend to pull each other back down into the bucket.” (Miller, 1998)

Causes of destructive behavior might be varied, but human interaction when taken into account with authority certainly must be considered. In his work 500 years ago, Thomas Hobbes (1651/2009) described the “Social Contract” that individual members of societies were responsible for each other and that it was their responsibility to ensure that they treated each other fairly and with respect. However, once this respect for one another breaks down, there is chaos. When there are groups within one society who demonize the other based on tribal affiliations, there is a breaking of this social contract, either through physical or other forms of discrimination. When this type of attitude is state sanctioned (implicitly or explicitly) or, worse, state sponsored, and it becomes acceptable to ignore this contract, then indeed chaos reigns. The examples of genocides are easy to use when considering what the potential end results are. Often with the aim of complete eradication of a group of people based on creed, tribe or education, as in Cambodia or Rwanda.

In addition, after killing large numbers of the groups, it was very effective to coerce the existing remaining tribal leadership to help get the local population to obey and listen to the new masters. This was (often) after they had given up all of their rights (through affixing an ‘X’ to a document that they also could not read) and then being relegated to a small area with the tribe members. (Churchill, 2001) This also allowed the colonizers to get frustrated tribal leaders to use their members to further their own goals. This meant everything from getting the tribal leaders to force labor from the members to giving up younger members to be sold into slavery. (Meredith, 2014)

There were two institutions that Europeans were able to utilize to their advantage, the existing divisive slave trade and the bureaucratic systems that had been well established in the Americas. For centuries, the Arab slave trade had been taking place and the slave markets of The Spice Islands (present day Zanzibar) were reaching deep into most parts of the continent. (Meredith, 2014) This had the effect of destroying much of the social structure that had been in place for tens of thousands of years (Meredith, 2014; Prunier, 1995). In addition to the direct losses of the population there was the corruption of the leadership: it was easy to make money by selling their own tribal members. When there were not enough members in their own tribes, there were also neighboring tribes

to raid and capture. This led to tensions, wars and complete distrust. The situation was very favorable for invading forces of Europeans to complete the take-over of the tribal regions. (Khapoya, 1994; Lamb 1987) The most successful place for the Europeans to look for guidance when taking over Africa was the Americas where their forefathers gained all that they wanted.

This new generation of colonizers assumed that governing tactics that had been successful in North America could work just as well in the newly acquired African territory. (Khapoya, 1994) Bureaucracy was designed to efficiently maintain the power elites to have their interests furthered the most effective way possible. These bureaucratic structures were initially designed to run larger and larger governments, in area, populace and finance. (Reybrouck, 2013) The first and most successful long term governing policy is eradication of the population that is currently occupying the place, otherwise known as genocide. (Churchill, 2001) This process clears vast areas that can be re-colonized by the succeeding party. Naturally, this was to encourage wars between tribes, often arming both sides of the wars and warring with the natives themselves. The second was giving one tribe power over the others and encouraging sycophants to get “rewarded”. This had disastrous effects on societies as their status, and often their very survival depended on which tribe they were able to associate themselves with, as happened in both North America and in East Africa. (Churchill, 2001; Helin 2006; Reybrouck, 2013; Meredith 2014).

The government of Canada was a world class leader when it came to the indigenous problem. (Helin, 2006; Engler, 2013) They created a system of identification for the members of the various tribes, and these cards were used to distinguish the card holders and then give them the right to stay on reserves, land that was designated for natives. It was here that the colonial governments of England, France and Belgium could learn methods to divide and conquer their own native populations (in Kenya the *luau* was the method).

As a bilingual country, Canada had the added historical advantage of hundreds of years as colonial administrators to assist various visiting dignitaries at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they were visiting the capital city of Ottawa. These bureaucratic tools and systems were quickly and efficiently transferred to Africa, from the Townships of South Africa to the ID systems of Kenya and Rwanda, further restricting the local population which had the effect of controlling them as well as driving even more division between disparate groups of people within these areas. (Engler, 2013) At this time, those without restrictions were those from European backgrounds and who served as the ruling classes of people. And, it is too easy for the competing tribe members emulate the ruling classes after they leave. Through everything from the symbolic trappings to the systematic approach of collecting the monetary resources that can be appropriated as their own: after being treated as adolescents, is it any surprise that once power has been transferred that the structure, or a (sometimes distorted) version of the structure remains in place.

Hobbes' (1651/2009) Leviathan was transformed into the omnipotent human who was a different color, and from a far-away place. Once removed, the distrusts and conflicts that were unleashed upon the people were unleashed. There was always the rage, but it was a "controlled" rage, directed in the way the colonial masters saw fit. An effective tool that was useful for imperial means, devastating (physically as well as psychologically) once removed. And, this removal could be either slow or sudden, but after centuries of violent oppression the conflicts that erupted were damaging to the point of debilitation with anger focused on those vulnerable, other tribes or members. (Prunier, 1995)

Once taken over by Europeans, there were also resources that were available in the bureaucratic sense. Bureaucracy has been an effective way for those in power to consolidate and to solidify their power base with those that they are now in charge of. The colonizers had a number of systematic approaches towards ruling areas that had been conquered. These traditions went back to Roman times such as record keeping and the system of being able to give and carry out orders that are necessary to keeping an empire running the way that it was supposed to and to maximizing benefits to those in power: and it was an efficient way to procure improvements on the land. And there were improvements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), for example, with a railroad and other infrastructure (Hochschild, 1999). But, as with all colonial powers and their development it had little value to the native inhabitants who were taxed for the building of the infrastructure, which invariably ended up assisting the colonial powers to further exploit the regions. (Landes, 1999) The policies in the DRC were much like the rest of Africa and the other conquered world, harsh and brutal with the local inhabitants being turned against one another to further the economic gain of the colonial masters (Hoschschild, 1998; Reybrouck, 2013; Meredith, 2014).

This leads to (in the Kenyan model), a situation where, as Mutahi Kagwe stated "Kenyans must learn how to believe in themselves and do away with this culture of dependency on donors for everything" (Helin, 2011, p. 295). An easy form of continued economic colonization is the dependency traps that people find themselves in, ranging from the hyper-micro level of the individual, through family, clan tribe, nation and region. Holding the purse strings for "good little natives" as the "benevolent masters" tell the natives (often behind the veil of Christian charity) what to do is a far cry from the ancient proverb, "Give a man a fish and feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and feed him for a lifetime." The very act of charity, originally channeled through churches that purported to save the natives and redeem them was perverted into a means of control.

Following the Papal Decrees of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of colonization has always found its strength in religion. The spread of colonial powers and the tribal wake left behind required the tireless devotion (often lifetimes of work) of missionaries to achieve the goals of the governments engaged in appropriating lands. The irony is that most of the original missionaries were well-meaning and had not knowingly bought into corrupt systems of governance, yet were often critical to the success of the colonizers. (Reybrouck, 2013; Hochschild, 1999) In addition, there were enough passages in the Old Testament

to encourage the eradication of old beliefs and to use chiefs and kings to subjugate entire populations recruited to their cause. Not to be outdone, literal readings of the Koran and the Hadiths empowered Islamic colonizers to be as effective as their Christian counterparts. (Lamb 1987; Reybrouck, 2013) Eventually, it came back to technology to determine the winning outcome; and always at contact the losers were the native populations. (Diamond, 2005)

## **Methodology**

As a member of a tribe in Canada (one of 2%), the methodology of this paper confers with a reflexivity (in a postmodernist manifestation) with contextualizing different groups with similar challenges. By doing so, the goal is to raise awareness of how historical understanding necessitates success in working towards ending much of the problems that are occurring.

Therefore, this paper is designed as a comparative look at two different parts of the world that have both been adversely affected by the colonial issues brought on by generations of occupation by technologically more advanced Europeans. The methodology is to delineate and explain how disparate groups are united in ways that are at first difficult to see.

## **Findings**

Tribalism is nothing new in the human psyche, and has proven to help mankind survive for tens of thousands of years. (Diamond, 2013) But, it is those groups who are able to co-exist together that have proven the most progressive, and the most powerful way is through alliances creating greater areas. Examples are The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Union to show how unity can overcome division. Long term peace can only be achieved when there is economic prosperity and that prosperity has the far reaching results of ensuring equality and that equality means the ability for those in the lower rungs to raise themselves above the poverty trap. Ability does not mean patronizing economic dependency but, the chance for all to achieve these economic prosperity.

The other is the EAC for East African Community, where the groups of the countries are reducing trade barriers and becoming closer. This EAC has the potential to show how by collaborating and by breaking barriers the postcolonial issues of the vision can be overtaken on our own. This is where there are truly self-confident and self-sufficient people coming together to build the unity. Whether looking at something from a micro, family or clan level, or expanding out the to the geopolitics, the issue of becoming more unified clearly shows how the breaking down of barriers becomes extremely efficient and effective and is truly a positive way forward.

## Recommendations

Almost 30 years ago, the Club of Rome stated that the biggest internal division that African leadership faced was to unify ethnic groups after the damages from colonization (Laszlo, 1977). Three decades later, it is as true as it has ever been in many countries, including Kenya. The threats that it brings to a state are from within and “[i]t saps the nation-state’s integrating power. In fact, it threatens to replace the nation with tribe” (Drucker, 1993, p. 152). Frantz Fanon was “a writer, psychiatrist, revolutionary, and pioneer of anti and post colonial thought” (Antony, 2013). He called for a rejection of both tribalism and regionalism, and this led to the need for the building of national consciousness in the nations that have been through the decolonization process. (Fanon 1961/2004) Because without the ability to overcome these, they continue to fester and conflicts will continue to be sparked by cultural and tribal differences. (Huntington, 1997)

There are several things that we can look to when it comes to overcoming this type of division. The first is that there are countries who have largely overcome their tribalism, even though they had been subjugated much to the same degree as all the rest of the groups. One example would be Rwanda which has gone through a traumatic - even egregious example of tribalism at its worst in 1994. During the 100 Days of Terror, more than 800,000 individuals lost their lives in one of the worst genocides ever. (Prunier, 1995) This shattered country has rebounded from the lows of the summer of 1994 to become a shining star among all of the 54 countries in Africa. (Crisafulli & Redmond, 2015; Perry, 2015) By overcoming the divisive tribalism and not allowing tribalism within the political agenda as well as identifying all citizens as Rwandans first rather than by a tribe, they have effectively transformed the society into a very productive, safe and secure society for its citizens. (Crisafulli & Redmond, 2015)

The world has continued to rapidly advance and technology has been critical for any successful power struggle: from prehistoric times through to present day militaries. The timing for the invasions of the Americas and Africa (and Asia, Australia and the Pacific as well), were all based on technological advances (Diamond, 2005 & 2013). These military and exploratory advances were contingent upon a variety of timed occurrences; in the Americas improved maps and sailing as well as steel; in Africa hydrocarbons and (again) an expanding population base. With the technological advances of today, readily available in Kenya, it can be possible to have various and disparate groups unite and develop their own economies in order to finally break the post-colonial bonds that are preventing successful social movement beyond the divisions that have, for far too long, held people back.

Nation building has employed a variety of successful methods, one of the most effective being early education. Thus, Kenya must start by reforming early education that will do away with tribal differences by using the example of at least one private school in Nairobi where this type of curriculum was successfully implemented (Wrong, 2010). The same vein, policies of not favoring one group of students over another and strengthening the national (Kiswahili and English) languages should be promoted nationwide. As the

main reasons for tribalism are existential, where people need roots, there needs to be a continued national movement towards building nation-state roots to replace the tribal alliances with national (Drucker, 1993). As the motto on the Great Seal of the United States reads, "*E pluribus unum*" (out of many, one), a policy of national unity can work. With proper education and policy, this can be achieved by all groups throughout the world.

As stated in the outset, understanding of the reasons for contemporary discord and debilitating actions is critical for current leadership to act effectively. Without deep understanding of the past and the context in which the present is playing out (at all levels of leadership) the risk is that reactions to issues are inappropriate and ineffectual, or worse.

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