

Classification: Colonial Attempts to Fracture Africa's Identity and Contribution to Humanity

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Abstract

The venturing of the colonial powers into Africa deserves a protracted singing of funeral dirges by all the sons and daughters of Africa to shake away the sorrowful treatment they infringed on our ancestors which has been extended to us. One of the many atrocities perpetrated by the colonialists is the classification of Africans and the derogatory concepts they used to describe them – black, tribe, coloureds and native. This paper attempts to reveal the motive behind the colonialists' wrongs in terms of classification against Africans in an attempt to kindle both the departed and the souls of all living Africans to stand up supreme to the challenges of identity pigmentation.

Key Concepts: Classification, deliberate fracture, denial of African contribution, humanity, western tactics

Introduction

Tedla (1991) wails in lamentation that Africa is seldom presented as a continent of creativity and inventions capable of influencing peoples from other continents who come in contact with it. The irony of this negative depiction of the African continent is that "...the influence and contribution of Africans and their descendants to Europe and the United States are incalculable if we think in terms of architecture, art, symbols, music, dance, raw materials, enslaved labour force, medicine, technology, manuscripts and artefacts housed in American and European museums and private collections, minerals, metals...animals for zoos, scientists inventors and countless inventions.

The words tribe, native and race, along with many of the ideas associated with these concepts, were first coined during the age of exploration, a time of European imperialism, exploitation, technological superiority and colonization (Meltzer, 1993). As Europeans encountered people from different parts of the world, they speculated about the physical, social, and cultural differences among various human groups. The rise of the Atlantic slave trade, which gradually displaced an earlier trade in slaves from throughout the world, created a further incentive to categorize human groups to justify the subordination of African slaves (Smedley, 1999).

The concept race or racial group, western scholars have made us to believe refers to the categorization of humans into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of heritable characteristics (AAPA, 2010). This is typically the machinations of western scholars. To the western scholar conceptions of race, tribe, and native as well as specific ways of grouping them, vary by culture and over time are controversial. The controversy ultimately revolves around whether or not the socially constructed and perpetuated beliefs regarding tribe, native and race are biologically warranted. However, Julian the Apostate describe ancient Egyptians as highly intelligent and more given to crafts, and architecture (Michael & Olson, 2003). The classified concepts are assigned to differentiate people from one another, especially in the African continent by the colonialists and western scholars for the perpetration of their atrocities during the colonization period as Smedley (1993) correctly describes "... to justify the subordination of African slaves". Black African in White Europe will still be called Black Africa, or simply African (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/first/brace.html>) Accessed 10th January 2010.

More than ever before Africa has been used as a resort place for Western tourists and animal poachers; as a study place for various Western scholars, anthropologists and archaeologists. Africa has also been a job provider for Western missionaries, researchers and advisors who are eager to westernize Africa. The West has not ceased taking and receiving from Africa. Yet the picture that is painted is one of conflicts, a poverty-and-disease ridden continent that has little or nothing to offer the world ('humanity' my emphasis)" (Tedla, 1991: 48-50).

Who Made the Coloured People of Africa?

Another derogatory concept that has been added to the English dictionary after colonization is "coloured people". Unfortunately, the epistemology of the concept shames the colonialists and western scholars and for that reason has decided not to give it a prominent space in their writings. Briefly, the colonialist coloured people are the direct off springs of the colonialists and the poor African women subjects that they raped and impregnated during their trampling expedition with no respect to culture, tradition and customs of the people they met. Fearing that if these coloured people are accorded their rightful place as sons and daughter of the colonialists, their atrocities and exploitations could come to an abrupt end because they would not like to see their own kit and kin, that is their coloured children and grand children suffer. This is the gospel truth about coloured people of Africa and elsewhere. You can find them in Europe, Canada and America but have not as yet been accorded their place as heirs of their white fathers and grandfathers. This is absolute injustice but The Hague, the United Nations and other international arbitrators who are calling for the blood of warlords in Africa have kept their mute about this because, to them the Western World's unjust atrocities against the so-called coloured people of Africa and the rest of the world is war crime and crime against humanity. Of course yes because the coloured people are not part of humanity and for that matter crime against them need no amplification.

African's Contribution to Ancient Civilization and Development

It is significant to recognise from this initial stage that the world is ordered according to the principle (doctrine of the co-existence and the interaction of opposites on all levels of understanding, recognition and appreciation from the abstract to the concrete (Kamalu, 1990). Unfortunately, the European World (referred to as the West) has unthoughtfully divided and polarised these opposites creating a major rift that in the world that is not European. At the most basic level there is the division between Europeans and non-Europeans. There are also divisions between emotional and rational aspects of human beings, the arts and the sciences, man and woman and so-called civilized and primitive peoples. Anything that falls short of being European (the West) is classified as primitive or uncivilised (Tedla, 1991; Kamalu, 1990).

But where did civilization begin? Africa? Europe? USA? Research for the answer and you will find the truth about the deliberate rape of Africa's contribution to civilization. Fortunately, space is given to describing this *Concert of Opposites* in African philosophy by some worthy African philosophers like Kamalu (1990). Encouragingly, it is an idea also found in Asian philosophies, notably Taoist principles of Yin and Yang (Kamalu, 1990).

Africa has distilled and encoded its experiences in science, philosophy, arts and heritage of its understanding of the world in countless ways. In brief, Africa's experiences are found encoded in its symbols, rituals, designs, artefacts, music, dances, proverbs, riddles, poetry, drum texts, architecture, technology, science and more importantly oral traditions (Tedla, 1991). The view of this list is that many of listed items appear simple on the surface; it is not until one attempts to unravel the encoded philosophies or messages within them that one is struck by their profundity. The negative perceptions of Africans by the West has led to under-reporting, omitting, distorting or misinterpreting what is positive about Africa.

Colonial Fracture Africa's Identity and Contribution to Civilization

The history of colonization has got much for Africans to learn from especially the concept of classification. Due the tactical methodology of the colonialists which came to be popularly known as *divide and rule* has been applied from the colonial days to date. The colonialists invented racial categories that were intended to perpetuate the stereotypes that some groups are more superior than others. Africans were classified as Hamitic, Semitic, Cushitic, Negroid, Neolithic or some other by European scholars who do not have the best interest of Africa at heart. These classifications became paramount during the Europeans scramble for and partitioning of Africa. All these were attempts by the colonialists to subjugate Africans which enabled them to proceed to fracture African continental unity from then till today.

The classification *Black* associated with Africans leaves much to be desired because if the concept black means what it is supposed to mean in the whiteman's dictionary, then Africans are not black neither can *White* be ascribed to Europeans because the colour white is different from the skin of Europeans. These divisions had created a rift among various population groups throughout the world. Africa has had its fair share of the degradation of human identity by Europe. How long do we wait to clarify these inconsistencies in the classification dilemma?

What Must African Intellectuals Do to Right These Wrongs?

The most important duty that all African intellectuals should group together and consider doing through the provision of recorded documentation supported by authentic data from the African indigenous knowledge system sources is to provide what Kamalu (1990) describes in his book *Foundations of African thought as a world view grounded in the African heritage of religion, philosophy, science and art*. Africans need to reach back into their wealthy past and take along with them all their works of art, philosophy and rich customs, traditions and culture and portray them positively to the rest of the world. We must focus on what is positive so that Africans can build on it as a foundation for future education of our younger generation. African intellectuals have a duty to push to the forefront the positive aspects out indigenous knowledge systems and ways that have been ignored, misinterpreted and misrepresented. Doing so will be healthy for Mother Africa and her sons and daughters and humanity as a whole because what is positive about Africa is also positive about humanity

The African world consists of continental and diasporan Africans rich with creativity and all kinds of resources. Africa, as a continent, is the source of ancient wisdom borrowed by ancient Europe during the eras of the European philosophers – Aristotle, Socrates, Plato - who deliberately decided not to acknowledge the sources of inspiration they obtained from the African continent during the times they visited North Africa especially Egypt and Timbuktu where education and economic development were at their climax.

Commentary and Recommendations

Western intellectuals always look for what is wrong or lacking in Africa. Usually such intellectuals go to libraries where they search for a plethora of books that have been written by their forefathers from a deficit perspective, ceaselessly comparing Africa to Europe or America forgetting that Africa is the cradle of humanity. Despite the glaring truth of this statement, the West refuses to acknowledge Africa's contribution to the progress of humanity in science and technology. It is time Africans reclaim among other powers:

- The power of redefining and renaming themselves,
- The power of speaking their own truth and
- The power to call forth and create a better future for themselves and their future generations to come.

To this end Africans need to reject the use of derogatory and disempowering terminologies which tend to put a wedge between Africans and create their disorganization. Words of classification like Christian names (Christian name my foot!), illiterate, and peasants, feudal, tribes, third world, developing, underdeveloped, uncivilized, black Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the like should be rejected. Instead, Africans should find their own terminologies that recognize their worth and contribution to the advancement of humanity. Can we not try ethnic Africans in their African world?

Conclusion

Succinctly speaking, truth hurts however if truth is told at the most appropriate time to the most relevant people, it makes them change their attitude and moral judgement to clarify inconsistencies and pacify those who have been offended. This article is a plain truth written in plain language by an African who feels that Africa has not been recognised by the western world and their scholars. Despite this, western scholars regularly come into Africa in their thousands every year with the pretext that they are tourists. When, in fact, they are researchers who have come to collect their data for whatever purpose. The gospel truth is that whatever data they collect are more often than not misrepresented and misinterpreted to suit their view in order to be awarded a qualification or a price of some sort. It is high time western scholars who come to research in Africa reveal and tell the truth as they found it in Africa. That is our plea.

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