

# Neo-colonialism and the emancipation of Indigenous Religions of Africa: Reconnoitering reformist possibilities

Joel Mokhoathi  
Department of Religion Studies,  
University of the Free State

## Abstract

Africa is considered to be the second largest continent of the world – only subsequent to Asia. However, its intellectual and cultural contributions to the world remain among the least influential, if not the most undermined. Particularly when one takes into account the written records about the continent and its people as sources and generators of knowledge. Much of what is known of Africa is anchored in the perceptions and attitudes of missionaries, merchants, and historians who occupied the continent due to foreign religious persuasions, commerce, or some biographical accounts of the continent and its people that aided and advanced the undertakings of colonisers in subduing the Africans. In such a context, the African narrative was told from an otherly view, with the main objects of reconnoitering being treated as spectators. Among Africans, those who transcended the bridge of spectatorship often spoke of indigenous religions as *praeparatio evangelica* due to their Christian convictions. For that reason, the essence of indigenous religions of Africa was destabilized. Using document analysis as a methodological approach, the aim of this paper is three-fold. Firstly, it seeks to critically reflect on the system that thwarted the development of indigenous religions in Africa, such as (Neo)-colonialism. Secondly, it attempts to show how such a system resulted in the erosion of indigenous religions, such as the *San (Bushmen)*, *Ibibio*, and *Basotho* religions in Africa. Lastly, it seeks to offer a reformist approach in which the emancipation of indigenous religions of Africa may be based.

**Keywords:** Neo-colonialism; Indigenous Religions of Africa; San Religion; Ibibio Religion; Basotho Religion.

## 1. Introduction

Much can be said on the interactions between neo-colonialism and the African continent. This is because neo-colonialism has different turns and has been rooted in a number of meticulous systems, which serves to advance its agenda. These may include monopolist entities such as politics, economics, education, and other overt systems. The principal objective of these monopolist entities is to continue the dominion of colonisers and to preserve their legacies. Thus, neo-colonialism is:

[C]onstituted by the evolution and perpetuation of a process whereby the existence of international diplomacy and protocols of state relations through an entrenched constitutional government and emerging political leadership at independence provides for a market structure cum capital and investment of the new state and the agenda for national development working in favour of the former coloniser (Babatola 2013:6).

As a student of religion, I will not attempt to dabble into how international diplomacy, protocols of state relations through constitutional government, and political leadership continues to experience and/or propagate colonial ideologies. Rather, I wish to focus on how neo-colonialism has thwarted the development of indigenous religions of Africa; show how its undertakings has resulted in the erosion of some African religious beliefs; and how current scholars of religion may reflectively contribute by reconnoitering reformist approaches in which the emancipation of indigenous religions of Africa may be revived.

## 2. Neo-colonialism and Africa

Neo-colonialism is an ideological concept that is closely associated to the notions of colonialism and imperialism. These are concepts which easily permeate each other and are not completely understood apart from each other. Thus, it is often very difficult to isolate neo-colonialism from colonialism and imperialism. All terms implicitly refer to the creation and/or maintenance of unequal economic, cultural and territorial relationship, usually between States and Empires based on domination and subordination (Johnston 2000:375). The essence of neo-colonialism therefore, as much as that of imperialism and colonialism, is that the State which is subject to it, in theory, is independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. Yet, in reality, its economic systems and thus, its political policy is directed from outside (Nkrumah 1965: ix). This means that in the place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism, we find neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1965: ix).

The migration of Europeans to Africa after the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 – in what is commonly known as the scramble and partition for Africa, served as the beginning stages of imperialism. Around this time, European imperialists advanced their practice by setting up the administration of native areas for the benefit of colonial powers (Mokhoathi 2017:6). Lenin (1999:7) refers to this period as “the Age of Imperialism”. It is an Age in which European powers divided the entire continent of Africa among themselves, except for two independent republics - Liberia and Ethiopia. Liberia was settled by free slaves from the United States and had become an independent republic by then. Ethiopia was not captured because it had routed out an Italian invasion. In consequence, both Liberia and Ethiopia escaped the claws of imperialism.

The presence of European colonies within the African continent marked yet another development. It signaled the advent of colonization whereby European colonies began to control African territories and States as conquered lands. With the fight for independence, many African countries obtained liberation from their colonial rulers. And for a moment, many Africans began to speak of the end of colonization. However, this so-called end of colonization marked the emergence of yet another more subtle and dangerous form of territorial or State control – commonly known as neo-colonialism. It is subtle because:

[I]t exist in forms of the cultural, educational, industrial and technological subjugation of a former colonial territory and the further economic domination of the independent state by the former coloniser in the absence of an institutionalised political structure and direct military presence for the physical control and direction of the state ideology and economy by a superior power or former coloniser over her former and liberated colonies (Babatola 2013:6).

It is dangerous because:

For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those served the ruling imperial power could at least look at its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case (Nkrumah 1965: xi).

Neo-colonialism therefore is subtle because it is embedded in a number of systems – such as cultural, educational, industrial, technological, economical and others, without military presence for physical control or enforcement of a State ideology (such as *Apartheid*) over the formally colonised republics. It is also dangerous because it is a system which holds power without responsibility for the ruling-class, and perpetuates injustices without redress for the oppressed. Both forms of neo-colonialism – whether subtle or evident, have destroyed the African heritage, called the humanity of Africans into question and thwarted the development of indigenous religions of Africa. Talking of (neo)-colonialism in Africa, Césaire (1955:51-52) asserted that:

I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out [...] I am talking of millions of (women and) men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life, from their dance, from wisdom. I am talking about millions of (women and) men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkies.

Neo-colonialism, is thus characterised by the exercise of monopolist power without responsibility and the oppression of the formally colonised without redress. In this regard, only the colonisers are at the vantage point since the formally colonised are being systematically brutalized. Testifying to the brutalization of Africa by colonial powers, Ahluwalia and Nursery-Bay (1997:2) attested that “[t]he history of Africa is, of course, one of cultural oppression on a major scale. Nowhere else was the oppression so comprehensive, so savage. African history was denied or appropriated, African culture belittled, the status and standing of Africans as human beings was called into question”. It is important therefore to notice that neo-colonialism has not benefited the Africans. Rather, it has been hostile towards them and their traditional heritages.

Lands were confiscated, religions were smashed, and millions of women and men were torn away from their gods, from their way of life and indigenous knowledge systems, all in the name of neo-colonialism. These are the ills of visitors that were never invited by Africans. It is rather the workings of intruders who systematically invaded the African continent. Mpofu (2013:109-110) further observes that:

The coloniser does not only distort the history of the colonised, slaughter their knowledge systems and empty their heads of self-confidence and their hearts of the emotional stamina to live without colonial domination. But he goes ahead to manufacture accusations and labels against the colonised, among many of the accusations are – laziness, drunkenness, backwardness,

propensity to violence, dirtiness, stupidity, ignorance, bad luck and spiritual damnation – all of which require the coloniser to intervene and save the colonised from the abyss of many ‘lacks’ and ‘deficits’ that bedevil him and his lot.

It is evident to see from the above citation that neo-colonialism is an oppressive system of the highest order. It did not only capture the Africans’ economic, political or cultural acuity, but also distorted their sense of identity, suppressed their forms of knowledge, and eroded their indigenous religious belief systems. In order to show how neo-colonialism eroded the indigenous religious belief systems of African, I now turn my attention to a case study of three indigenous religions of Africa – The *San*, *Ibibio* and *Basotho* religions.

### **3. The erosion of indigenous religions of Africa**

The indigenous religions of Africa were thriving well, vibrant and had served as the backbone of social ethic, stability and cohesion in most African societies. They gave shape to social order, cosmic unity, and ethnic stratification. Daily living, seasonal activities and existentiality itself was always interwoven with religious undertones. Early nineteenth century missionaries like Arthur G. Leonard attested to this. He observed that “[t]he religion of these natives [Africans] is their existence and their existence is their religion” (Leonard 1906:429). He went on to affirm that “[t]he entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with it that they cannot get away from it.” He, therefore, concluded that Africans “eat religiously, drink religiously, and sing religiously” (Leonard 1906:429).

This impetus of belief and practicing of indigenous religions of Africa was abruptly interrupted by the arrival of imperialism, colonialism and later neo-colonialism within the African continent. Thus, imperialists and colonisers did not come to foresee the development of African religions but to loot all they can from the Africans (Lenin 1999:15). Theirs was the task of suppressing, civilizing, and proselytization. In essence, they aimed at extending their legacies through foreign labour and market – enslavement and territorial gains. Africans were therefore seen as both ready and capable, even though unequipped. They simply needed to be conditioned in order to fulfil the task. Firstly, the imperialists and colonisers who had come to conquer Africa had to speak of a just course – that is, the civilization of the natives, which they deemed worthy for the improvement of the colonised (Oduro, Pretorius, Nussbaum & Born 2008:37). In practice, this meant the acclimatization and assimilation of western cultural ideals, languages and worldviews by Africans.

Secondly, in order to win them over, the colonisers worked closely with missionaries who were responsible for proselytizing Africans. Scholars like Ferguson (2003:115), McQueen (2007:21), and Pobee (1979:15) among others claim that early missionaries often advanced the interests of the colonisers and served as instruments of imperialism. It is said that these missionaries therefore adopted a policy of ‘religious vandalism’ or a ‘smashing crusade’ against the African local customs and belief systems (Chingota 1998:147). African converts to Christianity therefore, were often forced or expected to break away with their African traditional customs and religious heritage under this policy. In that manner, they forbid the systematic practice of indigenous religions of Africa.

Lastly, in order to impress western ideals in their minds and hearts, the colonisers often sponsored missionaries to build schools, mission stations, hospitals, etc. to validate their necessity among African communities. Many can attest to the continuing value and importance of these facilities – schools,

churches, hospitals, etc., even in our times. The perpetual offering and systematic reliance on these facilities, barred the development and practice of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). In school, Africans were taught of other histories than their own. Forsaking their own religions, Africans converted to Christianity and became extenders of alien traditions. Nowadays, Churches are brimming with African converts and yet the alters of their gods remain desolate. Because of hospitals, Africans began to abhor traditional healers and laid aside the ways of their ancestors, which had been able to bring them peace and healing for centuries.

Ultimately, those who were influenced by, had come into contact with missionaries, and had received their teachings now felt ashamed of their traditions, and began to practice it secretly. They joined the other in condemning their heritage, and agreed that their religions are erroneous, idolatrous and necromantic (Masondo 2011:33). At this point, I wish to show how imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism has eroded the indigenous religions of Africa, such as the *San*, *Ibibio*, and *Basotho*.

### 3.1. The *San* religion

The *San* are believed to be the earliest dwellers of the Sub-Saharan continent. Their presence dates back to 11 000 to 40 000 A.D. (Chapman 1996:1). In numbers, it is estimated that the *San* were around the figure of 150 000 to 300 000 before the arrival of the colonisers in the form of the Portuguese and the Dutch (Brown 1995:1). This is approximately around 1482, where first Portuguese post was established on the Gold Coast. About that time, the exploration of the African coast was carried out beyond the mouth of the Ogowe by Diogo Cam (Johnston 1899:30). Three years later – about 1485, Diogo Cam is said to have discovered the mouth of the Congo, and sailed up that river as far as Boma. Further expeditions were continued by Bartolomeu Diaz, who “passing along the south-west coast of Africa, rounded the Cape of Good Hope in stormy weather without knowing it, and touched land at Algoa Bay, whence, on his return journey, he sighted that famous cape, which King John II christened “the Cape of Good Hope”” (Johnston 1899:30).

Inspired by the Arabs, Vasco da Gama set out to India in 1497 and made his famous voyage round the Cape of Good Hope to Sofala (Johnston 1899:31). What was the newly discovered and christened “Cape of Good Hope” was ironically a settlement for the *San* for many centuries (Chapman 1996:1). However, with the arrival of the settlers, especially the Dutch colonial administrator, Jan Anthoniszoon Van Riebeeck, in 1652, Southern Africa was open for white settlements (Adhikari 2011:18). Due to land seizures and territorial battles, the *San* were tragically brutalized, deprived of their livestock and hounded to the brink of extinction. Many were turned into slaves and their hunter gathering lifestyles, cultures and religion destroyed (Skotnes 1996:7).

Those who escaped the brutality died of disease and starvation as they were driven off from their homelands. Adhikari (2011:87) characterized this brutality as genocide because the dispossession and extermination of the *San* took place under the Dutch rule. De Prada-Samper further (2012:173) observed that “[t]he notion that the *Boers* hunted the *San* as vermin (and all too often without the slightest provocation on their part) was quite commonplace in the nineteenth century in publications about the Cape colony, and is mentioned in popular publications from at least the 1830s onwards”. Thus, Louis Anthing<sup>1</sup>, the then special magistrate to Namaqualand in 1860, was correct in asserting

---

<sup>1</sup> In the 1860s Louis Anthing was appointed special magistrate to Namaqualand. During his tenure he studied the situation of the *San* on the northern frontier of the colony, investigating claims of atrocities committed against the *San*. Anthing

that “a wholesale system of extermination of the Bushman people had been practiced” (cited by Skotnes 1996:17). The *San* were treated as commodity and thereby enslaved, if not viciously killed.

That is probably why De Prada-Samper (2012:173) noted that:

Whatever conclusion is reached on whether or not this constituted genocide, there can be no doubt that in the period, say, from 1700 until 1890 (when the fragile colonial “rule of law” had reached the remotest areas of the colony) thousands of *San* perished at the hands of commandos organised by frontier farmers, not always white, and that an untold number of women and children were forced to become serfs of the murderers or their families.

It is worth noting that the *San* were often killed for no good reason, and their women and children were forced to serve the people who murdered their families. As De Prada-Samper, Skotnes (1996:17) also observed that “the killing of the Bushmen was not confined to the avenging or punishing of (stock) thefts, but that, with or without provocation, Bushmen were killed [...]. Sometimes by hunting parties, at other times by commandos<sup>2</sup> going out for the express purpose”. The Dutch-speaking white settlers in the Cape therefore often saw the *San* as nothing less than heathens who were merely fit for enslavement. This is because “most Dutch settlers believed that God’s covenant with the elect was extended automatically to their own children, but not to the children of non-Christians” (Elbourne 1992:5).

Therefore, the exclusion of non-whites from the very possibility of becoming Christians was reinforced by a judicial system, which gave different legal weight to Christian and heathen testimonies in court, and by a popular parlance, which termed all whites as Christians (Elbourne 1992:5). Around the 1790s however, a certain number of evangelically-minded Dutch settlers, whom many joined Johannes Van der Kemp in 1799 of the London Missionary Society (LMS), became tolerant of the *San*. This was further promoted by the late eighteenth century Anglican and Moravian churches, who believed that Christianity was inclusive (Elbourne 1992:5). This implies that from being treated as slaves, the *San* were now being Christianized – a less life threatening predicament than the former (enslavement). This, ultimately, was an exchange of one form of exploitation for another, in which the *San* had no right to claim their independence and heritage.

---

wrote relentlessly to the Cape government advocating for a magistracy to be established in the Kenhardt district, that land be put aside for the *San* and that their means of survival be ensured. Although his mission failed, his letters remain as a testament to the cruelty of the settler farmers, the endurance of the *San* and, indeed, to his own compassion (Centre for Curating the archive – University of Cape Town).

<sup>2</sup> The commandos were a product of the First Boer War during which the fiercely independent *Boers* had no regular army. When danger threatened, all the men in a district would form a *militia* organized into military units called commandos and would elect officers. According to Major G. Tylden (1945:34), “the first Commando rode out in 1715 to punish a raiding party of Bushmen, and from that date until first occupation of the Cape by the British between 1795 and 1803 a system was developed which became an integral part of life in the frontier districts. Many of its *provisios* seem not to have been committed to paper, but were none the less perfectly understood and accepted by all. Whether codified or not, the principles varied little throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They imposed on every male between certain ages, usually 16 or 18 to 60, the legal obligation either to serve in the field, mainly at his own charges, finding his own equipment and arms, or to contribute in kind or money, according to assessment, to the war needs of his own commando or in some cases to those of the war in general” (The Commando System in South Africa, 1795-1881)

### 3.2. The Ibibio Religion

The *Ibibio* are the fourth largest group of African people found in Akwa Ibom State in South Nigeria, with a population of about four million (Ukim 2020:55). The *Ibibio* are not a single group in Nigeria, but are made up of several clusters of independent communities within the local unity (Ekanem 2000:14). *Ibibio* therefore is an umbrella term, which covers all the sub-groups of Oron, Eket, and Annang. These are ethnic groups which are thought to have migrated from Cameroon (Noah 1994:25). During colonial times, these were the people who deeply felt the influence of missionaries, as missionary work began on the Southern coasts of Nigeria because it was less risky and missionaries could follow initial trade contacts which were developed by slave trading (Okoye 2015:11). That is, missionary activities intensified after the British abolition of slave trade in 1808, whose slave-traders had shipped some 1 600 000 Africans to its American colonies during the previous century (Daget 1989:66).

Ajayi (1965:7-13) argued that these early missionary activities were driven by three motifs: firstly, it was the perceived need to advance British civilization, which was robed with Christianity. Secondly, it was the need to end the slave trade. And lastly, it was the intent to halt the spread of Islam in West Africa. From this brief background, it is easy to see that there are various factors that led to the dismantling and eradication of the Ibibio as a people and their religious heritage. Among these factors, one may mention slave trade, particularly the trans-atlantic slave trade, and the proselytization of the *Ibibios* to Christianity. Both factors, slavery and Christianity helped to eradicate the culture and religious persuasion of the *Ibibios*.

Oftentimes, the proselytization of the *Ibibios* to Christianity was accompanied by military strength. Both Ajayi (1965:101-103) and Ayandele (1966:16-26) observed that the missionary activities were slow among the *Ibibios*, particularly among the *Efiks* before military interventions by British forces on the Southern coast. This is because the rulers of communities within the *Ibibio* territories did not take kindly to the activities of the British colonials, slave-traders and the proselytization of their people to Christianity. Missionaries did not take kindly to this rejection. Therefore, they would do their utmost best to overthrow the stance and resolutions of community rulers. Okoye (2015:15) noted that “[e]ventually missions often found real and imagined reasons to ask for British military intervention, and removal of the rulers in territories in which they were located. Once these rulers were removed, massive conversions followed and the missions were able to spread to new areas”.

There were many reasons why the community rulers rejected the message of the missionaries. Owing to the effects of slave trade, community rulers had formed small, closely-knit communities that had sustained themselves and their traditions. Again, being wary of all the intruders, including missionaries, administrators, and traders, community rulers wanted to protect their people (Okwu 2010:108-110). Although they welcomed the building of schools and political connections, which came with missionary presence, “they also believed that their traditions and customs were best for the conditions, and the leaders were extremely wary of rapid social change” (Okoye 2015:14 [footnote 22]). It is further said that the King of Creek Town in Calabar (*Ibibio*), Eyo Honesty II, foreseeing the social upheavals to come, explained to a missionary in 1849 that the customs of Calabar could not be changed abruptly, ‘else no man can live in the country’ (Ayandele 1966:20). This meant that the rulers of communities within the *Ibibio* territories were tired of seeing their people being taken into slavery, their traditional culture and customs being eroded, and the rapid social change that disturbed their way of life.

The missionaries, through Christianity, were destabilizing the *Ibibio* communities. Those who were perceptive saw this disruption. It was evident. Precisely because the *Ibibios* did not see any difference between those who claimed to be Christians and themselves. Okwu (2010:93), for instance, noted that the people of Onitsha (an *Ibo* town) once asked a missionary: “Can this (religion) be true when those who are born, taught, and brought up in the countries where it is said to be generally professed lived so indifferently of its teachings, laws and precepts?”. Thus, the rulers of communities thought that the acceptance of Christianity and its principles meant the total abandonment of traditional religion and customs, and a rapid social change to their ways of doing and living. This was further evidenced by the recaptured slaves who had been resettled at Sierra Leone after the abolishment of slavery.

These recaptured slaves continued to serve as agents of British missionaries in converting their own to Christianity, rather than resuscitating or return to their own traditional religions and customs. They instead became useful agents of the missionaries because they could connect with the local people. They spoke the local languages of the people, and were not so vulnerable to malaria – a disease that was endemic to Southern Nigeria, as the British missionaries were (Tasie 1978:14-17). Therefore, they became useful tools in the hands of the British missionaries. This stands to reason consequently, that even after the abolishment of slavery, an ethnic group such as the *Ibibios*, which has the highest historical number of trans-atlantic slave export in Nigeria (Okoye 2015:13), still continued to perpetuate the religion and ideologies of their oppressor and captor after liberation and actively forsook their own cultural and religious heritage.

### 3.3. Basotho religion

*Basotho* are one of the *Bantu*-speaking groups that migrated from Central Africa down to various parts of the Southern African region – south of the Limpopo, in the middle to the later centuries of the first Christian millennium (Inskeep 1969:31-39). On entering the region, Ngcongco (1989:90) asserts that “the *Sotho-Tswana* branch of the southern *Bantu* tended to keep to the plateau west of the Lebombo-Drakensberg line of mountain ranges”. He further noted that in the course of time, these *Bantu*-speaking communities established royal lineages and dynasties:

For some ten to fifteen centuries before the end of the nineteenth century, these *Bantu*-speaking communities had developed in this region south of the Limpopo a flourishing Iron Age civilization characterized by a congeries of small states under the political control of established royal lineages and dynasties. Generally speaking these states were peopled by iron-smelting and iron-using farmers, who also produced crops – chiefly sorghum and millets - and engaged in some hunting as well as bartering and long-distance trade (Ngcongco 1989:90).

These royal lineages and dynasties however, were characterised by tribal wars and conflicts. As a result, the first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the eruption of a tremendous social and political revolution that tore apart as well as rebuilt the prevailing state system in *Bantu*-speaking people of Southern Africa and beyond. It also transformed “the nature and the quality of the lives of many communities from as far afield as the vicinity of Zululand in Natal up to southern Tanzania” (Ngcongco 1989:90). This insurgency was referred to as “the *Mfecane*”, meaning the crushing (Cobbing 1984:1). The *Mfecane* was set in motion by the rise of the Zulu military kingdom under Shaka (c. 1787–



1828), who revolutionized *Nguni* warfare (Encyclopedia Britannica 2000). The rise of Shaka's kingdom, which took place during a time of drought and social unrest, was itself part of a wider process of state formation in southeastern Africa, which probably resulted from intensified competition over trade at Delagoa Bay (Encyclopedia Britannica 2000).

Out of this turmoil – the *Mfecane*, the kingdom of Lesotho was born. It was built-up by a series of small independent *Sotho*-speaking communities who were “scattered widely over the plains stretching north and west of the Drakensberg Mountains” (Ngcongco 1989:111). The tribal wars which were championed by *amaHlubi* in 1820-1822 and *amaNgwane* in 1827-1828 – two of the *Nguni*-speaking groups, against the *Sotho*-speaking communities of the Transorangian Highveld gave Moshoeshoe an opportunity to consolidate the *Basotho* nation (Cobbing 1984:9). Moshoeshoe was the son of a chieftain of *Mokoteli* clan, which was a junior branch of one of *baKoena* chiefdoms (Ngcongco 1989:111). He therefore unified all the independent *Sotho*-speaking communities that ran away from tribal wars, which were caused by *amaHlubi* and *amaNgwane*, and those that were later propelled by *amaZulu* under the military guidance of King Shaka, into a polity.

Since the infighting of the *Bantu*-speaking groups occurred within the interior of the Southern African region, most Bantu ethnic groups tended to hide in the fringes and sought safety in mountainous zones like the Lebombo or the Drakensberg. This gave way for white expansion into the interior of Southern Africa, especially in places like the Orange Free State, southeastern Natal and the Highveld. As a result of this expansion, kingdoms such as that of Lesotho lost most of its arable land to the *Boers*<sup>3</sup>. After a series of territorial wars against the *Boers*, in which Basotho had hope to gain back their territories but gradually lost, King Moshoeshoe decided to seek help through the British colonial protection (Eldredge 2007:25). He had no answer to the invasions that were carried out by the *Boers* of the 1860s. As Cobbing (1984:11) noted, “[o]nly fortuitous British aid in 1868 and again in 1910 prevented the absorption of Basutoland into the Union of South Africa, as happened to the Zulu”.

Having successfully formed a new nation – the kingdom of Lesotho, King Moshoeshoe had to adjust to the intrusion of white settlers. For this purpose, he invited missionaries. Walls (1998) records that “Eugene Casalis and Thomas Arbousset of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society arrived in 1833, and Moshoeshoe offered them every facility and encouragement, bringing *Sotho* institutions under Christian influence while avoiding disruption of the community”. The irony here is that Walls does not see the introduction of Christianity and its total control over *Basotho* institutions as disruption to the community. More especially since new systems were introduced. Walls (1998) reports that “[e]ducation was encouraged, Christian burial introduced, the killing of witch suspects forbidden, and the powers of diviners curtailed; most remarkably, the “circumcision schools” for manhood initiation were discontinued”.

In my view, these changes were disruptive, as they eroded the socio-cultural and religious undertakings of *Basotho* people. As a result, Walls (1998) also observed that “after 1847 *Sotho* disillusionment with whites slowed Christian progress; leading converts gave up their profession, and the circumcision schools returned”. Dismayed by these development, Casalis left in 1855 and “no subsequent missionary held Moshoeshoe's confidence to the same degree” (Walls 1998). With this in mind, one is keen to assume that King Moshoshoe wanted the missionary presence in Lesotho for political reasons. This is because even after he had invited the missionaries and encouraged them to work

---

<sup>3</sup> The *Boers* are a member of the Dutch and Huguenot descent that settled in Southern Africa around the late seventeenth century.

amongst his people, he divorced his two wives for becoming Christians (Juergensmeyer and Roof 2011:699). I do not see any valid reason why King Moshosho could divorce his wives if he truly appreciated Christianity and wanted his people to be Christians. He was probably responding to the situation of the time – playing petty politics in order to protect his nation.

When that dream was not realized, King Moshosho sought protection from the British against the *Boers*. In 1868, the kingdom of Lesotho was therefore annexed to the British Crown under the protection of the Queen. In 1871, it was turned over to the Cape Colony, which had just received the status of Responsible Government from Great Britain (Eldredge 2007:25). What King Moshosho did not realize was that he was handing over his power to the British Queen, and was thereby forfeiting his right to rule the kingdom of Lesotho. Eldredge (2007:25) depicts this situation in the following manner: “The colonial presence in Lesotho constituted, in the *BaSotho* discourse on colonialism, “a snake in the house,” while the collective Western interpretation of the *BaSotho* experience of colonial rule defined this experience as one of “benign neglect” through a system of indirect rule”.

Moshosho, in this case, was caught between a rock and a hard place. His beseech of the British protection – what he considered to be the lesser of the two evils, seemed to be more deadly than the *Boer* invasion that he dreaded at the end. Eldredge (2007:26) notes that:

From that time forward the *BaSotho* were constrained in their ability to resist colonial oppression by the British because they feared a worse fate at the hands of the *Boers*. For over a hundred years, then, the *BaSotho* accommodated themselves to one form of political oppression at home in preference to what was perceived to be the potential for worse oppression, which would come with direct South African rule.

This became the state of affairs until Lesotho obtained its independence from Britain on 4 October 1966. By then, King Moshosho had passed-on and the next kings were forced to engage in bitter wars in order to gain back the independence of Lesotho from the British crown.

#### **4. A reformist approach – Rogueism**

Having shown how indigenous religions of African were largely eroded by imperial, colonial and neo-colonial systems, I now turn my attention to the current context, with the aim of contributing by proposing a reformist approach in the emancipation of indigenous religions of Africa. The starting point should be a critical reflection of the three ethnic groups that were considered in this paper – the *San*, the *Ibibio* and *Basotho*. From these ethnic groups, history has taught us that, to a large extent, Africans have been victims of (neo) colonial agencies. This is for a number of reasons. The first is that Africans received an influx of colonial agencies whose primary task was to overthrow and take away their heritages rather than negotiate terms of interactions – they needed no invite, the richness of Africa attracted their attention.

Secondly, the colonial form of plundering did not merely focus on material possessions, but Africans themselves were captured as slaves – thereby becoming property of the colonisers. The trans-atlantic slave trade is but a testimony to this fact. Thirdly, the introduction of Christianity in Africa seems to have led to the formation of new value systems in which Africans were forced to neglect and condemn their socio-cultural and religious heritages. Fourthly, due to colonial benevolences, the majority of

African people have become extenders of foreign legacies and/or ideologies – the total dependence on western philosophies is a testimony to this. Lastly, the presupposed independence of many African states from their colonial powers, in theory, seems to be a reality which has no practical relevance – as many African states’ policies and political systems are still controlled from the outside by neo-colonial agencies.

What is to be done of this predicament? Seeing that Africans have often been on the receiving end of history. I propose that Africans consider employing some reformist approaches in order to preserve what they have, and to revive the emancipation of indigenous religions of Africa. To this end, I suggest roguism as a theoretical construct that may be used in the emancipation of indigenous religions of Africa. The term “rogue” is considered to be negative and therefore controversial. The Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines the term “rogue” as behaving in ways that are not expected or not normal, often in a way that causes damage.

Other definitions are worse than this, but all seem to convey the same message – that being rogue is bad, it implies dishonesty and is dangerous. In short, roguism is the opposition of conformity. This philosophical concept may be likened to that of “epistemic disobedience” by Walter D. Mignolo in his *“Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto”*. While epistemic disobedience focuses on decolonial delinking, its aims are far stretching. Mignolo (2011:45) asserts that:

Epistemic disobedience leads us to decolonial options as a set of projects that have in common the effects experienced by all the inhabitants of the globe that were at the receiving end of global designs to colonize the economy (appropriation of land and natural resources), authority (management by the Monarch, the State, or the Church), and police and military enforcement (coloniality of power), to colonize knowledges (languages, categories of thoughts, belief systems, etc.) and beings (subjectivity)”.

He (2011:45) argued that “delinking” is therefore necessary because there is no way out of the coloniality of power from within western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought. As an extension to this line of thought, I argue that by using Eurocentric systems rather than delinking from them, may be of benefit for Africans in reshaping their course. Unlike Mignolo (2011:45) who argued that there is no way out of the coloniality of power from within Western categories of thought, I argue that there is a way out and this comes through roguism. As outlined earlier, Africans have been victimized by colonial agencies for too long, whether this came through slavery, Christianization, western educational training or other forms, they have already assimilated to western forms of thought.

There is no denying therefore that western ideals continue to shape our thought processes and existential realities. We depend of western forms of education, economic agencies, political structures, health interventions, and so forth. How then can we simply delink ourselves from such indoctrinations? The more reasonable solution is that we should use such indoctrinated aptitudes to our advantage, in the development and resuscitation of African ideals rather than the perpetuation of western legacies. This is what the theory of roguism entails. It argues for non-conformity in the perpetuation of western ideals, but appreciatively welcoming the use of western ideals for the benefit of repressed legacies, such as that of the Africans. Thus, instead of unlearning and abandoning western forms of thought through delinking, we should embrace them but use them to develop and resuscitate our own heritages.

## 5. Conclusion

It is evident therefore from our discussion that neo-colonialism still impacts Africa and Africans negatively. Its primary goal is to dominate, control and take away the resources that are meant for Africans. As a result, much has been taken out of Africa already. Its natural resources continue to benefit other countries while Africans are seen as the poorest of the poor, who are always looking for aid from developed countries. This process of taking away did not end with natural or material possessions, but Africans themselves were also taken into servitude, away from their homelands and made to develop other countries. Moreover, the civilization of Africans under the name of Christianity did not save the course, but exacerbated the situation, as Africans were often forced to cut ties with their traditional customs and heritages. Implicitly, this led to the erosion of African value systems, including the emancipation of indigenous religions of Africa. That is why the study proposed that Africans should consider reconnoitering reformist possibilities and as a starting point, the theoretical construct of rogueism has be encouraged.

## Bibliography

- Adhikari, M. 2011. *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: the extermination of the Cape San Peoples*. Cape town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Ahluwalia, P., & Nursery-Bray, P. 1997. Introduction. In: *Postcolonialism: Culture and Identity in Africa*. Edited by Ahluwalia P and Nursey-Bay (Commack, NY: Nova Science Publications, Inc.), pp.1–10.
- Ajayi, J.F.A. 1965. *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Walls, A.F. 1998. The Dictionary of African Christian Biography: Moshoeshoe. Accessed on 08 August 2021. Available online at: <https://dacb.org/stories/lesotho/moshoeshoe/>
- Ayandele, E.A. 1966. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A political and Social Analysis*. London: Longmans Publications.
- Babatola J. 2013. *Neo-colonialism in Africa: A Perpetuation of Western Interest and Subjugation of Africa*. Department of History and International Studies, Ado-Ekiti: Ekiti State University Publications.
- Brown, D. 1995. *Orality, Textuality and History: Issues in Southern African Oral Poetry Performance (Doctoral Thesis)*. KwaZulu Natal, Durban: University of KwaZulu Natal.
- Cesaire, A. 1955. *Discourse on colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Chapman, M. 1996. *Southern African Literatures*. London/NY: Longman.
- Chingota, F. 1998. “A Historical Account of the Attitude of Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian towards Initiation Rites”. In: *Rites of Passage in Contemporary Africa: Interaction between Christian and African Traditional Religions*. Edited by James L. Cox. (Cardiff, UK: Cardiff Academic Press), pp.146-156.
- Cobbing, J. 1984. *The Case Against the Mfecane*. African Studies Institute, Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Daget, S. 1989. “Abolition of Slavery”. In: *General History of Africa, VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until 1880s*. Edited by J.F.ADE Ajayi. (California, UNESCO), pp.64-89.
- De Prada-Samper J.M. 2012. The forgotten killing fields: “San” genocide and Louis Anthing’s mission to Bushmanland, 1862-1863. *Historia* 57(1):172-187.
- Ekanem, B. 2000. “Comparative Study of Ibibio, Egyptian and Greek Arts”. In: *Arts today for tomorrow*. Edited by Ekanem B. and Egonwa O. (Uyo, Nigeria: Dorand Publications), pp.10-17.
- Eldredge E. 2007. *Power in Colonial Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870-1960*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Elbourne E. 1992. Early Khoisan Use of Mission Christianity. *Kronos: Journal of Cape History* 19(1):3-27.

Encyclopedia Britannica. 2000. *African History: Mfecane*. Accessed on 28 July 2021. Available online at: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mfecane>

Ferguson, N. 2003. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Allen Lane Publications.

Tylden, G. 1945. The Commando System in South Africa, 1795-1881. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 23(93):34-38.

Inskip, R.R. 1969. "The archaeological background". In: *The Oxford History of South Africa, volume 1*. Edited by Wilson M. and Thompson L. (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp.1-39.

Johnston, H.H. 1899. *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnston, R.J. 2000. *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. University of Bristol: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers.

Lenin, V. I. 1999. *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Sydney, Australia: Resistance Books.

Leonard, A.G. 1906. *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*. London: Macmillan and Company Publishers.

Juergensmeyer M., & Roof W.C. 2011. *Encyclopedia of Global Religion*. SAGE Publications.

Masondo, S. 2011. African Traditional Religion in the face of secularism in South Africa. *Focus: The Journal of the Helen Suzman Foundation* 62:32-38.

McQueen, N. 2007. *Colonialism*. Harlow: Pearson Publications.

Mignolo W. 2011. Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto. *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1(2):44-66.

Mokhoathi, J. 2017. Imperialism and its effects on the African Traditional Religion: Towards the liberty of African Spirituality. *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98:1-15.

Mpofu, W.J. 2013. Coloniality in the Scramble for African Knowledge: A Decolonial Political Perspective. *Africanus* 43(2):105-117.

Ngcongco, L.D. 1989. "The Mfecane and the rise of new African States". In: *General History of Africa, VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until 1880s*. Edited by J.F.ADE Ajayi. (California, UNESCO), pp.90-123.

Nkrumah, K. 1965. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Publications.

Noah, M. 1994. Early History of the People. In: *Akwa Ibom State the land of promise: A compendium*. Edited by Petters S.W., Iwok E.R., and Uya O.E (Lagos, Nigeria: Gabumo Publishing Company Limited), pp.25-32.

Oduro, T., Pretorius, H., Nussbaum, S. & Born, Bryan. 2008. *Mission in an African Way: A Practical Introduction to African Instituted Churches and their Sense of Mission*. South Africa: Christian Literature Fund and Bible Media Publication.

Okoye D. 2015. *Things Fall Apart: Missions, Institutions, and Trust*. Department of Economics: Dalhousie University.

Okwu, A.S.O. 2010. *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions, 1857-1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice*. USA: University Press of America.

Pobee, J. S. 1979. *Toward an African Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Publication.

Skotnes, P. 1996. *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Tasie, G.O.M. 1978. *Christian Missionary Enterprise in the Niger Delta, 1864-1918 (Studies on Religion in Africa, volume 3)*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers.

The Cambridge Dictionary. 2021. *Definition of rogue*. Cambridge University Press. Accessed on 28 July 2021. Available online at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rogue>

Ukim I. 2020. Influence of Traditional Art of Africa on Contemporary Art Praxis: The Ibibio Funerary Art Example. *International Journal of Art and Art History* 8(2):54-61.