Colonial Africa and Its Emerging Cultures

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Introduction

The period between 1870s and 1900s was a period of profound and revolutionary changes in the history of Africa. It was a period that Africa faced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual conquest and colonization. Most African societies fought fiercely and bravely to retain control over their countries and societies however, by the early twentieth century, much of Africa, except Ethiopia and Liberia, had been colonized by seven European powers—Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy (Ekechi, 2002).

The colonization of African societies marked the demise of old African kingdoms and empires and their reconfiguration into different political entities. The political geography of Africa was reconstructed and new African societies were founded on alien ideological and social premises, thus marking the beginning of imposition of new culture over African traditional values. The forced acceleration of the black populations into the new world represented the sustained assimilation of western culture by Africans (Moti, 2011).

While it is an indisputable fact that colonialism has a monumental implication for the contemporary Africa, some people are of the view that colonialism has now become history and that Africans should allow it to remain so (Ayanwu, 2001). This is because there is no need bemoaning the colonial past as some countries that were also colonized did not allow their colonial past to cause setback for them as they are already making appreciable progress. On the contrary however, some scholars have a different view. This is why decades after the end of colonization the intellectual debate over the positive and negative impacts of colonization is still very much alive (Lange, 2009). This is the crux of this chapter, to contribute to the debate on the impact of colonialism on Africa from cultural perspective. For analytical purposes, this chapter is scaled down into four sections. This section is the introduction while the next section focuses on conceptual discourse on colonialism and culture. Section three analyzes colonialism and its cultural Legacy in contemporary Africa and the last section (four) concludes the discourse.

Conceptualizing Colonialism and Culture

According to Horvard (1972), colonialism is a form of domination – the control by individuals or groups over the territory and or behaviour of other individuals or groups. Hilton (2011) defined colonization as the establishment and maintenance of a colony in a specific region. According to Kelm (1998) however, colonialism is a process that includes geographic incursion, socio-cultural dislocation, the establishment of external political control and economic dispossession, the provision of low-level social services and ultimately, the creation of ideological formulations around race and skin colour that position the colonizer at a higher evolution level than the colonized. Colonialism can also be defined as the extension of a nation's authority over another

territory by the establishing settler colonies or administrative dependencies in which indigenous populations are directly ruled or displaced. Colonization can occur with or without the presence of indigenous people (Hilton, 2011). The resources, labour, and markets of the colonial territory are generally dominated by the colonial power who may also impose its socio-cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the colonized territory. This may stem from the belief (often erroneous) that the mores of the colonizer are superior to those of the colonized territory. The colonizer then uses this belief to legitimize or promote the cultural displacement of the colonized territory. Colonialism is therefore the establishment of a country's sovereignty over another country. When a country colonizes a region, fostering an indigenous population, often, the result is oppression (Hilton, 2011).

Colonialism can take the form of settler colonialism. In this case, an imperial power migrate its own people in a massive proportion permanently into a territory. The purpose is territorial occupation, hence the assimilation, displacement or elimination of indigenous residents through various means and formation of a new community (Veracini, 2010). Settler colonialism is motivated by land acquisition and its attendant resources and other physical structures are the principal motivating factors for such settlement and necessitate the perpetual process of establishment of settler sovereignty over the territory (Wolfe, 2006). Another type of colonialism is dependencies in which the colonizing country does not send large-scale migrants to the colonized territory but establishes administrative or governing organization that controls the indigenous population by the use or threat of force. Another form is exploitative colonialism in which the motive for conquering a territory by the imperial authority is low-cost resource extraction and exploitation of the indigenous community (Veracini, 2010). It is therefore obvious

from the foregoing analyses that colonialism can have multidimensional effects on the economic, political and socio-cultural life of the indigenous people.

The concept of culture is however, difficult to define, the issue being that of explanatory adequacy of its nature (Apte, 1994). Despite a century of efforts to define the term, there is no single definition of it that has achieved consensus in the literature (Spencer-Oatey (2008). The following definitions wlll however guide this study. According to Matsumoto (1996), culture is the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next. For Hofstede (1994) however, culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Arowolo (2010) defines culture as people's total way of life, which includes the way people live, eat, worship, produce, create and recreate. He explained further that culture is the totality of bequeathed ideas, belief system, values and norms, which constitutes the common bases of generally agreed social action. In the view of Mulholland (1991) however, culture is a set of shared and enduring meaning, values, and beliefs that characterize national, ethnic, or other groups and orient their behavior. Perhaps, a more comprehensive definition is given by Spencer-Oatey (2008) who conceives culture as a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the meaning of other people's behaviour. Moti (2011) on the other hand, defines culture as the totality of the way of life of a group of people that has been developed, shaped by the environment and needs of the people and practiced over the years.

The definitions above show that culture is a way of life of a group of individuals which gives them identity and distinguishes them from other group. The people of a society share common experience, beliefs, values, attitudes and human nature like emotional drives, intellectual capacities which are transmitted from one generation to another. This constitutes the general culture of that society. Culture is learned and derives from one's social environment rather than biologically inherited (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Culture is dynamic and not static. It undergoes changes to reflect changing trends as societies develop and modernize. The elements of culture include values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, symbols, traditions, artifacts, rituals, and heroes (Hofstede, 1994). Rituals in this context mean the socially essential collective activities within a culture. Heroes on the other hand are the real or imaginary people who serve as behaviour models within a culture. While culture cannot exist without society, there are no known human societies that do not exhibit culture.

Colonialism and its Cultural Legacy in Contemporary Africa

European's scramble for Africa was basically motivated by some factors. First was to promote their economic growth –trade facilitation, low-cost resource extraction and exploitation of the indigenous community. It was also to "discover" Africa which they had viewed as the Dark Continent. Another factor is European ethnocentric nature, which viewed their culture as superior to others. As a consequence, there was the need to assimilate Africans into European civilization. Colonialism as a concept therefore has its roots in European expansionism and the founding of the so-called New World (Wolfe, 2006).

At the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, all the European powers particularly, Germany, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain met to legitimize their colonization of

Africa by partitioning the continents' territory. This division was done without regard to ethnic, cultural, linguistic peculiarities of African societies. The conference was called to avoid war among European nations over African territory following the defeat of Germany in the World War I (Gerald, 2009).

The wave of decolonization started in the 1940s following World War II as many of Europe's colonies began to fight wars of resistance against colonial domination and to agitate for independence (Wolfe, 2006). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, most African States achieved their independence with great expectations for a bright future. The effects of colonialism on the sphere of life in African societies however, did not end with decolonization.

Colonialism affects political, economic and social life of the colonized. Pre-colonial societies relied on social norms rooted in their shared culture in the organization of their social, political and economic life (North, 2005). However, the advent of colonialism has affected these activities. Colonialism brought about infiltration of the Western civilisation and culture, and the relegation of African culture to the background (Arowolo, 2010). Colonial policies forcibly denied Africa from continuing with its traditional cultural activities (Gerald, 2009). During the period of colonialism, traditional African culture and values were seriously threatened and in some cases, African subjects were forcefully assimilated into the cultures of their colonial masters. In extreme cases, the colonialists categorically denied the existence of African cultural values and worse still, taught the African themselves to despise them. The ultimate effect of colonialism is the disintegration of African culture and distortion and retardation of the pace and tempo of cultural growth and trend of civilisation in Africa (Moti, 2011). The impact of colonialism on African culture can be seen in several ways which are discussed below.

The Marriage Institution

One of Africa's institutions affected by colonialism is the marriage institution. Marriage institution is a social institution that is formed based on the religious and social norms of such a society. Generally speaking, marriage is a union between persons of opposite sex. In African culture, the nature of marriage institution is largely polygamous. A man that worth its salt can marry as many wives as possible. It is a means of showing affluence. That is to say, it is not one man and one wife (monogamy). It is also important to note that the choice of a marriage partner is not limited to the couple-to-be. In fact, it is often subjected to the approval of parents of the couple to-be, extended family members and gods (or as the case may be, the ancestors) which are also consulted in the process. Marriage institution in African culture encourages large family. Couple can decide to have as many children as possible. Large family size provides ready workforce for farming activities. Apart from this, having many children is also seen as a way of perpetuating the name of the man. Some societies are matrilineal that is emphasis is on the female while those that are patrilineal emphasizes the importance of the male gender (Mdukwe and Madukwe (2010). The impact of colonialism on African marriage institution can be seen in the fact that, it encourages monogamy as against polygamy. Africans that imbibed Christianity via colonial experience are in the habit of adopting monogamy as against polygamy which is indigenous to Africa.

The Family System

The basic social unit in the society is the family. In modern sense, family is composed of the man, wife or wives, the children and other household dependants (Nwaogugu, 1990). However, in the traditional African family setting, membership of a family apart from the man, his wife

and children, membership of a family also include all blood relations sharing common descent like grandchildren, nephews, nieces and aunts (Egbeke, 2000). Ogbonmwan (2008:3) put it more pungently:

> Everybody is linked with all the other members, living or dead through a complex network of spiritual relationship into a kind of mystical body. Consequently, it is not just "being" that the African values; "being-with other" being rooted in kinship into one parental role. A person is an individual to the extent that he is a member of a family, clan or community.

Colonialism has brought about individualism. It is now me and my family hence, the distinction between distant and close relations. In essence, the social effect of colonialism is the glorification of individualism of families and fragmentation of family and social relations as against close knit-family structures.

Relegation of African Traditional Institution and the Glorification of Modern Institutions

Before the advent of colonialism, African traditional institution was held in high esteem. In fact, in some African settings, the traditional rulers were seen as demi-gods. They were seen as the representatives of God on earth. They wielded enormous authority and had the power of death and life. Colonialism brought in modern system of governance. The implication is that traditional rulers became subservient to the modern political leaders (Madukwe and Madukwe 2010).

Colonialism and the Culture of Corruption in Modern Africa

It is believed that western civilisation, the major product of colonialism is responsible for the unbridled corruption in modern Africa. From the work of Mulinge and Leseted (1998) some of the ways through which the historical event of colonialism could be linked to corrupt practices include, monetization and taxation policies introduced by the colonialists among others. One can

also add imperialism of trade. To start with, it is important to state that a closer examination of pre-colonial African economies reveals that there were no sizeable monetary economies in the territories acquired then by the emerging colonial power. The pervasive use of money made it to become a very useful commodity. Thus, this brought on board, financial and economic infrastructures that prepared the ground for corruption. In the process, the colonialists introduced their own legal tender. To complete the monetization process, the colonial overlords introduced compulsory tax payable in colonial currencies to ease cost of administration. The options left for people in the colonies were either to: work for colonial masters in order to get paid in colonial currencies; or engage in cash crop production needed by colonial companies so as to get paid in colonial currencies.

Introduction of taxation had nothing to do with corruption but the manner in which the tax itself was collected, encouraged corrupt behaviour. The colonial governments mostly relied on local African leaders and especially chiefs to collect taxes. In order to motivate much tax revenue, the tax collectors were allowed to retain certain percentage of the total taxes collected. The idea of rewarding tax collectors with the passage of time turned out to be a major means for the accumulation of private property, a lifestyle that became difficult to do away with which encouraged chiefs to abuse their office. This is one of the major ways through which corruption gained deep root in Africa.

Destruction of Communal lifestyle

Pre-colonial Africans lived a communal lifestyle. That is to say, there was interconnectedness among members of a community. There was communal assistance in form of mutual self help during farming season. It could be in form of bush clearing for farming, cultivation, harvesting

among others. Apart from this, pre-colonial Africa was also noted for helping one another. In fact, they shared virtually everything. Indeed, community was an extension of the family system. In typical African setting, one can easily walk into a neighbour's compound to seek for help. It could be to demand for food which would be gladly given even if it was not eating time for such a neighbour (Ogbonmwan, 2008). One may even go to another person's farm stead to collect live charcoal in order to make fire for cooking and may be given enough food to the extent that such person may not even need to cook again at that moment. In a sense, people used to bear one another's burden and everyone was his brother's keeper. Lands were also farmed by cooperative group efforts rather than by individual farmers (Ibhawoh & Dibua, 2003). Colonial contact that culminated into urbanization has made nonsense of this noble African culture. People can hardly do such a thing in urban centres, as people are only interested in helping mostly their immediate family members.

African Legal System

In any society, the importance of maintenance of peace and order cannot be overstated. In African setting, there exist moral codes and ethics that govern the behaviour of people in a particular community. These include customs, regulations, taboos and rules. In African continent there are human and divine laws. While breaking human laws attracts human sanction, contravening divine laws brings divine judgement. In short, breaking these laws in most cases are considered as wrong against the entire community and not just against an individual (s) and of course must to be punished corporately. Breaking divine laws are seen as offence against the gods. The gravity of the offence determines the punishment that would be meted out to the culprits. For example, heinous crimes are often regarded as sacrilege may attract death penalty or banishment or sacrifices to appease the gods. Another method has to do with oath taking. For

instance, where somebody is suspected of evil acts, like adultery, poisoning or stealing which he or she denies, he/she may be required to swear an oath to authenticate his/her innocence. If somebody steals and is caught, he/she may be required to do restitution (Mbiti, 1990). African colonial experience has lessened the impact of the customs, taboos, and divine laws especially in the urban centres. In fact, people born in urban centres hardly know about all the aforementioned.

Conflict Resolution

The processes of conflict resolution in African context are relatively informal and thus, not as intimidating like the modern legal system. It is necessary to note that traditional African Societies, elders, chiefs, family heads, traditional healers, diviners, herbalists and members of secret society play prominent roles in conflict resolution. In this circumstance, conflict resolution procedures are derived basically from the culture of the people. It also emphasizes restoration of relationships and reconciliation of groups (Choudree, 1999). In general, conflict resolution in traditional African is a community affair and it focuses on identifying the root cause(s) of the problem, and bringing together the warring parties in addressing the underlying issues. The process of conflict resolution is done in such a way that makes the guilty to accept wrong doing, thereby paving the way for reconciliation, which may culminate in compensation or just forgiveness (Brock- Utne, 2001). In the case of conflict between the living and the ancestral spirits traditional/spiritual healers may use herbs, animal sacrifices and water to perform rituals aimed at resolving conflict between the living on one hand, and between the living and their ancestral spirits on the other hand, may involve the spiritualists. Those involved in conflict resolution are not just to resolve conflict, they are also to anticipate and perhaps stop it before it degenerates to uncontrollable state.

Commenting on the negative impact of colonialism on conflict resolution in traditional Africa Mimiko (2010) asserts that:

> The social fabric was completely devastated and a new culture of violence was implanted. Traditional African systems of conflict resolution were destroyed and, in their places, nothing was given. The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. A new crop of elites was created, nurtured, and weaned on the altar of violence and colonialism armed with the structures of the modern state to continue to carry out the art and act of subjugation of the mass of the people in the service of colonialism (cited in Arowolo, 2010:2)

African Traditional Religion

Right from the time of creation, human beings have developed the instincts that make them believe in the existence of a supernatural being. This is usually expressed through religion. Africans are highly religious and this shows in every area of life of a typical African man. African religion is expressed through belief in spirit whether ancestral, magical, witchcraft or sorcery. They believe in immortality and they worship ancestors and spirit beings which they believe serve as intermediary between them and the gods. They believe in the protection capability of the ancestral spirits. They also believe in non-ancestral spirit which to them control natural events and other awesome creatures like the sun, moon, star, mountains, rivers animals like snakes among others. Sacrifices are made to these gods to appease them so as to avert their wrath when there is infringement of the laws of the land or to obtain favour from them (Mbiti, 1990). The coming of colonial overlords brought about Christianity and not many Africans are still adhering to African traditional religion.

Language

Another area of colonial influence on African culture includes language. The various local dialects and languages of African societies are being taken over by the language of the colonial masters. During colonialism, African languages were banned in schools and African students were given new Christian names with the aim of giving Africans a new identity. Most countries colonised by English speaking countries now make English their lingua franca, those colonised by French speaking are comfortable making French their official language while those colonised by Portugal prefer Portuguese language above their indigenous languages as their lingual franca. In other words, colonialism has led to language loss on the part of the colonies. The imposition of alien language and the relentless attack on African values contributed to the African inferior mentality and to the loss of confidence in Africans, African institutions and heritage (Khapoya, 2012).

Food

The influence of the culture of colonial masters on African culture can also be seen in the in the shift from African basic diet to foreign foods including alcohol and beverages. In fact, the hangover of colonialism can be seen in the heritage and legacy of food than in any other part of everyday life (Richards, 1985). Prior to colonisation, the staple food of the African tribes that inhabited the continent depended on topography, soil structure, transhumance, agricultural development and climate. Colonial occupation however, gradually changed the African indigenous diet to favour crops for industrial needs at the expense of the local agronomic needs. Healthy traditional staples were replaced by refined foods like flour and sugar. Imported foods eaten by the colonial masters or produced by their companies on African soil are gradually taking over from African traditional food. Some Africans born in urban centres even find it

strange to eat some indigenous food. The resultant effects of this dietary shift are hunger, weakened health, less varied diets and ailments strange to African continents such as obesity (Dietler, 2007).

Women's Right

In most societies in pre-colonial Africa, women were made subservient to their male counterpart. They were to obey their husbands. In some areas they were seen as property to be inherited by members of their husbands' families when their husbands died depending on the prevailing culture in their communities. Colonial influence has changed most of these. Women now strive for equality with men. Feminist ideology is now being used to drive equal right with men. Gone are the days that women did not have right over their bodies or determine the number of children they want to have (Aniekwu, 2006).

Positive Impacts of Colonialism on African Culture

Having seen some of the negative sides of colonialism, it will be wrong to conclude without discussing very briefly some of the positive parts associated with Africa's contact with colonialism. Scholars (Madukwe and Madukwe, 2010; Ogbonmwan, 2010; Arowolo, 2010) have discussed in detail, some of the positive impacts of colonialism. They include:

Christianity

One of the greatest legacies of colonialism is Christianity. African spiritual heritage and practice in many ways inhibited the development of rational thought and science. The introduction Christianity is one of the major factors in the process of Westernization in Africa. It extricated African spiritual savagery by eradicating some African barbaric spiritual practices like idol

worship associated with human sacrifices, killing of twins among others. It freed Africans from the uncertainties of daily sacrifices, rituals, and cleansing ceremonies traditionally required for longevity, peace and prosperity. Africa is now liberated from the belief that everything that happened to one in life is due entirely to the intervention of the spirits, a belief that required frequent spiritual consultation to determine what should be done to pacify those spirits and which was also extremely fatalistic. In addition, Christianity created a new basis for Africans with diverse backgrounds to come together and as they had traditionally done, to assist one another (Khapoya, 2012).

Education

Colonial education was one of the factors in the process of Westernization. Indigenous African education system had close links with African social life both in material and spiritual sense. It was characterised by such things as ritual passage ceremony from childhood to adulthood, artistic performances, preparation for adult roles, ceremonies, games, festivals, dancing, singing and drawing (Woolman, 2012). The traditional schooling system however, could only prepare the local youth to be relevant in their respective societies and not necessarily for life outside of Africa. In the process of converting and inculcating Western values in Africans however, schools were built to educate Africans while some were sent to Europe to acquire higher education after finishing from secondary school. The introduction of formal education, helped to broaden the Africans' outlook and to unlock the hidden potential of the African people. With colonial education (though structurally different from African cultural background) schooling was no longer just about rituals and rites of passage but would now mean earning an education that would allow Africans to compete with countries such as the United States and those in Europe.

Furthermore, the contemporary African states now use political and moral ideas deeply rooted in Western education (Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013).

Modern Technology

Another legacy of colonialism includes modern agricultural and transportation technology. African societies, before the arrival of colonial technology, were using crude method of farming and transportation such as hoes, cutlasses, axe and digger while African indigenous transport infrastructure consisted largely of footpaths and tracks for pedestrian and animal traffic, canoe and natural navigable waterways (Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012). But contact with the colonial overlords has brought about the use of modern farming techniques and machines like tractors, harvesters to mention just a few. Modern transportation infrastructure such as good road, rail networks and aircraft now facilitate movement of people, goods and services from one place to another in the erstwhile colonies of Africa rather than trekking long distances on foot or farming with manual labour, which took long hours, days and years (Ziltener & Kunzler, 2013).

Improvement in Health Care Delivery System

The institutionalization of the modern health care system can be seen as one of the many legacies of Western encroachment in Africa which marked a significant and rapid innovation in tropical medicine (Abdullahi, 2011). Before colonial incursion into African region, the various communities in Africa depended so much on orthodox (traditional) medicines. Indigenous Africans suffered and perished in greater numbers when they encountered a disease to which they had built up no natural immunity. Malaria fever and Trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness then were incurable and Africans had no understanding of Sickle Cell Anemia (Page Davis,

2005). However, contact with Europeans via colonialism has provided opportunities to access improved medicines to cure diseases, particularly, the invention of quinine to stem the scourge of malaria that orthodox medicines could not cure. African health care delivery system has equally been enhanced through exposure to modern health techniques and standards of sanitation and hygiene such as immunization of children (Abdullahi, 2011). The increasing demand for and use of traditional medicine not only in Africa but indeed the entire world, is a pointer to its contribution to promoting positive health behaviour and serve as a good referral point to modern health care system (Osowole et al., 2005). This would require the acknowledgement of areas of strengths and weaknesses by both traditional and modern medical practitioner and the need for cooperation for the advantage of Africans.

Conclusion

The implication of colonialism on African culture has been examined in this chapter. No doubt, colonialism has a huge influence or impact on African culture. Colonialism served as a medium for imposition of foreign culture over African indigenous culture and in this manner, disallowed the later from cultural continuity, growth and changes to reflect changing trends of civilization in Africa. European imperial powers suppressed, disintegrated and distorted African indigenous ways of doing things. This partly explains why some Africans view Western culture as superior while regarding their own African culture as archaic, inferior and primitive and therefore unacceptable for the modern societies. The postcolonial Africa now faces cultural confusion resulting from duality of institutional practices. This confusion has culminated in a dilemma for the continent. The solution to this predicament is a dynamic interplay and harmonization of Africa's cultural heritage and Western civilization such that can inform good governance and sustainable development in contemporary Africa.

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