Review

British colonial education policy in Africa

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As a result of colonization, the colonizing countries implemented their own form of education within their colonies. Colonizing governments realized that they gained strength over colonized nations not only through physical control but also mental control. This mental control was carried out through education. The colonizer's educational goal was to expose Africans to a superior culture. Colonizers thought education would bring Africans into the modern world and education would bring them to a higher level of civilization. However the need for skilled native labor by colonizers for economic development and eagerness to propagate Christianity caused colonizers to use education as a tool to achieve social control over African people.

Key words: Africa, colonial education, western culture, assimilation, inferiority, superiority.

INTRODUCTION

"How can one dare compare the advantages and disadvantages of colonization? What advantages, even if a thousand times more important, could make such internal and external catastrophes acceptable?" (Memmi, 1965), and "Throughout the last four and a half centuries, racism and white supremacy have continually threatened the existence of African people before, during, and after enslavement. These threats have forced Africans to modify their beliefs, thoughts, behavior in order to survive on a planet where they are regarded as "Third World People". Those who now claim to be members of "First World" are actually late comers to the human family" (Browder, 1996). Both Memmi and Browder conceptualized the domination of Europeans over Peoples of African descent. Colonization is an attempt to remove the colonized people from their indigenous learning structures and draw them toward the structures of the colonizers. Therefore, more than the power of the cannon, it is canonical knowledge that establishes the power of the colonizer "I" over the colonized "Other" (Foucault, 1980). White supremacy manifests in the social, economic, political, and cultural history of European expansion (Christian, 2002).

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European colonialism was established in the belief that "superior races" have the privilege and the duty to civilize

the less fortunate, "inferior races" (Serequeberhan, 2010). A notable British geographer, James MacQueen, arrogantly proclaims, "If we really wish to do good in Africa, we must teach her savage sons that white men are their superiors"? (Falola, 2007). The "ideological pacification" of the colonized occurs when this insidious and humiliating *idea* is decisively implanted in African psyches and is accepted by Africans as their *destiny* (Serequeberhan, 2010). As Frantz Fanon puts it: "In the colonial context, the colonizer does not stop his work of breaking in [d'ereintement] the colonized until the latter admits loudly and clearly the supremacy of white values" (Serequeberhan, 2010).

The English novel is the "terra firma" where the self-consolidating project of the West is launched, and *Robinson Crusoe* is an inaugural text in the English novel tradition. It is also an early eighteenth-century testament to the superiority of rational civilization over nature and savagery, a text that foregrounds the developing British Empire's self- representation through encounters with its colonial others (Kehinde, 2006):

The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe, who cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella maker and a clergyman. He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty

savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races (Susan Gallagher, 1991).

On the island Crusoe attempts to change all of nature, including Friday. Crusoe begins imposing cultural imperialism. He gives Friday his new name and instructs "Friday" to call him "Master". Crusoe then teaches Friday English Language needed for master-servant relationship, and he wants Friday to be useful, handy and dependent. Crusoe then converts Friday's religion. When Crusoe wants to build a boat, for example, he assigns Friday all difficult tasks. Crusoe is able to prove his superiority through tongue, pen, gun and Bible. Kehinde argues that, in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* Crusoe the Western European self is equated with futurity, vision, civilization, rationality, language and light. Conversely, the depiction of the non- European (the Amerindians, the African) in the text is an absolute negation of the Other. The black is associated with pre-history, savagery, cannibalism, unconsciousness, silence and darkness (Kehinde, 2006).

Gebrewold argues that the colonizer considered the colonized as inferior beings. On the one hand he considered them inferior, therefore, justified to exploit and subdue; on the other hand, the colonizer maintained it was his ethical and Christian responsibility to civilize them (Gebrewold, 2008). The colonizer's educational goal was to expose African's to a superior culture. Colonizers thought they were developed and well educated. Colonization which started with the goal of colonizers' providing modernization for colonized people turned into a means of service for white people. George Urch states in his article "Education and Colonialism in Kenya" that the influx of settlers had given a tremendous impetus toward trade and development. With a policy of granting huge tracts of land to the wealthier settlers, a great demand was created for African help of all kinds (Urch, 1971). The need for skilled native labor by the white settlers caused the colonizers to reconsider the educational program. George Urch argues that while the Africans were developing an interest in Western-style literary education, the colonial government began to realize the necessity of training Africans for service to the white man (Urch, 1971).

The desire of colonial powers was to make their countries strong by exploiting the others (Illiffe, 1997). Colonizers used Western education to train Africans as catechists, messengers and other positions needed to assist them in realizing the social and economic development and transformations desired by the European missionaries and their agents, moreover, merchants and traders also required qualified personnel to handle their business transactions (Omolewa, 2006).

Professor Toyin Falola states that Western education, for a long time, became the tool of colonization. Consciousness of race inferiority was accepted and interna-

lized by many blacks (Falola, 2007). W. E. B. Du Bois spoke about double consciousness, defined as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Falola, 2007). In his well cited book (2006), Carter Woodson spoke eloquently about what he called the "mis-education of the negro":

…the negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor. The problem of holding the negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary (Falola, 2007).

Kelly and Altbach state that "colonial schools ... sought to extend foreign domination and economic exploitation of the colony" (Kelly and Altbach, 1984). They find that "education in... colonies seems directed at absorption into the metropole and not separate and dependent development of the colonized in their own society and culture" (Kelly and Altbach, 1984). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o a citizen of the once colonized Kenya, in his book "Decolonizing the Mind" displays his anger toward the isolationist feelings colonial education causes. He writes:

The process annihilates people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves (Thiong'o, 1981).

Western colonialism is not content with pillaging human and material resources to sustain and consolidate its power over its colonies; it has to destroy the indigenous cultures and values (religion, language, dressing codes, etc) and supplant them with distorted and totally ambivalent versions (Kehinde, 2006). As Frantz Fanon asserts:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (Fanon, 1991).

Colonial administrations deliberately neglected education for both political and economic reasons and the British was accused of not extending the benefits of European civilization, including education (Whitehead, 2005). It was claimed that the British achieved social control by denying education to Africans (Ball, 1983). Martin Carnoy in his book *Education as Cultural Imperialism* strongly condemns colonial education as part of deliberate policy to perpetuate colonial rule (Carnoy, 1974). In the article "The Historiography of British Imperial Education Policy" which examines British education policy in Africa by Clive Whitehead, it is argued that indigenous people were brainwashed to discard their own cultures and embrace Western cultures which were supposedly superior, a situation which resulted in a culture of dependency, mental enslavement and a sense of inferiority (Whitehead, 2005). By altering the history and culture of Africa, the colonizer created new values for the African. Education which was implemented by the colonizers is important in facilitating the assimilation process.

All our traditions and experiences are connected with a foreign race - we have no poetry but that of our task-masters. The songs which live in our ears and are often on our lips are the songs we heard sung by those who shouted while we groaned and lamented. They sang of their history, which was the history of our degradation. They recited their triumphs, which contained the records of our humiliation. To our great misfortune, we learned their prejudices and their passions, and thought we had their aspirations and their power (Blyden, 1990).

On the other hand, despite severe criticism by the colonized Africans, in the eyes of the colonizers the policy of assimilation was based on a very real need.

> The black races of Africa have not attained a complete and coherent civilization of their own, nor do they possess the necessary foundations on which to build up a real system of education. The great contribution that we can make lies precisely in the interweaving and blending of primitive civilizations with our own universally applicable civilization, which will have to justify its position of superiority and authority by the manner in which it acquits itself of the responsibility it has assumed (Charton, 1930).

Western education was considered "too European," and therefore, ill-suited and irrelevant to African needs, and that in the process, the indigenous values of love, community relationships, and profound spirituality were being lost (Omolewa, 2006).

> Too many students leave our schools with just enough knowledge to alienate them from the soil and make them contemptuous of their brothers who have remained in the villages, but they are incapable of using this semblance of education, of which they

are so proud, to earn a living. They are too often the declassed, the malcontents, the parasites of the working community (Antonetti, 1925).

However, this physical presence, domination and control of Africa by the colonizer is sustained by a series or range of concepts implicitly constructed in the minds of the colonized (Kehinde, 2006). At the same time, African people complained that the new system had introduced new values of hatred, intolerance, "cutthroat competition", disharmony, pride, arrogance, covetousness, and even cheating. It was further suggested that there was too much rote-learning and too little application of the principles being taught in the schools (Omolewa, 2006). According to Aime Cesaire, there are no equal relations but the ones of domination and submission between the colonizers and the colonized. He depicts what bumps into his eyes in the colony:

> I see force, brutality, cruelty, sadism, conflict, and, in a parody of education, the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate functionaries, "boys", artisans, office clerks, and interpreters necessary for the smooth operation of business … between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses (Cesaire, 2000).

Jason A. McGarvey in his article "Conquest of the Mind" writes about a Tanzanian man whose name is Semali who had his master and Ph.D. degree. McGarvey in the article writes real life experiences of Semali during colonization. Semali says:

> Education is slavery of the mind…While I was growing up in what was then called Tanganyika, we had already been under colonization for nearly a century – first by the Germans, and then the British after the First World War. The colonial school I attended did not teach me to be a member of Chagga society. Although I had certain knowledge system as a member of the village, I read, wrote, and spoke things at school that did not fit into village life. I always wore two different hats. I developed this double-consciousness so well that I did not realize it. In order for the colonizers to exploit the Chagga for labor they first needed to establish themselves as the authority. Since authority traditionally rested in the hands of the Chagga elders, the colonizers needed to begin dismantling Chagga cultural traditions. The main tool for doing this was the colonial school. The colonial school was set up to instill the values and practices of the colonizers on the indigenous people so that the indigenous people would open up their land and their minds to market

economies. In order to establish control over these economies, the colonizers had to first establish control over the socialization of the people. As a result, the colonial schools began socializing the children in ways that conflicted with their traditions. The children began to lose faith and respect for the elders as authority figures, and began to see the colonizers as the authority… (McGarvey, 1997).

McGarvey in his article states that according to Semali, his village began to fall apart as the colonizers gradually replaced Chagga traditions with colonial education. As their culture disappeared, so did the knowledge that had enabled the Chagga to be self-reliant. They became dependent on the British and other Europeans to provide them with such everyday needs as food, clothing, and shelter (McGarvey, 1997).

"Traditionally, village elders were responsible for passing the social values and customs of our community on to the children," tells Semali. "However, children were not taught using the same methods that the colonial schools later used. Rather than reading books and taking exams, the children in the village 'learned by doing,' what is called *mtato*, or 'imitative play'. "The philosophy of this type of learning is known as *apvunda*," he continues. "Through *apvunda* children are not merely taught abstract pieces of knowledge to be memorized for exams, but instead are taught knowledge that was necessary in everyday Chagga life. This knowledge extends into three practical areas: social duties, social values, and spiritual beliefs" (McGarvey, 1997).

Lola Young in her article "Culture, Resistance, Freedom" states that Africans were split up in such a way that those within the same language groups were separated and forbidden to speak in their own languages. "As soon as we entered the fifth grade," remembers Semali, "we were no longer allowed to speak our native language, Kichagga. We had to speak English. The way that teachers enforced this rule was through a wooden block. This small block, which had the word 'English' carved on it, would secretly be given to one of our schoolmates who was told to report to the teacher if he or she overheard anyone speaking Kichagga. If anyone was caught speaking Kichagga, the teacher could punish them" (McGarvey, 1997). Semali continues:

"The trust of the community was betrayed. We were taught by the village to trust each other as children, but now we learned that we could not trust each other; we never knew who might have the block. The community was supposed to bond together, but the colonial school was dividing us. As the saying goes, 'Divide and Conquer'. We were taught that the only ones we should trust were the colonizers – the

colonial teachers and the colonial government" (McGarvey, 1997).

At first African people expected much from Western Education, but they were soon disappointed over the results. The education given to African people did not meet their needs.

Why do you teach our children only to use the Native axe and knife, and prevent us using saws and hammers? Why do you tell us to make wooden spoons? Do you not want us to climb the ladder of civilization? We buy metal spoons from the store. Is it wrong for our children to want to have chairs and beds and be like the European? It is not easy to tell our children 'No, you must want to be Native'; 'No, you must make spoons because it is hand and eye training'; 'No, the Pass Laws are not all bad because they are made to protect you' (Brown 1964).

Colonizing nations through education tried to isolate students of Africa from their local communities.

Western education in African conditions was a process of psychological de-ruralisation. The educated African became … a misfit in his own village… when he graduated … his parents did not expect him to continue living with them, tending the cattle or cultivating the land (Woolman, 2001).

Furthermore, education was a means to propagate Christianity. The foundation of Western education in Africa was laid by Christian missionaries who were eager to use literacy training to introduce Christianity and win converts to their religion (Omolewa, 2006). Various missionary groups were continuing to use education as a tool for expanding religious activities and enlarging their own sphere of influence (Urch, 1971).

Moyo remarks that the introduction of Christianity made the mistake of believing that to become a Christian, people had to be "removed from their indigenous cultures" (Moyo, 1983; Haar, 1990). African religions were treated as an evil which had to be encountered. This can be seen in the following quotation: "Once their children have gone to school, they begin to show interest in the strange religion of the white missionaries, religion which denies the truth of Tonga religious beliefs". It was frequently believed by Western missionaries that traditional religious beliefs and practices were inferior, and traditional customs had to be done away with before the acceptance of Christianity. This did not happen without resistance or problems, and gave for instance rise to the process which can be seen as religious syncretism in religious beliefs today. What Bishop Desmond Tutu described as a "form of schizophrenia" was thus the result of having to disclaim the indigenous culture before converting to Christianity (Moyo, 1983). Although the missionaries' task was to make people accept the Bible

and its teachings, Christianity was turned into an ideology which could be used to convince people not to resist white domination (Hilde, 1997).

CONCLUSION

Colonial powers used education as a tool for both political and economic reasons. Colonizing nations held the belief that "the superior" white race should educate and bring civilization to "the inferior" African people, but this notion was exploited by the colonizers. In order to achieve social control, the British Empire misused education. Colonial education was used to remove the colonized people from their indigenous learning. Colonizers wanted the African people to be useful and qualified personnel for their economic development. Moreover, for colonizers education was a means to win converts to their religion.

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