

# Ethnicity and Identity Creation: Africa's Social Work-Role Lessons from the Past

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This paper argues that both colonialism and missionaries influenced the creation of (new) narratives and ethnicity in Africa through their provision of community, which filled a void imposed by contextual factors. Such factors consist of social upheaval and disorientating change, which occurred at various pivotal points in history, of which colonialism was one. Therefore, while missionaries succeeded in creating ethnicity through the creation of sense-making stories and written language, which forged and defined indigenous groups, colonialism acted as both the cause of, and cure for, cultural disillusionment, prompting people to unite in the quest for much-needed security, protection and economic prosperity. We argue that an understanding of this history is important for modern organizational life—as these very social roles are being enacted again in African countries, but by legitimate and illegitimate governments, responsible and irresponsible businesses and unrepresentative unions. Unfortunately, many African citizens are hopelessly unaware that they are pawns in the greater drama, and even wittingly and unwittingly help script the unfolding drama.

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## Introduction

Although the influence of both missionaries and colonial states on the creation of ethnic identities has been discussed extensively in academic literature, primarily since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there has been insufficient emphasis on the active part that indigenous people played

in accepting and adopting those ethnic identities. Even though indigenous Africans had to face the ethnic identities attached to them by colonialism and, to a much smaller extent, missionaries, they actively sought a sense of belonging which had long-disappeared in such turbulent times and worked together with these socio-political forces

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to achieve it. Therefore, we argue that while colonialism and missionaries exploited the unsettling context which colonialism itself provided to establish ethnic identities in Africa, Africans themselves actively participated in this process, whether knowingly or subconsciously, to assuage their social isolation. This argument will unfold by exploring the ways in which colonial states directly and indirectly forged ethnic identities, and then feeding this into the many ways in which missionaries were similarly and consequentially influential in creating ethnicity, revealing the mutually beneficial nature of both social forces.

### Defining Ethnicity

Although there are numerous definitions of ethnicity, for the purposes of this paper we will take ethnicity to mean "... the degree of conformity by members of the collectivity to these shared norms in the course of social interaction" (Schutte cited in Tonkin et al., 1989, p. 216). 'Ethnicity' that was constructed by missionaries and colonial rulers in the past is referred to with interchangeable terms for centuries.

Tonkin et al. (1989, p. 15) observes that the recent definitions of ethnicity have unwittingly adopted "... the 'us and them' duality that related terms have had through most of recorded history". This is reinforced by Berman's (1998, p. 328) view that "the conceptualization of ethnicity requires the existence of an 'other', and the distinction thereby of insiders and outsiders". Both Tonkin and Berman's concepts take us to the very heart of ethnicity, a phenomenon where one group requires distinction and protection from the other, both of which colonial states and missionaries provided.

### Using 'Divide-and-Rule'

"Chip the colonial shell away and you will get back to the traditional core" (Tonkin et al., 1989, p. 43). This is applicable to the constructed ethnicities

which colonial rulers introduced in Africa as, contrary to the common perception that distinct and defined tribal groups always existed, the reality is that ethnicity was both a fluid concept and perceived as such, with the cult, clan, chief or professional guild constantly usurping one another as the very definition of ethnicity (Ranger cited in Vail, 1989, p. 120). However, colonialism was not guilty of complete ethnic fabrication, as 'modern tribalism' is a creation of the impact of colonialism on forms of ethnic consciousness whose roots lie deep in the colonial past.

Taking existing fragments of ethnic identities and using them for their own purposes ensured success for colonial states, providing a foundation in which indigenous people could believe, and thus would adopt. This is exemplified by the 'divide-and-rule tactics' (Vail, 1989, p. 3) which successfully created ethnicity. The new federal system and power shifts imposed by colonialism following World War II raised ethnic tensions. Although 1980s revisionist studies of ethnicity stressed the creation of ethnicity by colonial rulers for their own gain through divide-and-rule, Niehaus' (2002, p. 557) reassessment of "Shangaan identity in the multi-ethnic South African Lowveld ... highlights the agency of the subordinate to adopt terms of their own definition as the basis for collective assertion". This reinforces our view that, while colonialism employed both constructed and traditional elements of African ethnicities to formulate politically-beneficial ones, these were also taken and altered in some circumstances by Africans to suit their needs, making them active participants of this creative process.

Prevalent indigenous groups used ethnicity to their advantage, to advance tribal histories, tribal narratives and myths, thus generating ethnic affiliations and fortifying ethnic ties. Such actions were reinforced in the 1930s and 1940s by colonial politicians such as Awolowo and Macaulay, who

aimed to promote a specific ethnic group unity (Falola, 1999, p. 14). In their quest for a constituency which followed a single party, generating more votes and supporters, Awolowo chose to promote a history using the predecessors of the Yoruba: Ile-Ife and the Oduduwa. This resulted in the formation of an ethnic group called "Egbe Omo Oduduwa ... a cultural organization of aspiring Yoruba nationalists under Awolowo" (Falola, 1999, p. 14). Thus, colonial rulers constructed unified ethnic groups for their own political ends, and such categorizations were accepted by certain sections of indigenous people who wanted to solidify their ethnic identities in a dynamic, disconcerting colonial context.

### The Use of Territory

The direct and indirect effects of colonial states on African territory resulted in the formation of ethnicity. White and Vail (1992) discuss the way colonial states promoted ethnicity as the basis of migrant labor, using it to ensure that workers "would be kept on the move, tied to a homeland" (Lovejoy cited in Falola and Jennings, 2003, p. 109). This is true of the Manyika identity, which became widespread in the Inyanga, Umtali, Makoni and the migrant diaspora, due to labor migration and greater involvement in peasant farming: both of which were a direct result of colonialism (Vail, 1989, pp. 142-143). In this case, colonial states directly employed ethnicity as a method of social domination.

Ethnicity, however, also resulted indirectly from varying levels of development in colonial territories. As colonialism provided educational opportunities in those areas inhabited by forward-thinking petty bourgeois groups, these units were threatened by the demise of the colonial state. Consequently, they sought to forge ethnic identities and ethnic narratives for their groups for protection and survival, aiming to generate

support using this ethnicity. Large followings were sought after and manoeuvred to ensure that each group gained maximum power and resources when colonial states collapsed.

Vail (1989, p. 5) refers to the use of ethnicity by indigenous groups, desperate to forge and secure their own identities and narratives, in the face of competition, as "a way of papering over growing class divisions within their ethnic group so as to secure their own narrow [ethnic] interests when ordinary people embrace it, is the very epitome of 'false consciousness'". This is integral to our argument that the negative and positive effects of colonialism worked in a dynamic, two-way process with indigenous people for change. Colonial states negatively caused social upheaval which indigenous people had to cope with but, conversely, colonial states provided opportunities which people used to their advantage, to forge and secure their own identities in the face of opposition. Contrary to common perceptions, it is not only colonial rulers who can be accused of employing illusion for their own gain, as "people ... [have] the need for myths [and narratives] to help support their ethnic existence" (Viljoen cited in Tonkin et al., 1989, p. 225), also constructing ethnicity for collective-selfish purposes.

### Social Regression Due to the Colonial Context

"Perceptions of ethnicity often seem to reflect a closed, ordered world of insiders armed against a hostile world" (Falola and Jennings, 2003, p. 108). Ethnicity provided belonging and structure for many individuals and communities amidst the hostilities imposed by colonialism. The subsequent capitalist work-system overhauled everything that the indigenous peoples had known, often leaving them with cognitive dissonance (which resulted in widespread lack of self-esteem)

and insecure mentally, psychologically and socially. Consequently, colonialism succeeded in creating ethnicity through indirectly encouraging a regression (and over-identification) to the past and its values, which were no longer applicable, to regain a comforting sense of security ('established narratives'). Therefore, as indigenous peoples battles with dual views of who they are, they threw their faith into past ethnic identities, in denial of colonialism's pervasive influence in every area of their lives. Vail (1989, p. 6) is correct in describing "... ethnicity as a kind of romantic rejection of the present". Colonial states clearly succeeded in constructing ethnicities due to filling a void felt by Africans during colonialism, providing faith and stability which had long since been lost.

As a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade database's research, some Africanist historians are now in agreement with this view, arguing that slaves in the Americas created "identifiable communities based on their ethnic or national pasts" (Childs cited in Falola and Jennings, 2003, p. 145). Such clear self-assertion, as an indirect result of colonial states, demonstrates that colonialism only succeeded in creating ethnicity because indigenous people embraced it, due to the unsettling circumstances of their colonialist-circumstances. It is commonly argued that the Atlantic slave trade was highly influential in moulding ethnic identities and its accompanying narratives. Those Africans displaced from their homelands turned negative racial discrimination by colonial administrators, which all in the African diasporas received, into a positive common bond, exemplified by Africans in Cuba.

In Cuba, voluntary groups were established "based upon a common ethnicity that often reflected a shared geographic origin, language, and common culture" (Childs cited in Falola and Jennings, 2003, pp. 118-119). These organizations, called *cabildos de nacion*—town governments of

the nation—provided an alternative to colonial government for displaced Africans and thus functioned as ethnic opposition groups to the dominant political elite, providing services in all spheres of life. Childs (cited in Falola and Jennings, 2003, pp. 118-119) highlights the closed nature of such groups, and the consequent perceived protection from colonial oppression that they provided for their members, stating: "The *cabildo* house provided a sacred space for ethnic solidarity in a society increasingly divided along racial lines between slavery and freedom". Due to the hostility of the colonial state, Africans evidently constructed their own ethnic communities in opposition, as protection and protest to the status quo.

This brings us back to indigenous people being driven to form ethnic groupings due to the inequalities and vulnerability which colonial states imposed upon them. The fact that the Bambara ethnicity became so widespread in the African diaspora of Louisiana (because many slaves of other ethnic origins chose to accept this arbitrary categorization) highlights the use of colonial labeling to African needs and the appeal of simply belonging. It is interesting to note an objection posed by Lohse (2003), who disagrees with many authors on the extent to which colonialism influenced the formation of ethnic identity. He looks to Spanish slave masters, insisting that they tended to categorize African slaves according to the port from which they came and which was not always reflective of their ethnicity; that Africans were reclassified into ethnic groups numerous times throughout their lives; and that slaves only accepted the ethnic categories imposed upon them by colonial authorities in certain cases. However, the former two objections, adversely to his intentions, highlight the extent of power which colonialism had over shaping ethnicity, as this could be achieved even in cases where categorization was arbitrary and such classification could be altered at political will.

## Language in the Creation of Ethnicity

The influence of colonial states over the creation of ethnicity can, as with missionaries, be starkly seen in the power they possessed to promote language as the basis of ethnicity. The Yoruba, a prevalent, linguistically-defined ethnic group in Africa, was categorized under this name in its diaspora, due to the slave trade. The power of construction of missionaries and colonial states, despite their lack of knowledge, is evident from their deliberate misuse of Yoruba as the national name for the Aku country. It was a prominent missionary, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who made Yoruba an official language by unveiling the first Yoruba service in Freetown (Peel cited in Tonkin et al., 1989, p. 198). This occurred regardless of the hybrid nature of the language “its morpho-syntax predominantly Oyo/Ibadan, its phonemes markedly Abeokuta, its lexicon enriched by coinings and the speech of Lagos and Yoruba diaspora (Adétùgbó, 1967; Ajayi, 1960 cited in Tonkin et al., 1989, pp. 202-203). Such definition of the Yoruba language highlights the way in which both colonial states and missionaries worked in conjunction with one another to establish self-serving narrative discourse and ethnicity through language—the colonial states providing the suitable historical context and the missionaries working within this framework.

Missionaries relied on colonialism to act as a support structure for their language work, whilst colonialism required missionaries to spread the written word to reinforce colonial narratives and values, as well as construct politically-useful ethnicities. Vail (1989, pp. 12-13) captures this mutual dependency stating: “... if language in the form of written discourse was central in specifying these forms of culture, indirect rule provided the institutional framework of articulating these forms”. Thus, the indirect rule

employed by colonialism gave missionaries the chance to collaborate with recently professed, and economically-motivated, ‘chiefs’ to enforce their ethnic identities upon indigenous people. Berman (1998, p. 305) captures this, stating that “colonial states were grounded in the alliances with local ‘Big Men’, incorporating ethnically-defined administrative units linked to the local population by incorporation of pre-colonial patron-client relations”. Such fusion of ethnic traditions with modern elements demonstrated the appeal of colonialism’s narrative and ethnic reconstruction for those who wanted to further their social and economic status, by way of ‘regaining their roots’—enacted within a context in which they believed that had little-to-no maneuverability (inevitability hypothesis).

Language was certainly vital to the formation of ethnicity during colonialism, constituting a “principle means of ordering social relations” (Henderson, 1997, p. 115). The way in which it was used by both colonial states and missionaries encouraged ethnic homogeneity. Beach’s (1980) work on the Shona-speaking people reveals that Portuguese contact in the 16<sup>th</sup> century changed the meaning of the ethnic term ‘Karanga’ (the main territory). Originally meaning “the ancestry which reigned over the Shona-speaking people in the North and East”, it came to mean “the first Shona-speakers which the British came into contact with late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. This resulted in the naming of all people in the southern plateau ‘Karanga’, and all those in the southwest ‘Kalanga’ (Beach, 1980).

Therefore, European use of ethnic categories caused a regression into tribal terminology, since ethnic units and, thus, terms were significantly narrower in the past. “In this way, terms which certainly did not mean to convey the idea of ethnic homogeneity in pre-colonial times were picked up in the colonial period precisely to convey that

idea" (Ranger cited in Vail, 1989, p. 121). Ranger captures the way in which colonialism and missionaries, working within the colonial framework, attached definitions to ancient ethnic units and managed to turn them into 'umbrella ethnic terms'. This resulted in the creation of broader ethnic units than those which ever existed before, but under the guise of continuity, as the actual terminology was never altered. Thus, colonial states employed traditional language and narratives to create new ethnicities, appealing to Africans who desired regression to a past in which they were secure in their communities and identities.

True to the nature of mutual dependency, missionaries and their converts, referred to as 'unofficial' Europeans and 'unofficial' Africans (Vail, 1989, p. 122), reinforced the territorial divisions which had been established by colonialism through ethnic categories, by accepting these ethnic labels. "In the 1890s, no one in Makoni thought of themselves as 'Manyika'; by the 1930s most of them had come to accept that they were members of a wide Manyika identity" (Vail, 1989, p. 122). Although propaganda, colonial enforcement, and economic punishment provoked indigenous people to accept new ethnic identities, conformity also occurred due to natural cultural adaptation. Therefore, indigenous people clearly (willingly and unwillingly) consented to the ethnic categories they were given by colonial states and missionaries, demonstrating that the creation of ethnicity required the enforcer, the creator and the compliant.

With colonial states enforcing their work, missionaries were more directly active as the creators of ethnicity, due to their linguistic skill and skill with narrative sociology. Peel (2000, p. 288) is therefore accurate in likening missionaries to "the midwife[s] of a nation", giving birth to new ethnic groups through their provision of a

written word to unite indigenous peoples under one ethnicity. A codified language and self-serving discourse were highly desirable for missionaries and colonial rulers, as whereas "oral languages were ... dynamic and observed no frontiers in space or time, a written language was bound by rules that delineated and fixed it both spatially and temporally" (Harries, 1988, p. 44).

Johnson's (1921, p. 642) *The History of the Yoruba, from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* was paramount in the formation of the Yoruba ethnic identity. The missionary Johnson was responsible for establishing a writing system for Yoruba language, translating historical ethnic writings, and studying the Yoruba religion from various perspectives. A formal writing system, such as that developed by Johnson, logically led to a standard Yoruba language (Peel, 2000, p. 287). Missionaries sought one form of the Yoruba language, believing "... that to purify the language meant ridding it of its foreign influences ... Once the language was reduced to its original state, the identity of the tribe/nation would be able to reawaken and re-emerge from the unconscious" (Harries, 1988, p. 44) in ways which make them much more governable. Missionaries, like colonial rulers, clearly utilized language to simplify the various existing dialects to increase their social and political influence on ethnic construction.

### Missionaries as Cultural Symbols and Agents

As the creators of ethnicity, missionaries themselves provided the "cultural symbols that could be organized into a cultural identity, especially a written language and a researched written history" (Vail, 1989, p. 11). Newly codified forms of language, which only missionaries had the expertise to research and construct, provided new colonially-imposed ethnicities with legitimacy and long-term security, something which

members gained comfort and stability from. Vail, supported by others such as Butler, Gilomee, Harries, Penvenne and White, identifies language as integral to the establishment of an ethnic culture, because it acts as the primary form of communication and thus purposefully includes or excludes people. Furniss (1992, p. 275) reinforces Vail's argument, stating that "... language was used by missionaries to create social knowledge". In this way, it acts both as a unifying and protective mechanism— serving mainly the creators of such social knowledge. Both of these features were central to the formation of ethnicity and the sense of security desired by those in ethnic groups.

The intellect of missionaries instilled a sense of awe and excitement in the minds of Africans, stimulating their desire to learn. When teaching the Yoruba language, Falola (1999, p. 17) discusses the way in which missionaries attempted to adhere to the structure of English grammar. Consequently, the "... study of Yoruba in classrooms became a distinct subject of its own" (Falola, 1999, p. 17). Western assumptions also influenced the creation of ethnicity in mission schools, as driven by the perception that Africans were historically tribal (uncivilized) people, missionaries taught students that their uncivilized natures could be contained and educated toward more Western/European-type natures (essentially making them more 'human')—that such tutorship would enhance their distinct ethnic identities into greater coherence, thus socializing "the young into accepting a tribal membership" (Vail, 1989, p. 12). Vail continues to mention that missionaries also promoted tribalism indirectly through its relationship with education and thus modernity. In this way, missionaries worked with the people to create ethnic identities, mesmerizing them with their linguistic techniques.

While the missionaries ironed out linguistic differences in an attempt to create unified ethnic

groups, they also "created discrete dialect zones by developing written languages centered upon a number of widely scattered bases" (Vail, 1989, p. 127). Similarly, when colonial states specified and enforced territorial divisions, such linguistic divisions also succeeded in forging new ethnic identities. Although in pre-colonial Zimbabwe people in nearby villages spoke broadly the same language, missionaries downplayed their unity and carved linguistic boundaries, creating ethnic divisions and therefore more ethnic groups (divide-and-rule). Taking the Umtali and Makoni areas of Africa as examples, dominant mission churches (Anglicans, American Methodist Episcopal Church and Trappist/Marianhill Catholic fathers) successfully engineered a Shona-Manyika dialect.

In order to spread missionary work, ensuring success and preventing stagnation, missionary centers worked for promotion and reinforcement, specifically through "mission-out school networks" (Vail, 1989, p. 127). The movement of those who taught Makoni and Umtali languages meant that they spread into other parts of Southern Rhodesia (Southern-Zimbabwe today). Missionary ethnic education of local peoples meant that they were well-equipped to continue missionary work on the creation of ethnicity. The colonial context could not fail to raise their concerns about the "forces that were pulling apart their societies and, with the examples of nationalism in Europe derived from their own mission education before them, they sought to craft similar local movements as a means of countering these problems" (Vail, 1989, p. 12). Clearly, missionaries succeeded in creating ethnic identities by a 'domino effect', with their ethnic teaching mobilizing local people to spread these 'ethnic histories' and 'accompanying narratives'. Longing for a sense of community in such changing/uncertain times, local people were more than happy to spread the ethnic word.

Therefore, missionaries can be regarded as cultural agents, spreading ethnicity both in word and in deed. Similar to colonial authorities, missionaries assumed a powerful social position which they used to forge ethnicity through language and story. Falola cites Samuel Johnson's career to exemplify that missionaries possessed the linguistic ability to represent indigenous authorities. "The first set of literate 'diplomats' were drawn from among them, to represent indigenous interests and present their views to the British" (Falola, 1999, p. 32). Thus, although missionaries established ethnicities, as did colonialism, their social role as the mediator between the indigenous peoples and the colonial states afforded them a privileged social position, which was benign and thus highly effective in creating ethnic groups. Missionaries encouraged the active participation of indigenous people who desired to gain stable, protective identities whereas colonialism employed a harsher approach. We argue that both, regardless of their methods, in practice provided people with what they needed in such uncertain and ambiguous times: ethnic communities to which they could belong and within-group connection.

### Specification of Tribal Customs, Histories and Traditions

While the establishment of a written language and linguistic specification constituted the primary way in which missionaries acted as cultural agents, missionaries also used their social power to specify ethnic custom and tradition, primarily through writing tribal histories (Vail, 1989, p. 12; also discussed by Jewsiewicki, Ranger and White). Missionary authors of such ethnic history stressed that each ethnic group they promoted had a "common origin, long history, and a distinct identity" (Falola, 1999, p. 6). Such uniting factors were clearly made vital by the social and ethnic

fracturing of previous ethnicities which colonialism had caused.

Johnson, for example, deliberately depicted the Oyo as central to Yoruba history: "As Ajayi and Awe have noted, there is an Oyo-centric characterization of Yoruba history: all events revolved around Oyo's origin, its rise to fame and collapse" (Falola, 1999, pp. 45-46). Johnson's argument that the establishment of the Yoruba nation can be primarily attributed to the kings of Oyo was reinforced by his later work, in which "... the history now becomes fully that of the Oyo empire up to the end of the eighteenth century" (Falola, 1999, p. 44). By focusing exclusively on the Oyo, missionaries such as Johnson were clearly biased in their historical interpretations. In his case, many of the traditions reflecting ethnic divisions were omitted in order to promote a united Yoruba ethnicity, illustrated by his negativity towards the Egba, Fulani and Ijebu ethnicities in order to self-servingly promote the Oyo (Falola, 1999, p. 6). Johnson freely admitted taking such liberties in the name of ethnic construction, and "... he confessed that he deprecates the spirit of tribal feelings and petty jealousies now rife between us" (Falola, 1999, p. 6). In this way, missionaries and colonialism did not simply use historical reality to reinforce ethnic identities, but selected a version of history which promoted ethnic unity, thus promoting their ends. Arguably, thus, "the missionaries, British officials, and Johnson became part of the history of this period" (Falola, 1999, p. 45).

The indirect rule employed by colonial states relied heavily on the assumed existence of 'tribes'. Due to their own European backgrounds being influenced by the Bible and various Roman historians, colonial administrators wrongly thought that the nation was to Europeans what the tribe was to Africans: their community of belonging. Iliffe (1979) applies this concept to

the establishment of tribes in Tanganyika during colonial rule, describing the assumption that each tribe had one social system, one language and a recognized common law (Ranger, 1983, p. 250). However, this was not the case and consequently, colonial states succeeded in constructing ethnicity through placing ill-fitting Western assumptions upon non-Western peoples, constructing the political and economic geography (Ranger, 1983, p. 250) but referring to the wrong map.

Although colonial states are often regarded as dictatorial powers which impose their structures upon indigenous peoples, Africans often participated in the restructuring of ethnicity and society as they knew it, regarding it as (economically) beneficial to them. MacGaffey (2000) discusses the way in which the fluidity of the Bakongo tribe was replaced by set land and tribal rights determined due to colonialism, and this codification was common of all ethnic groups (Ranger, 1983, p. 251). Colonial states, like missionaries, needed to make sense of the African culture in the only way they knew how: imposing their structural norms on tribal groups and, in doing so, inventing new narratives and identities and, thus, new ethnic groups and traditions.

### Cultural Nationalism

A clear illustration of colonial states and missionaries imposing their European social structures on African peoples lies in the notion of the nation state. Missionaries promoted ethnicity as the foundation of the nation state, concentrating on language and narratives as the defining features. This is clear from "... nationwide mobilization based on a common language, common experience under imperialism, and belief in descent from a common ancestor [creating] Oromo cultural nationalism" in Ethiopia (Bulcha, 1997, p. 343), as well as missionary attempts to establish a unified 'pan-Yoruba identity' (Falola,

1999, p. 49). Peel (2000, p. 282) explains that for the Christian bourgeoisie "in the towns of coastal West Africa—the African nation was another name for a racial category" (Peel, 2000, p. 282). However, seeing that this supposed nation suffered from the absence of nationalist sentiment and cultural cohesion, according to James Johnson, "... the nationalists of Lagos naturally turned to the rich culture and historical experience that could give it substance, their own as Yoruba" (Peel, 2000, p. 282). In this way, much 'historical' writing (such as studies of J O George) focused upon promoting unity as opposed to tribal factions (Peel, 2000, p. 282). This, together with direct CMS mission work to discourage tribal wars (mentioned by Peel), demonstrates the manner in which missionaries worked to create ethnicities by underplaying ethnic differences.

Such ethnic change was only possible due to the context provided by colonialism, which created the ethnic disharmony that missionaries sought to dispel. However, one must question the extent to which missionaries succeeded in constructing national, as opposed to tribal-ethnic, identities, as although they desired the creation of a 'supra-tribal nation' (Peel, 2000, p. 285) and converts accepted an Yoruba ethnicity, these converts simultaneously believed themselves to be part of their previous tribes (Peel provides the Egba, Ijesha and Lagosian as examples) "... in the sense of subdivisions of the nation ... These remained the focus of people's primary loyalties" (Peel, 2000, p. 284). Thus although missionaries succeeded in the creation of an overarching African ethnicity, the fact that Africans still felt an affiliation to their pre-colonial tribes arguably undermined their success.

As a consequence, "chroniclers abandoned the pan-Yoruba nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in favor of a sub-group identity to defend local interests" (Falola, 1999, pp. 11-12). This can be

attributed to intellectuals, primarily missionaries, promoting local history in response to colonial local government reforms, political reorganization and resource allocation. As they all required competition amongst different Yoruba groups, Progressive Unions which were ethnically determined came into being (Falola cites the Ibadan and Oyo Progressive Unions as examples). Colonial rulers relied on such missionary work to construct ethnic identities, due to the belief that these unions legitimized their decisions regarding boundaries, the status of chiefs, and aided their establishment of political alliances regionally (Falola, 1999, pp. 11-12). Such dependence is made clear by colonial rulers seeking Intelligence Reports in the 1920s and 1930s, causing them to seek the expertise of missionaries regarding ethnic histories. This resulted in so-called great works both by British officers and European scholars. Evidently, colonial states and missionaries were mutually dependent on one another in their creation of ethnicities, with one facilitating the other.

### Conclusion

It is indisputable that colonial states and missionaries influenced the creation of ethnicity in Africa. Although the two used some diverse methods, the former relying upon the infamous 'divide-and-rule' social control mechanism, indirectly producing uneven territorial development and an incentive for indigenous peoples to adopt their ethnic labels or construct their own ethnicities, both colonial states and missionaries worked together in their employment of language and narratives as their primary tool for constructing ethnicities. As a consequence of codifying and standardizing language for ethnic groups, tribal histories and cultural nationalism were also employed by colonial states and missionaries to forge ethnic identities. While the rulers (colonialists) and cultural agents

(missionaries) promoted certain ethnic identities, indigenous Africans accepted, adopted or adopted-and-altered these constructed ethnicities, due to their desire for a sense of community and economic prosperity in an unsettled colonial world, having been socially detached or displaced from their pre-colonial ethnic identities. Colonial states and missionaries could not have succeeded in their own aims of constructing ethnicity without indigenous Africans also pursuing their aims within the framework provided, proving the three-way nature of the creation of ethnicity in Africa. It is this direct and indirect participation of indigenous peoples in the establishment of narratives, identities and ethnicities which is of interest to modern African organizations—with governments playing roles as rulers, and businesses and/or unions playing the role of cultural agents. Such clever and manipulative shaping of connection and belonging is often purposefully used on the modern African continent by such actors in order to serve particular ends—and, as such, should be the focus of much academic research (the beginnings of which we have not yet seen).☞

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