

Colonialism and Education

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Abstract Colonialism and education has been identified as instruments used by European powers to dominate and subjugate third world countries and Africa in particular. Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. It was a response to the economic needs of industrial capitalist Europe who desire colonies in order to have access to raw materials of the colonies, to have markets for sale of manufactured goods of the home country and field for the investment of surplus capital. Colonialism ravaged Africa like wild fire with disastrous consequences and the instrument used for that purpose is education. This same education was later used as a weapon to fight colonialism. This paper is therefore to explore why and how colonialism was imposed on African nations and how education was used as a two-edged sword for the propagation and abolition of colonialism. "To know the present we must look into the past and to know the future, we must look into the past and present."

Introduction

Colonialism and education are two main ways through which European powers perpetuated underdevelopment in Africa. Though education predates colonialism, but the European nations used their strong powers to introduce a system of education that were so foreign, whose aim was to ensure that African nations were subjugated and exploited. Colonialism arose out of the need for European nations to have direct political control over their colonies so as to ensure the protection of their economic interest. So, colonialism is not just merely a system of exploitation, but one whose main purpose was to repatriate the profits to the metropolises. By exporting the profits created by African Labour to Europe, the development of Europe was assured.

The colonization of Africa was a response to the economic needs of industrial capitalist Europe. European nations desire colonies in order to have access to the raw materials of the colonies, to have markets, for sale of manufactured goods of the home country and field for the investment of surplus capital. With twist of fate, colonialism has assisted in the distortion of African economies to fit in with the demands of the world market, the demand which are not always compatible with the demands put own development and thus depriving our economies of the capacity for a self-sustaining growth which is a pre-condition to development. The weapon used by the Europeans for the realization of the purposes of colonialism in education. Education had been accepted world wide as the gate way to the development but for it to achieve its aim, the content must be tailored to the needs of the society and it has to be internally driven. European nations used force to suppress the traditional educational system on ground and hoisted a foreign educational system that is geared towards development of an internal material base, with the result that technologically and in relation to the developed world.

This paper will explore colonialism and education holistically and its impact on the political, economic, social and cultural development of the continent.

Colonialism

*"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.
(Karl Marx.)"*

With the spread of Hellenic and Roman culture and technology by the Roman Empire, the Renaissance and the enlightenment of the fifteen and sixteenth centuries and the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most of the world has at some point been colonized by a European country. The most notable colonial powers were Rome, Greece, Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, whose combined empires covered at various times the whole of the North, Central and South America, Africa, Australia, much of Indonesia, India subcontinent as well as most of the countries lying in between

Colonialism is a system of rules which assumes the right of one people to impose their will upon another. This must inevitably lead to a situation of dominance and dependency which will systematically subordinate those governed by it to the imported culture in social, economic and political life.

According to concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics, colonialism is the policy and practice of a strong power extending its control territorially over a weaker nation or people. It came from a Latin Word "Colonia" simply meant a country estate. But colonialism became more often thought of as an attribute of the late nineteenth century imperialists who conquered large tracts of the globe to find themselves "new-caught sullen peoples, it is usually used pejoratively to denote an unwanted sense of racial superiority and the set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices that sprang from this sense.

Colonialism is the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. Historically, this has often involved killing or subjugating the indigenous population. A colonial power must control populations with very different social-systems from its own, which are distributed at great distances from the metropolitan and territorial capitals and which in the African case often manifested very low levels of social and economic differentiation. It has to overcome problems of authority distances and cost to persuade subject people to accept both its version of law and order and its control over dominant social institutions.

Colonialism arose out of the need for the strong European Powers to have direct political control over another country or territory. With the industrial revolution in Europe, the economy of most industrialized nations became saturated. In Britain for example, inequalities in wealth and income distribution had weakened the consumption power of the working classes and this did not create room for producers to utilize fully their individual capacity. Lacking in domestic investment outlets, British capitalists turned their attention to the economically under-exploited regions of the world. Britain then established colonies as archives for their surplus capital. The need to expand capital and boost the domestic economy prompted European nation especially Britain, France and Portugal to venture into Africa where labour and raw materials were cheap.

This was the situation until 1885 at Berlin conference that Africa was partitioned among the contending European powers. So in order to ensure full control over their territories and to avoid unnecessary intrusion each of the European powers initiated moves to have dominion over her territory. The imposition of political control by these European powers over African nations marked the beginning of "COLONIALISM". It is therefore erroneous to believe that colonialism was introduced in order to develop Africa as speculated by some European scholars. The underlying principle is behind the introduction of colonialism which is not just merely a system of economic exploitation, but one whose main purpose was to repatriate the profit to the metropolis. By exporting the profit created by African labour to Europe, the development of European was assured, while dialectically, this meant the underdevelopment of Africa. Let it be noted that European Powers did not establish colonial states to carry out a programme of political development or change but to erect efficient and effective administrative states for purposes of economic exploitation and this largely explains many of the problems faced by African nations after independence.

Impact of Colonialism

Dependency theorists Frank G.A. argue that colonialism leads to net transfer of wealth from the colonized to

the colonizers and inhibits successful economic development. Frantz (1967), Brett (1973) argue that colonialism does political, psychological and moral damage to the colonized. People are free to acknowledge that colonialism was good for Africa. These group of people, though acknowledge that there was exploitation and oppression but that on the other hand, colonial governments did much for the benefit of Africans and they developed Africa. Well, it is my contention that colonialism never meant well for Africa. It has only one hand – it was a one armed bandit. The negative impact of colonialism was so powerful and so pervasive that it turned the lives of all victims upside down and inside out. During the periods of pre-colonial trade, some control over social, political and economic life was retained in Africa in spite of the disadvantageous commerce with Europeans. That little control over internal matters disappeared under colonialism. Colonialism went much further than trade. It meant a tendency towards direct appropriation by European of the social institutions within Africa. Africans ceased to set indigenous cultural goals and standards, lost full control of training young members of the society. Those were undoubtedly major steps backwards.

As for the apologist of colonialism who claimed that some measure of development did occur. Yes it is true that some form of development occurred under colonial rule, but this according to Offiong (1980) took place in sectors limited almost exclusively to production for export, the import trade and related collection and distribution services.

European powers did not establish colonial states to carry out a programme of political development or changes but to erect efficient and effective administrative states for purposes of economic exploitation and every machinery was put in motion in ensuring that they realize their aim. In realizing their aim, Africa was on the receiving end. The negative impact of colonialism in political terms was quite dramatic. Walter explained that overnight, African political states lost their power, independence and meaning irrespective of whether they were big empires or small polities. Again that certain traditional rulers were kept in office, and the formal structure of some kingdoms was partially retained but that the substance of political life was quite different. Political Power had passed into the hands of foreign overlords. He maintained that colonial rule meant the effective eradication of African political power throughout the continent and that colonialism crushed by force all pre-existing states in Africa but that those that survived were puppet creations. (Walter 1992, pp. 246-248).

So the decisiveness of the short period of colonialism and its negative consequences for Africa spring mainly from the fact that Africa lost power. Power is the ultimate determinant in human society, being basis for relations within any group and between groups. It implies the ability to defend one's interests and if necessary impose one's will by any means available. When one society finds itself forced to relinquish power entirely to another society, that in itself is a form of underdevelopment.

African women were also not spared from the evils of colonialism. Walter (1972:p248) explained that what happened to African women under colonialism is that the social, religions, constitutional and political privileges and rights disappeared, while the economic exploitation continued and was often intensified. He said it was intensified because the division of labour according to sex was frequently disrupted. Traditionally, African men did the heavy labour of felling trees, clearing land, building houses etc., apart from conducting warfare and hunting when they were required to have their farms to seek employment, women remained behind saddled with every task necessary for the survival of themselves, the children and even the men as far as foodstuffs were concerned.

Colonialism reduced Africans to state of nothingness. It determined that Africans were no more makers of history than beetles – objects to be looked at under a microscope and examined for unusual features. In summary, the effects of colonialism are:

- a) Loss of political power
- b) It blocked the further evolution of national solidarity
- c) It distorted craftsmanship and destroyed the growth of technology in Africa.
- d) It destroyed internal trade
- e) It destroyed African culture

- f) It introduced new value system
- g) The introduction and intensification for cash-crop production.
- h) It brought poverty into Africa via taxation, paid employment, alienation from the land and environment and discouragement of food-crop production.
- i) It created social stratification in Africa.

Education

Education is crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of the members and the maintenance of the social structure. Under certain circumstances, education also promotes social change. The greater proportion of that education is informal, being acquired by the young from the example and behavior of elders in the society. Under normal circumstances education grows out of the environment, the learning process being directly related to the pattern of work in the society.

Education has been universally accepted as the bedrock and engine of growth. It is a child's passport out of poverty. The highly prized possession that anyone can have is an education. It is the foundation for higher living standards and an important tool in the long term eradication of poverty. Education provides you with knowledge and information which in turn brings about desirable changes in the way you think, feel and act. The importance of education cannot be over-emphasized.

The discussion on education shall be centered on pre-colonial and colonial education. Indeed the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans, in sharp contrast with what was later introduced.

Walter (1972) identified the following features of indigenous African education which are: its close links with social life, both in material and spiritual sense, its collective nature, its many-sidedness; and progressive development of the child. He maintained that there was no separation of education and productive activity or any division between manual and intellectual education. Altogether through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well rounded personalities to fit into that society.

Some aspects of African education were formal: that is to say, there was a specific programme and a conscious division between teachers and pupils. Formal education in pre-colonial African was also directly connected with the purposes of the society. Just like informal education, the programmes of teaching were restricted to certain periods in the life of every individual, notably the period of initiation or coming of age. Formal education was also available at later stages in life, such as on the occasion of passing from one age grade to another or of joining a new brotherhood. Specialized functions such as hunting, organizing religious ritual, and the practice of medicine definitely involved formal education within the family or clan. Such educational practices all dated back to communal times in Africa.

As mode of production moved towards feudalism in Africa, new features also emerged within the educational pattern. There was, for instance more formal specialization because the proportion of formal to informal education increases with technological advance.

Apart from hunting and religion, the division of labour made it necessary to create guilds for passing down the techniques of iron-making, working, leather making, cloth manufacture, pottery molding and professional trading.

In pre-colonial Africa, literacy rate was high to the extent that there were universities in Egypt, Morocco and Mali - all testimony to the standard of education achieved in Africa before the colonial intrusion (Walter, 1972:pp 261 – 263).

Going by what is on ground, it did show that the colonizers did not introduce education in Africa, they rather introduced a new set of formal educational institution which partly supplanted and partly replaced those which were there before. The colonial system also stimulated values and practices which amounted to informal education. It was an educational system that never grew out of African environment or one that was

designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources. It was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African Society. But one which sought to instill a sense of difference towards all that was European and Capitalist. With few notable exceptions colonial education in Africa especially British enclaves was based on learning to read, write and calculate in the English Language. Later addition to the curricular were British Empire history and European geography plus a few practical subjects such as gardening, sanitation and personal hygiene. As African history was considered either non-existent or unimportant, the great men who were studied in schools were kings of England. The great events and historical developments that were taught were European and colonial wars of pacification, the evolution of the British constitution, and the growth of the British Empire. In Literature, Shakespeare and the Bible held the stage.

To some extent, Europeans thoughtlessly applied their own curricula without reference to African conditions. As content, the schools equipped the African with little more than an elementary knowledge of the English Language for an economic future in which a senior clerkship was the upper limit of his permissible advancement. In terms of need and desire, there were hundreds of candidates for every school vacancy. (Coleman, 1986).

The process of colonization involves one nation or territory taking control of another nation or territory either through the use of force or acquisition. As a by-product of colonization, the colonizing nation implements its own form of schooling within their colonies so as to suit their purpose.

The colonizing government realized that they gain strength not necessarily through physical control but through mental control. This mental control is implemented through a central intellectual location- the school system. Kelly and Altbach (1984) states that "colonial schools sought to extend foreign domination and economic exploitation of the colony. They felt that education in the colonies seems directed at absorption into metropole and not separate and dependent development of the colonized in their own society and culture. They concluded that the process is an attempt to strip the colonized people away from their indigenous learning structures and draw them towards the structures of the colonizers.

Just as the European controlled African participation in the new economic order, they carefully structured African education, so as to perpetuate their underdevelopment and dependency. The system of education was designed to impose upon Africans, the white man's mythical, racial superiority and African inferiority. Whatever Africans were taught about themselves was designed to enable them to internalize their inferiority and to recognize the white man as their savior. Colonial schooling was education for subordination, exploitation, the creation of mental confusion and the development of underdevelopment.

Colin (1968) therefore contended that certain amount of technical training was essential to provide cheap semi-skilled labour but that it could not be allowed to continue beyond a given standard or the Africans would soon be competing with whites. No matter whatever progress that was put in place, it could not change the fact that colonial education was an instrument to serve the European capitalist class in its exploitation of Africa. Whatever colonial educators thought or did could not change that basic fact.

Often, the implementation of a new education system leaves those who are colonized with lack of identity and a limited sense of their past. The indigenous history and customs once practiced and observed slowly slipped away. The colonized became hybrids of two vastly different cultural systems. Colonial education creates a blurring that makes it difficult to differentiate between the new enforced ideas of the colonizers and formerly accepted native practices.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, a famous African writer in his book 'decolonize the mind' displayed his anger towards the isolationist feelings colonial education causes. He asserts that the process annihilates a people of belief in their names, in their language, environment, heritage of struggle, unity, capacities and ultimately in themselves. (Ngugi, 1981).

Colonial education makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves. Not only does colonial education eventually create a sense of wanting to

disassociate with native heritage, but it affects the individual and the sense of self-confidence.

Colonial education far from giving people the confidence in their ability and capacities to overcome obstacles or to become masters of the laws governing external nature as human beings, it tends to make them feel their inadequacies and their ability to do anything about the conditions of their lives. No wonder an African educationalist, Abdou Moumuni concluded this "colonial education corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of the African and filled him with abnormal complexes (Walter, 1972 p.273).

The closer one scrutinizes the educational contribution of colonialism even in purely quantitative terms, the more it shrinks into insignificance. However education (both formal and informal) was powerful force which transformed the situation in post war Africa in such a way as to bring political independence to most of colonized African nations within decades. The few educated elites such as Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Casely Hayford etc, were able to galvanize support of the masses against colonial rule. The educated elites especially in West Africa came together under an umbrella known as National Congress of British West Africa and through this body ideas were articulated and actions taken which brought to an end colonial rules in the continent. European powers did not establish colonial states to carry out a programme of political development or changes but to erect efficient and effective administrative states for purposes of economic exploitation and every machinery was put in motion in ensuring that they realize their aim.

Conclusion

Colonialism and education have been carefully analysed in order to bring to bare the mission of colonialism and how education was used for the realization of that mission.

To the apologists of colonialism, it has brought development and civilization to Africa and to these categories of people. Africa would have been nowhere if not for colonialism. Well, they are right in their own way, but from critical and deep understanding of colonialism, it was not meant for the good of Africa rather for the interest of the colonizers. Colonialism could be likened to a thief who come not to save life but to kill, destroy and maim. Colonialism has destroyed and crippled Africa and the weapon used for the mass destruction is education under the guise of Christianity. The colonizers never meant well for Africa and that is why the continent was oppressed, suppressed and disregarded.

Britain and other nations carefully and craftily brought Africa to her knees by keeping the continent in the state of mental confusion. This was purposely done through the inculcation of foreign principles and values in order to dominate and exploit the continent.

When the wind of de-colonization was blowing across the globe, Britain, France, etc, did not diminish their interest in perpetually keeping Africa under colonial rule. Political power was handed over to leaders who continue from where the colonial masters stopped.

Basil commented that what the colonial powers thought wise and necessary was the formation and promotion to power of leading elites or middle classes (those whom the French have so revealingly called interlocuteurs valables – negotiators worth talking to): groups of men who would ensure that post colonial government should be moderate and responsible - and should be, that is a reflection of colonial government. And that it is here in no small part that the seat of the troubles has lain. (Basil, 1971 p.131)

This meant that Africa was formally decolonized without transforming the economy. The economy remained disarticulated and vertically integrated into Western industrial economies. Independence saw African leaders taking over political powers from colonial rulers without appropriating economic powers. While Africans controlled political power, Europeans controlled economic power. In the field of education, the educational system remained the way the colonial masters left it. Foreign personnel were recruited to teach her citizens. The early years of independence did not focus on building an adequate philosophical foundation of education that could positively stimulate the heterogeneous cultures of African nations. The stimulation was negative – rather than capitalizing on national pride and patriotism, the focus was on misguided capitalism and greed that created conditions for regionalism, sectionalism, tribalism, bribery and corruption

to flourish and this is where the real problems of development lies.

Withdrawing in deep water, colonial powers left behind far greater problems than they had ever proposed to solve. This conclusion is borne out of the fact that the main solutions they proposed and also promoted are in themselves a large part of the troubles, difficulties and problems faced by Africans today.

I have gone thus far to show how colonialism has left the colonial societies exploited, penetrated and neglected and also to make us appreciate the fact that the present myriad of problems confronting Africa today lies in the distant past. However, this is not to say that there is no hope. There is hope of reversing the trend and the surest way of doing that is abandoning the evil prescriptions from the colonial masters which are the ideology of stepping up exports, increasing aid and loans from the developed nations and arresting growth in population. African leaders should as a matter of urgency begin to transform the economy from its colonial externally – responsive structure to one which is internally responsive. There is also the need to embark on process of mental de-colonization by making Africans understand that they can do it with emphasis on building capacity for self-sustaining growth. African educational system with sound philosophical base should be encouraged so as to develop a sense of community or whole person productivity among the generality of the masses.

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