

How Did British Colonial Education in Africa Become a Reason for Decolonization?

Çağrı Tuğrul Mart

Ishik University
tugrulbey@hotmail.com

Alpaslan Toker

International Burch University
atoker@ibu.edu.ba

Abstract: As a by-product of colonization, the colonizing nation implements its own form of schooling within their colonies. Colonizing governments realize 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. At the heart of this policy is the paternalist idea that the “backward” undeveloped inhabitants of the colonized areas need to be educated and brought up to the level of the superior culture and life-style of the colonizing power. Indigenous people were made by brainwashing 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. White supremacy used education for its own sake so colonial education was a deliberate policy to continue colonial rule. In African British colonies the misuse of education became a major reason for decolonization.

Key Words: Colonial Education, Superiority, Decolonization

Introduction

One of the areas colonialism affected in Africa was education and language. Two scholars on colonial education, Gail P. Kelly and Philip G. Altbach, help define the colonialism process as an attempt "to assist in the consolidation of foreign rule". colonialism is a process that is an attempt to strip the colonized people away from their indigenous learning structures and draw them toward the structures of the colonizers (Gail, Altbach 1984).

Colonial powers imposed their own education system and language on the local population. Everybody had to learn the language of colonizers which was associated with modernity, sophistication and social status. In almost all colonies the language of the colonial power was used as the language of administration. For this reason, the education system needed to produce people who knew this language well. In many cases people received their education in the metropolitan state, which offered better educational facilities and more exposure to the language and culture of the colonial power.

Colonial education was fueled by a widely held belief that the “superior” white race of Europe should bring civilization to the “less developed” people of color living on other continents. White supremacy manifests in the social, economic, political, and cultural history of European expansion and the development of the New World. White supremacy has negatively affected the lives of peoples of African descent throughout the world (Christian 2002: 188). What is worse; from a European point of view, colonial territory was singular: colonized land and people all fell in the category of “other”. 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. 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: 250). Later the “superiority” and “inferiority” terms which were occurred with the imperialist project of colonizers brought about “othering” category. Because they belong to lower class the indigenous people were referred as “backward”.

Colonial Education

Colonizers share the idea that education is important in facilitating the assimilation process. The ultimate goal of colonial education might be deduced from the following statement by Thomas Babington Macaulay:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

(CPCR 1999: 268)

This colonization process which started with the goal of colonizers' providing a good education for colonized people turned into a means of service for white people. White supremacy used education for its own sake, and colonial education was a deliberate policy to continue colonial rule. African writers and abolitionists such as Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cugano and Phyllis Wheatley, in their very different ways, articulated in print the desire to be respected as human beings and their work served as rallying points for the antislavery movement.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o a citizen of the once colonized Kenya, in his article "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: 28)

White supremacy manifests in the social, economic, political, and cultural history of European expansion and the development of the New World. White supremacy has negatively affected the lives of peoples of African descent throughout the world. The European enslavement based on the economic plantation system led to a global affront on African humanity. Negative effects of White supremacy and racism are ubiquitous in different ways. With the birth of the New World, White supremacy was borne and where African descent reside it has left cultural, and socioeconomic scars. White supremacy and cultural expansion of Europe are inextricably interwoven from the 15th century to the present (Christian 2002: 180).

African-centered psychologists, such as Bobby Wright and Frances Cress Welsing focused on the psychology of White supremacy. They attempted to more fully understand the illogical behavior and inhumanness associated with White racism. Bobby Wright was particularly sincere in his analysis of collective White European behavior in relation to peoples of color. Wright contended that White European behavior toward Black people is similar to the psychopath. Welsing writes about the idea of Black inferiority. Both Wright and Welsing approached White supremacy as a behavioral inadequacy.

Europeans who favored rapid Westernization of the African argued that old African values must be replaced. The one great hope for progress in Africa, they felt, was the application of European knowledge, experience, and skill. On the opposite side were colonial officials, educators, and non-educators concerned with the maintenance of those traditions in African society. This controversy in education policy was especially evident in Kenya. George Urch states in the article that missionary activity in Kenya dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century. The forces of western civilization in the appearance of trade and Christian missions had access to the area under the protection of the British flag (Urch 1971: 253).

Building and operating the railway in Kenya greatly increased the cost of administering the territory; the British government sought ways to make the railway pay so white settlement began. When the white settlers

arrived the prestige and power of the European grew. The mission's educational objective was to expose Africans to a superior culture. 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. The demand for skilled native labor by the white settlers and commercial leaders caused the colonial administrators to reevaluate the educational program of the missions. The different thought over educational goals arose between the government and the various mission groups. The conflict caused colonial officials to realize the necessity of educating indigenous people and the importance of creating an over-all education forward in a desired direction because a better education by white civilization would elevate the African to a better standard of living (Urch 1971: 254).

It was apparent to the government that various missionary groups were continuing to use education as a tool for expanding religious activities and enlarging their own sphere of influence (Urch 1971: 256). The early 1920s brought concern for the people of Africa from outside the world. The development of the "trustee" concept aroused a strong feeling that colonial governments had a greater responsibility toward their subjects. There was a growing recognition that the education of the indigenous population was the concern of the controlling government (Urch 1971: 258). Thus, by 1925 the fundamental problems which faced education in Kenya throughout the colonial period had been magnified to the point where concern was being shown by both African and European (Urch 1971: 258). The government continued its criticism of mission education which displayed more concern for religious training than meeting the social and economic needs of its parishioners; the missionaries were frustrated when their newly educated students left the tribal compound to seek work in the fast developing urban area. So the aim of the education by missionaries was to propagate Christianity and White supremacy tried to use the education for its own sake in Kenya. Colonial government used education to train Africans for service to the white man.

The missions established schools in Africa long before the British Government took systematic interest in education. British interest in the control of education policy in Africa in the colonial empire was of short duration, which started in the early 1920s and waned by the 1950s. In 1950s various territories in Africa assumed responsibility for the conduct of their own internal affairs as a prelude to independence. But British education system received a great deal of criticism. Much of the criticism focused on the concept of adaptation and the education system kept indigenous people in their place. Other criticisms were about the slow pace and scope of educational development (Whitehead 2005: 444).

Schooling extended to only a minority of children in most colonies and most of that was confined to primary stage. Colonial administration deliberately neglected education for both political and economic reasons. British Government was accused of not extending the benefits of European civilization; furthermore, the British were accused of deliberately pursuing forms of cultural and ideological domination to destroy the cultures of African people (Whitehead 2005: 447).

The most scholarly critic of British colonial education policy was Trevor Coombe whose study based on colonial administration's limiting the provision of secondary education for Africans. As a result he states, when independence was achieved the supply of educated manpower was utterly inadequate to run the country. In his doctoral study of education policy in the Gambia J.C.E. Greig claimed that there was no central policy only general guidelines were worked.

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

Education is slavery of the mind. I was born on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro in a village called Chaggaland. My people, the Chagga, are an indigenous tribe of Tanzania. 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 didn't teach me to be a member of Chagga society. Although I had a certain knowledge system as a member of the village, I read, wrote, and spoke things at school that didn't fit into village life. I always wore two different hats. I developed this double-consciousness so well that I didn't realize it. In order for the colonizers to exploit the Chagga for labor they first needed to establish themselves as the authority. Because 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: 22)

Colonial Education Became a Reason for Decolonization

Colonizers believed that their whole culture was more highly advanced, and they ignored or swept aside language and customs of colonized people. Colonialism changes its guise, diversity of forms and methods for the subjugation of dependent countries, especially in the era of imperialism, when colonialism in its "classic forms" of direct political rule of one country over another recedes more and more into the background, while other means for the economic subjugation of weaker countries by industrial powers come to the fore. Native people were afflicted by the impositions of colonial power and misuse of education by colonizers. Colonization and colonial education have brought about these issues "superiority", "inferiority", "other", and "backward" and these terms used for native people led to decolonization.

Decolonization is the act of reversing the process of colonization in other words attaining independence. Through decolonization process African colonized people granted their independence. Colonizers thought they were developed and well educated. They thought their level of education and life-style were high so they referred the colonized people as "the peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world" and the "advanced nations". These superiority and inferiority issues received some criticism from the indigenous people. The colonial power credibility was challenged, colonized people began to lose faith and respect for colonizers because colonizers despised their culture and referred them as "inferior and backward". Some local writers such as Chinua Achebe in "Things Fall Apart", M.G.Vassanji "The In-Between World of Vikram Lall", and Austin Clarke in "The Polished Hoe" started to complain or criticize about this "othering" or "superiority, inferiority" terms.

Conclusion

Colonization is taking control of another nation or territory and colonial education is colonizers' implementing their own form of schooling within their colonies. Poka Laenui in his study "Indigenous Voices" defines the process of colonization and colonial education through some steps. Firstly, Denial and Withdrawal: When a colonial people first come upon an indigenous people, the colonial strangers will immediately look upon the indigenous as a people without culture, no moral values, nothing of any social value to merit kind comment. Thus, the colonial people deny the very existence of a culture of any merit among the indigenous people. Secondly, Destruction/Eradiation: The colonizers physically destroy and attempt to eradicate all physical representations of the symbols of indigenous cultures. This may include the burning of their art, their tablets, their god images, the destruction of their sacred sites. Thirdly, Denigration/Belittlement/Insult: As colonization takes a stronger hold, the new systems which are created within indigenous societies, such as churches, colonial style health delivery systems, and new legal institutions, will all join to denigrate, belittle, and insult any continuing practice of the indigenous culture (Laenui 1999).

References

- Adhikari, Mohamed. "British Colonialism and Its Opponents" *Journal of African History*, 42.3 (2001): -523-25
- Chris, Bunting. "A Tale of a Language Lost and Then Found" *Times Higher Education*, 1539 (2002): 23-26
- Christian, Mark. "[An African-Centered Perspective on White Supremacy](#)" *Journal of Black Studies*, 33.2 (2002): -179-98
- Clive, Whitehead. "The Historiography of **British Imperial Education Policy**" *History of Education*, 34.4 (2005): -441-54
- Geoffrey, Wheatcroft. "The Anguish of Africa" *New Republic*, 190.1 (1984): 18-23
- Gailey, A. Harry. "The Turning Point in **Africa**" *American Historical Association*, 88.2 (1983): -445-47
- Goodman, Joyce, and Jane Martin. *Gender, Colonialism and Education*. London: Routledge Publishing, 2005
- Hyam, Ronald. *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonization, 1918-1968*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007
- Johnston, Harry Hamilton. *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races*.
New York: BiblioBazaar Publishing, 2009
- Kelly, Gail P. and Philip G. Altbach. "The Four Faces of Colonialism." 1984 3 Jan. 2010
<<http://www.englishmemory.edu/Bahri/Education.html>>.
- Khanna, Raniana. *Colonial Rescriptings Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. London Duke University Press, 2003
- Omolewa, Micheal. "The History of Colonialism in Africa" *Journal of African American History*, 94.2 (2009): -248-52
- Panikkar, K.N. *Colonialism, Culture, And Resistance*. London: Oxford University Press, 2006
- Pennycook, Alast. *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*. London: Routledge Publishing, 1998
- Shillington, Kevin. *History of Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, 2005
- Smith, L.Young, and Nima Poovaya. "[Culture, Resistance, Freedom](#)" Publisher Routledge, 36.1 (2007), -133-37
- Southard, John. "Colonial Education." Fall 1997 2 Jan. 2010
<<http://www.englishmemory.edu/Bahri/Education.html>>.
- Susan, Van Zyk. "The Other and Other Others: Post-colonialism, Psychoanalysis and The South African Question" *American Imago*, 55.1 (1998), 77-98
- Urch, E. George. "Education and Colonialism in Kenya" *History of Education Quarterly*, 11.3 (1971), -249-64
- White, Nicholas. *Decolonization: The British Experience Since 1945*. London: Longman Publishing, 1999