Decolonizing Moral Education: An African Indigenous Perspective

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Abstract

This paper has examined the importance of African Indigenous Moral Education versus Moral Education introduced by the colonizers in maintaining social fabric. In doing so, concepts pertaining to colonialism, decolonization, education, morals, have been defined. Further, aims of education of African Indigenous people have been articulated as well as their status in these societies and corresponding state of morality among Indigenous African people versus the rest of the world today. Finally, suggestions towards integration of African Indigenous Moral Education into school curriculum has been made.

Key words: Colonialism, Decolonizing, Culture, Morals, Education, Indigenous

Introduction

It is difficult to grasp the meaning of the decolonizing process without understanding the underpinnings of colonialism. Simply defined, colonialism is an elaborate system of forceful physical occupation of lands or territories belonging to indigenous peoples by a foreign nation(s) exclusively for self-centered interests. Besides, forced physical occupation of lands by foreigners, colonialism was totally involved in devaluation of the colonized peoples' skills, knowledge and particularly culture in terms of beliefs, traditions, norms, and morals. Morals are concerned with what is considered right or wrong. The word moral is derived from a Latin word **mores** which refers to customs, beliefs, values, norms and traditions of a particular society or community.

According to Summer (1907) **mores** refer to morality of a given society with regard to what is regarded right or wrong, moral or immoral actions, as well as thoughts and feelings. People in a society are obliged to abide with a particular society's mores in order to promote harmonious co-existence. The term moral, therefore, seems to describe what is considered right or virtuous or wrong and evil in a society.

Given that human beings are born neither moral nor immoral, the society through its institutions especially the family, churches and schools are therefore charged with the responsibility of transmitting what is considered to be right or wrong to its new members. Lack of such standards lead to social disorder or anomie.

Essentially, the colonizers viewed the colonized peoples as primitive and subhuman. Moreover, colonizers from time immemorial and particularly from 15th Century to early twentieth century took every opportunity to strip off indigenous people of Africa and other colonized peoples naked of their culture and its associated

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skills, knowledge and value systems that had set them apart as a people with unique identity. The school setup by the colonialists including ways of worship initiated by different denominations that competed for sphere of religious influence were particularly designed to colonize the mind, the heart and the spirit of the indigenous people.

Once the mind, the seat of consciousness, understanding, reason and imagination of the indigenous people were baptized "inferior" and "barbaric" their creativity, self-identity and self-esteem were crushed. With suppressed self-identity, it was only a matter of time before indigenous people developed self-hate and emptiness. To fill this void they started to ape the ways of the colonizers.

Similarly, the heart which is said to be the seat of human personality became very fragile. The term personality refers to characteristics sets of behaviours, cognitions, and emotional patterns, moods, attitudes and opinions that evolve from biological and environmental factors. A combination of these characteristics distinguish one individual from another except in rare cases of identical twins when they are brought up under the same environmental factors.

Finally, the term "spirit" which is derived from a Latin word which means "breath"; it is believed to be a part of being alive as well as part of a person that is associated with eternity even after physical death of the body in most cultures. This seems to justify the reason why most of the African indigenous peoples talk of the "living dead" (Mbiti, 1971:132). From biblical perspective, God breathed his spirit into human beings (Genesis 2:7). The spirit, therefore, is the intangible aspect of a person and is the reservoir of conscience and character. The term character stands for the mental and moral qualities unique to an individual while conscience deals with ethical issues relating to an awareness of what is right and wrong motives and behavior. For instance, it is considered unethical even to contemplate to cheat and to actualize cheating in an examination.

Decolonization of Moral Education

Having defined the concept of colonialism and observed how it robbed individuals and societies of their identities, an examination of decolonization of moral education is attempted. Decolonization refers to the process by which the colonized peoples forced out the colonizers from the occupied territories through non-violent resistance movements like in the case of India or violent means in case of Kenya. It important to note that decolonization of now independent former colonies from colonial cultural heritage has been a very slow process.   This is because education they introduced coupled with their ways of worship colonized the mind, heart and spirit as mentioned earlier. Therefore, though former colonial states fly their flags as symbols of political independence, they still remain chained to their former colonial oppressors in their world view and to some extent in their cultural orientation. By and large, leaders of the former colonized nations use similar strategies to oppress their people and often with the help of their former colonial masters.

According to Ralph Linton (1945) culture of a society is the totality way of life of its members. This in turn is shared and transmitted from adult generation to incoming generation through social institutions such as the family, school, religion and government among others. In other words, culture consists of knowledge, skills, language, beliefs, art, morals, laws, religion, customs, traditions and other human-acquired capabilities. All these components of culture are better understood by those who have been born and grown in it through socialization and active participation. It is almost impossible to decolonize minds of the former colonized people unless deliberate steps are taken to retrace the true history of their cultural heritage. For this reason, focus is directed towards establishing the role of education in general and moral education in particular in the present time in decolonizing the mind, heart and spirit former colonized peoples.

Concept of Education

The term education is derived from Latin words *educere or educare*. The word "educere" means to lead out or draw out while "educare" means to train, mould, and bring up. In ancient Rome the verb *educare* which is adapted in this paper, is used to refer to the general process of bringing up children in the community's or society's way of life or culture. International Dictionary of Education (1977:94) defines culture as the sum total of values, beliefs, customs, arts, scholarship, institutions and artefacts of a group or community or nation. This seems to suggest that education is wider than moral education, though no society can survive without moral education since it is the social glue that facilitates peaceful co-existence. It teaches about all that a society holds to be right and wrong or "dos" and "don'ts" that regulate behavior, thinking and actions of people.

Plato (428-BC to 348-BC) stated that "education is the creation of sound mind in a solid body" leading to development of a person's idea of what is good, and virtuous. A virtuous individual is one who honest, respectful, courageous, humble, hardworking and dependable. He or she lives according to high moral standards. Plato thus regarded education as a means by which both individuals and social justice can be achieved. Plato to a very large degree envisaged education that would be intellectually fulfilling as well as morally sound.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) like Plato seemed to agree that education with a heavy component of morals was critical to creation of a just and orderly society. He defined education as the "influence exercised by the adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life". He continued to state that the objective of education was "to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him/her by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he/she is specifically destined". Unfortunately, most of the former colonies followed and still follow education systems of the colonizers. The quotations cited hereabove, seem to imply that education fashioned after the colonizer's system may not sufficiently serve the aspirations of indigenous peoples and in particular in the moral realm.

In the recent past, Radcliffe, (2017 (ed.) has quoted Nelson Mandela who asserted that "education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world". However, while this sounds perfect, it may only happen if that education is designed to touch mind, the heart and the spirit of indigenous peoples particularly in relations to moral issues. It is observed that education devoid of morals that are deeply rooted in the culture of the people produces people with superficial sense of morality and therefore lacking in social justice.

Aims and Content of Moral Education of African Indigenous Societies

The word moral is derived from a Latin word *mos/moris* meaning customs, beliefs, values, norms and traditions. *Morals* of a given community define morality in terms of what is regarded right or wrong, moral or immoral actions or thoughts or feelings. People in a society are obliged to abide with a particular society's morals in order to promote harmonious co-existence. Morality, therefore describes what is considered right or virtuous or wrong or evil in a given society. Morals therefore provide a social glue that prescribes how individual members of a specific society should live together harmoniously.

Broadly speaking, the African indigenous form of education had three main aims. These comprised equipping individuals with relevant knowledge and skills and proper codes of conduct that would enable them to be properly integrated in the society. Every step was taken to ensure that necessary, knowledge, skills, and codes of behaviour were learnt at specific stages during the life cycle, as the individual progressed from childhood to adulthood and old age. As a matter of fact, education was compulsory throughout one's life in African traditional societies.

African indigenous education had a heavy component of moral education whose overarching goal was promotion of community life weaved around religious underpinnings. According to Mbiti (1969) "to be, is to be religious". Religion from this perspective touched every aspect of human communal life, in terms of supernationalism or myths, beliefs, traditions, actions, morals and social relationships. Indeed, religion was to be practised every minute of one's entire life and not an appointed specific day of worship such as Friday or Saturday or Sunday or any other day of worship. It is also important to note people of a given community for example the Gikuyus or the Kambas or the Luos, or the Masaais of Kenya were bound by a monolithic religion. Diversity of religions within a community was unheard of; thus religion formed unbreakable bond of community unlike in the era colonization when a community was bombarded with different religious beliefs from diverse denominations. These divergent beliefs divided families as well as community at large.

Challenges of Teaching Moral Education in Post-colonial Africa

The coming of Europeans to Africa and elsewhere led to the introduction of western type of education which failed to appreciate the moral teaching of colonized people and particularly in management of human sexuality, intimate relationships and fair distribution of material wealth. The abandonment of traditional ways of life enmass left a moral vacuum. This is may be attributed to the fact that European way of life and

formal education mainly concentrated on reading, writing, arithmetic and pursuit of an individual's self-development at expense of inculcation of societal human values and social skills for communal life.

The overemphasis of academic education made many African parents feel incompetent to teach their children moral values, for what they knew with respect to moral issues was no longer valued. The parents who insisted on their traditional ways of bringing up children found out that the school and the church taught them to abandon traditional morality which they labelled negatively as "evil" and "satanic". Unfortunately, even when more and more parents become "converted" colonialist ways of life, they did not feel confident and competent to impart moral values because they had not grown up in them. Thus, though Christian moral values are perceived to be good, they are still largely viewed as "foreign" since they lacked socially inbuilt mechanisms to ensure that they are followed, other than appeal to a very distant god who did not appear to punish bad behaviours immediately and decisively. Apparently, conscience and judicial legal systems do not appear to be applied to all equally and effectively (Kibera & Kimokoti, 2007). In traditional societies every individual without exception had to comply with the agreed moral code at both family and societal level. In fact, moral education in Africa today, is in crisis; there are no clear-cut objectives as far as moral education is concerned. Indeed, religious education which was initially used to instill morals during colonial times, is no longer a compulsory subject and in many developed countries, teaching of religious education is outlawed.

For instance, abstinence from sexual involvement is no longer emphasized and this is aggravated by the electronic media seem to glorify sexual gratification outside of marriage. Furthermore, Constitutions of most countries of the world have legalized abortion and those that have not are under intense pressure to do so. One can no longer persuade girls not to engage in sexual activity on account of pregnancy. It has been reported that within the first three months of lockdown of schools in Kenya mid-March, 2020 and June 17, 2020, 152,000 teenage girls became pregnant from Machakos County alone (https://ncpd.go.ke>teneage pregna...& https://www.voanews.com.

Replication of this number if it is duplicated to the rest of other 46 counties in Kenya would translate into over 900,000 thousand girls being pregnant. This seems to confirm that parents are not capable of teaching their children to delay sexual activity until they are of age and able to take care of themselves and their own children. Prevalence of pregnancy during corona pandemic seems to run against the protocols of social distancing. Children should be advised that unbridled sexual activity leads to teenage pregnancy, and also may lead to corona virus infection as result of physical closeness in addition to other sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDs among others.

Lack of agreed standards of moral code has created divergent views on moral issues has led to unbridled sexual activity thus, outside marriage 37.9 million people are currently infected with HIV/AIDS (https://hiv.gov>datatrends, 2018). HIV, the virus which causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is mainly sexually transmitted. It has been reported that 2/3 of those infected with AIDS virus live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Kenya, 8 percent and 4 percent of adult women and men respectively are

infected with HIV/AIDS. This seems to suggest that there has been a breakdown of sexual morality among the former colonized nations as result of invasion into their culture by foreign ideologies.

Moral education and sustainable development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also referred to as Global Goals were adopted by all United Nations members states in 2015. These goals have called for action to eliminate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. A close look of 17 SDGs and even the previous 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have not included a goal implicitly on moral education. Consequently, MDGs and SDGs goals are not likely to succeed since they are not grounded on sound moral principles relating to control of self-interest at individual, national and global levels in management of sexuality which also leads population explosion, fanatism, terrorism and self-gratification. The "ubuntu" philosophy among indigenous African peoples and elsewhere in the world created a conducive environment for moral education which effectively equipped people with common values that fostered social justice as well as individual justice. The Ubuntu philosophy postulates that "I am" because "you are" (Ogude, 2018).

Currently, most nations are involved in internal and inter-states tensions. Some of these nations include and not limited to Yemen, Afghanistan, United States- Chinese tensions, Saudi Arabia, The United States, Israel and Iran, Syria, Nigeria, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Venezuela (www.crisisgroup.org, 2019). Oftentimes, a majority countries having internal and inter-state wars have a colonial past. These wars most of the time being funded by the former colonial powers or other powerful foreign nations interested in exploitation of material resources of less developed nations.

Conclusion

Towards elimination of suffering and unending conflicts within and without national borders and in general moral decadence, each nation especially less developed nations must decolonize their current way of life that seems to be devoid of communal life and replace it with moral values that foster Ubuntu philosophy. To realize this, each community within a nation like Kenya, which has 45 registered communities should be facilitated by the Government to identify and codify the best of their moral code that guided the conduct of its people before colonization, westernization and europeanization. Out of these write ups on moral values that cut across and are relevant to modern life should be put together into a curriculum that should be studied directly through curriculum and indirectly by examples at every level of education and especially at basic level. Once this is done, it is hoped that school education will deliberately and consciously teach skills, knowledge and appropriate to moral underpinnings in every lesson. Further, all those who transgress the agreed moral code should without exception be sanctioned. Finally, parents, teachers and leaders at all levels of society should set good examples to incoming generations.

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