

Western Education and Cultural Upheaval in African Indigenous Setup: The Case of the Native Luo Community of Western Kenya.

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Abstract

The opening up of the African continent and eventual occupation of Europeans restructured the traditional lifestyle of the native Africans. This paper examines institutional reforms characterised by this change. This study will reveal the deep rooted impact associated with this change to the communities that were affected during the period of study and raise pertinent issues as to whether or not the fusion of Anglo-African culture was necessary to the native African communities or not. The outcomes of this study can be generalised to include other indigenous communities whose cultural practices were revolutionised as the result of the contact between the continent of Africa and the outside world.

1.0 Introduction

The arrival of western European Christian missionaries in Africa marked the genesis of western formal education. It is evident from this study and other related studies that Europeans come to Africa for several reasons ranging from economic to social reasons. Spreading of western civilization and Christianity was one of the main reasons for the coming of missionaries in Luo Nyanza. To achieve their mission, Western schooling/education was introduced. Especially among the young women and girls at Ng'iya school was a road through which Europeans were to ensure Western civilization takes roots among the Luo as well as the spread of Christianity among the natives. Through the study the opening up of western Kenya was made possible by Nabongo Mumia (The King of the Wanga) who encouraged many Europeans to come to his territory hence he became an agent of western civilization and cultural as well as socio-economic and political transformation in his territory through which western formal education was introduced. The completion of the Uganda railway also facilitated the penetrating of the C.M.S (Church Missionary Society) missionaries in Nyanza, which was given boost by the warm reception that was given to missionaries by the native communities.

1.1 Methodology

Historical method of research was employed in collecting, analyzing and presenting data. The study employed both secondary and primary sources of data. Primary data mainly involved oral interview, data from the Kenya National Archives while secondary data included books and other written documents. Non random selection technique called purposive sampling and snowballing technique was used.

Through snowballing sample technique, fifty eight respondents were identified and classified as follows fifteen members of the local community, six former C.M.S clergy and missionaries, seven former head teachers, ten teachers, four former provincial administrators and sixteen former students. The number of the informants used by the researcher under study was determined based on the accessibility of the informants. Some of the key informants had passed on, others were not easily found since they were scattered in various parts of Kenya while Europeans missionaries had left for Europe. The female gender represented 51.72% while the male represented 48.27% of the total sample size

After data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, the researcher subjected the data to vigorous process of verification and justification. The process involved comparison of selected data to validate its reliability. The guiding principal to the process of data verification was subjecting the gathered information to historical techniques of internal and external criticism in the process of determining authenticity of the data collected. External criticism involves the process seeking to determine the genuineness and validity of the collected data at hand.

2.1 The Conceptual Framework

The study was carried out with the concept of the positive role played by Christian missionaries in colonial and post colonial period in Africa, in relation to the nature of the impact of their activities on the traditional communities in Kenya with whom they came into contact with. The study envisaged the main concern and perception of the missionaries on the needs of Africans in relation to the general expectation of Africans in colonial setup. It became clear on the onset to European philanthropist and missionaries who perceived the realization of Africa needs through education. As noted by painter:-

“With prophetic highlights Friends recognized that proclaiming Christian messages of salvation involved much more than singing and praying and preaching. Their concern was to witness to the truly abundant life in Christ. The African people to whom the missionaries were being sent would need medical care, more suitable homes, food and for their families, education for the young and old, and a above all, they would need to develop their own Christian culture by expanding the entire horizon of their living (Painter, L.K1966:20)”

To the missionaries, western schooling was seen as one of the key tenets to “civilization” of Africans. But to the native Africans western formal schooling was a means of achieving colonial economic, social and political status. Several scholars have argued differently on the role played by missionaries in pre-colonial Africa. The argument has been more profound and greatly associated with colonization.

Missionary endeavour should not be lightly dismissed as precursors to colonial conquest. Walaba (2009), agrees that missionaries came to spread Christianity, civilize Africans, abolish slave trade, slavery and introduce humane trade. Since some missionaries faced some problems from Africans; the missionaries requested for protection from their respective mother countries. The imperial powers mainly occupied countries where their missionaries had established themselves (Walaba, 2009:22). In this case Christian

missionaries were agents of European colonization in Africa that distorted African culture, liberation, conceived the actual misery of Africans due to colonialism and was part and parcel of European colonization (Wanyama, 2012:16). In Britain and other parts of Europe the need to spread European faith formed a very important justification for imperial expansionism (Maxon, 1989:24). Native Africans viewed and associated missionaries with colonial evils imposed on them, namely forced Labour, land alienation, destocking policy, tax payment, kipande system (Pass) and other social evils, particularly when the missionaries got involved with administrative issues, hence the assertion that "Africans lost their land as they closed their eyes participating in official prayers offered by missionaries". Missionaries were seen to have gotten mixed up and forgot their evangelical mission in Africa, which led Africans to view them with a lot of contempt as noted by Wellborn,

"The denomination which was imported from West caused not only social but political division; and nationalism developed and the God of the church became identified with the God of the Europeans, it began to be asked whether Christianity was in fact the religion for Africa or whether it was no more than the religion edge of the imperialist" a policy of divide and rule." (Welbourn, 1976:386)

Education was religious based and actual classroom teaching was based on the basic 3rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). In this case western formal education paid less attention to the needs, goals and expectations of the wider African society. The perception that Africans had no written history made the natives to be considered conspicuous by lack of tradition, history and culture, sentiments that were greatly echoed by Wilson,

"While the rest of the world was being occupied by rapid developing races of mankind, elaborating from the first rudiments of civilization their own culture, these Africans advanced hardly at all. The primitive hunter had learned to cultivate a few crops and to keep domestic animals; they made for themselves huts.....then progress stopped and in that stale they seem to have been content to remain" (Wilson, 1952:34)

The ordinary European regarded Africans as retarded children incapable of intellectual effort and deficient in constructive power. The argument that Africans were infamous to European and motivating spirit behind missionary education was brought out clearly by Julian Huxley (1931).

"I am prepared to believe that if we ever do devise a really satisfactory method of measuring inborn mental attributes, we shall find the races of Africa slightly below the races of Europe in pure intelligence...But... And the but: is a big one...I am perfectly certain that if this proves to be so the differences between the races will be small...and the great majority of the two populations will overlap as regards their innate intellectual capacities"(Huxley, 1931:189)

To African as earlier on indicated, missionary education had no meaning and place in the society. Missionaries were identified with land grievances and their form of education failed to meet the circumstance of the time, as the Africans saw them criticism of the opposition to missionary influence deepened to erupt in the 1929-31 "circumcision controversy" (Mutua, 1975:28). Missionary education interfered with the tribal rites and structures and many native Africans opposed this kind of education because it alienated members of the society from the tribal life.

Two schools of thought explain the impacts of missionary activities in Africa. The first school of thought views the role of missionaries as agents of “pollution” and “erosion” of African culture. Missionary education seemed to be irrelevant to the indigenous people. It prepared and modelled individuals to be patriotic citizens, providing the much needed labour force for the colonial administration in Africa. It was a means of African exploitation and hence it herald imperialism and eventual colonization of Africa a concept that never pleased the native Africans who came in contact with Europeans.

The second school of thought perceived Christian missionaries as having played a key and fundamental role in positively transforming African society. They introduced into Africans with whom they came into contact with the taste for western material culture (Rotberg, 1967:10). Missionaries played a key role in transforming the lifestyle of Africans, they urged Africans to adopt white mannerisms and taste for western material culture. Western education introduced by missionaries in this sense was seen as a factor being accepted and fitting in the rapid changing African society in colonial times.

Western education as introduced by the Christian missionaries and effected and propagated through the school institution proved as the most appropriate means for orienting and preparing individual for useful and relevant role in the emerging society where European economic, social and political system and values begun to replace the traditional ones. These were aspirations African people wished to achieve through the education offered in colonial schools (Shanghuyia, 1996:15). They trained Africans to take up clerical jobs in the colonial government, to be self reliant through technical and vocational training and teachers of mission schools. The move was later on viewed to have greatly culminated to the development and growth of Africa nation. The need for western education grew with time as the African society experienced westernization.

Both the colonial government and the missionaries played a critical role in meeting the ever rising demand of education. Education became a basic source of survival for one in the society. Secondary school output became critically important for it was those with secondary education who could go on to become university graduates or enter training for a wider range of technical business or administration careers (Stabler, 1969:16). This argument is also put forward by Oliver (Oliver, 1952:292), that Kenyans got secondary education because of Christian missionary activities who wanted to entrust the leadership of East Africa in the hands of Christians, arguments put forward by also Bauer (Bauer, 1990) and Wanyama (Wanyama, 2012:20) . The need for the establishment of N.G.H.S (Ng’iya Girls High School) and other similar schools by the C.M.S missionaries was for the purpose of meeting the demands of the society.

The study was mainly guided by the second perception of the perceived important role played by the Christian missionaries in positively transforming African society (See fig 1.1). The second school of thought is also supported by a number of scholars and historians among them Maxon (1989), Welbourn (1976), Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1972), William Ochieng’ (1989). Missionary education should be viewed as having been relevant and vital except in specific areas of lives of the indigenous African communities under study whose social, economic and political activities were negatively affected. In this later transformation the negative effects brought by the missionary education cannot be under scored.

3.1 Social-Economic Revolutions and Change in the Traditions of the Native Luo Community at Ng'iya 1923-1967

For all African indigenous communities the aspect of land ownership was a communal responsibility and a very sensitive affair. It's evident from this study that the council of elders among the Luo "buch piny" which was headed by a chief elder "Ruoth" was the ultimate custodian of land. However with the advent of missionary activities at Ng'iya Africans abandoned their ancestral land to the aliens. The missionaries took over control of African land and established a church, schools, mission hospital and residential homes as indicated in appendix a map showing Ng'iya high school complex (KNA: PC/NZA/3/14/23/49A) and extension of C.M.S Ng'iya mission (KNA: PC/NZA/14/123/33B). Further registration of the land in reference to the school as per the gazette notice setting up land for Ng'iya girls in 1957 (KNA: PC/NZA/14/123/49) and the district commissioners central Nyanza letter on Gazettement of Ng'iya girls in 1957 as reflected also in the appendix, clearly shows how Africans lost their land, to the whites, of which the activities which took place on the same land had adverse effects on the local community.

Due to the influence of the C.M.S missionaries, Africans gave up some cultural practices like removal of teeth, and traditional way of worship and initiation rituals i.e. the practice of the removal of the six lower teeth was seen by the missionaries as Barbaric and of no positive value to the lines of the natives. Western formal education and Christianity as introduced at Ng'iya fought such cultural practices to the end as noted by Strayer, transformation of mission station into mission communities; represent sign of social as well as religious change in modern African history. Isolated outposts of European religious propaganda became focal point for new associations of Africans Europeans (Strayer, 1978:59).

The role of elders as custodian of culture and knowledge was done away with. The old in the traditional African society educated the youth on various aspects of life, all the aspects were eroded. The young who left for school lost parental values. In most cases they spent all the day in school and when Ng'iya girls' school became a boarding school they spent months in school. Pioneer students established independent schools and churches in and around Ng'iya. Village Schools came as a result of the Africans who had attained western education .and the growing urge of providing Africans with more educational opportunities and the rising spirit of African nationalism. N.G.H.S (Ng'iya Girls High School) over the years since its inception has attracted the development of urbanization and high population around the area. This is evident by the fact that market centers have developed around the area as well as residential homes for the workers around Ng'iya and its environs. This population may have also been influence by the availability of social facilities around the school established by the C.M.S missionaries.

Through village schools young native girls were provided with a stepping stone to move to higher levels of education. N.G.H.S has over the years liberated the African girls from the bondage of illiteracy and has provided highly educated elites in the society. One of the renowned products of N.G.H.S is Hon Grace Emily Akinyi Ogot, former member of parliament and renowned scholar, Victoria Okungu who is a researcher at the University of Nairobi and renowned chemistry teachers Susan Olimba and Joan Otieno among many others, Lady Justice Emily Aluoch, an I.C.C judge based at the Hague in the Netherlands.

Then was a revolution in housing styles, following the new architectural designs introduced in the construction of classes' houses and dormitories at N.G.H.S and mission center by the pioneer missionaries. Many people started putting up iron roofed and cemented houses in and around Ng'iya. Traditional religious leaders had their roles reduced as mission schools produced educated leaders who took up leadership responsibilities both in the church and administratively. Even with the exit of pioneer missionaries, Africans took senior position at the mission station.

The establishment growth and development of N.G.H.S had adverse economic impact to the local Luo community who are the subjects of the study, in the sense that a class of enlightened Africans who progressed economically a rose in social, economic and political power. Early students drawn into Ng'iya girl's high school established the western system of economic production. In school skills of production were acquired through technical and industrial education taught to pioneer students at N.G.H.S the subjects included Agriculture and Home Science. Students took up trades taught as their occupations. Some utilized newly acquired skills to set up modern homes with permanent buildings.

The result of the increased western type of education was the production of a class of African clerks and officers to assist the government in administration and Europeans in their business. Some of the students were employed as workers in the mission station, Ng'iya girls' school as well as bush schools, at settler homes and government departments. To provide services in various capacities. Agriculture education exposed members of the local community to new crops and methods of farming, some of these skills were learnt through demonstration plots established in missionary schools. This led to the establishment of small scale cash crop economies by the Africans in and around Ng'iya. Products of N.G.H.S were given appointments to the public community posts. Some worked as community service officers, doctors, nurses, as members of the local native councils. Young women who left homes to go to mission stations executed economic production gaps. This group abandoned traditional modes of production such as farming. The establishment of N.G.H.S and Ng'iya mission station in general triggered a number of land problems including immigrants who flocked the mission station as workers.

Political allegiance and authority was transferred from traditional elders and rulers to missionaries. Local traditional chiefs such as the famous chief Ng'onga and elders complained of the bad behaviours of the converts, the chiefs and elders of the affected areas demonstrated that the schools and the churches be shut down because of what they termed as negative influence (KNA: DC/KSM/1/10/43). Africans also became aware of the rights; this led to the rise, growth and development of African nationalism.

4.1 Roles of former students of N.G.H.S in community development.

Students engaged themselves in various activities for example preaching in the church and teaching in the local/village schools around. Some took informal roles as leaders of associations and organization. Out of the products of N.G.H.S who are in thousands providing services to this country in different occupations and levels since its inception, we have, Preachers such as Rosa Achieng the wife of Rev Joshua Omondi of the Anglican church of Kenya. Other students like Isabella Obel, who served as a secretary at the All Saints Cathedral in Nairobi, Dr. Pamela Kola. Teachers and education offices for example Rhoda Anyango, Alice Ogot, Joan Otieno who is currently a teacher at Nyabondo High school, Susan Olimba is currently a teacher at Mudavadi Girls High School, Victoria Okungu is a researcher at the University of Nairobi.

Bankers, Secretaries and accountants such as Josephine Obara who is the credit controller at K.K security, Laura Otieno who is an accountant and Stella Opondo a sales manager at Sameer Africa. Politicians and those in Government positions such as Hon. Grace Emily Akinyi Ogot, wife to veteran academician and Historian, considered to be the father of Kenyan History and who is a former Chancellor of a prestigious Moi University Prof Bethwell Allan Ogot. Agricultural officers, such as Dorcus Omoga, who is a lab technician at the ministry of livestock. Lady Justice Aluoch, a judge of the I.C.C. They have been a source of envy by those who have not been able to go their way as indicated by Olimba (O.I; Olimba, 03/07/12).

Ng'iya teacher training center provided N.G.H.S with teachers as well as helped in the spread of western formal education in and out of Ng'iya, as products of the college became instrumental in the transformation of the native lives through the roles they played in the society. In conclusion the main

social-economic and political impacts which N.G.H.S introduced to the local community as a result of its establishment have been extensively discussed in this study. The later period or stage produced from 1950 to 1975 took up leadership as well as professional positions both locally and internationally, Products of N.G.H.S were given appointments to the public community posts. Some worked as community service officers, doctors, nurses, and as members of the local native councils. Generally the pre-colonial Luo culture was greatly interfered with, for example as discussed, there was Social Revolution and change in the traditions and lifestyles of the native Luo community at Ng'iya, due to the influence of the C.M.S missionaries, Africans gave up some cultural practices. Economic as well as Political impacts were realized. Political allegiance transferred from traditional elders and rulers to missionaries hence declining the socio-political roles of elders in the society. The establishment of N.G.H.S and Ng'iya mission station in general triggered a number of problems as discussed above.

5.1 Conclusions

In summary, the discussions in this study has clearly brought out the fact that, the level and the extent to which the establishment of learning institutions/schools, introduced western cultural values either directly through curriculum instruction or indirectly through missionary interaction with learners and the resulting effect thereof. The role, activities and the impact brought by the products of N.G.H.S and other similar institutions who are former students both locally and internationally are immense. The early or initial period, produced the first products of this schools, namely pioneers up to 1949. This group became the vanguards and strong agents of change in the society who spearheaded an academic revolution whose course still goes on up to today, and early students drawn into Ng'iya girl's school established the western system of economic production a role still played by the ever increasing products of Ng'iya.

As presented by this study N.G.H.S and similar schools had an adverse impact on the local African communities. The impact of N.G.H.S and similar schools has greatly contributed to social change and transformation in the culture and traditions of the native African communities. The school in itself has produced products that have consequently transformed the society in various spheres of life and professions. The school employed local African teachers who spent their income in developing the society economically.

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