

Time for Africa to dissociate from colonial entrapments

A significant event of revolutionary magnitude has been quietly occurring in recent times in the United States, with tens of Cities, States and Universities endorsing the renaming of "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous Peoples Day".

The renaming, coming more than 80 years after the declaration of a Federal holiday in honor of Christopher Columbus, marks the fearless, open acknowledgement of a long process of paradigm shift that has simmered in the minds of many thoughtful Americans.

Acclaimed in history books as the "discoverer" of America, much to the mortification of Native Americans, who in addition to being the first to discover and occupy the territory known as the United States, were also killed, maimed, enslaved and contracted diseases from Columbus and his party.

The naming of a holiday after Columbus mandated the elucidation of his heroic deeds as a discoverer and benefactor to Native Americans.

This ill-gotten narrative, long challenged by the subdued voices of present day Native Americans is now being buffered by the more visible voices of reason among the descendants of the immigrant, Christopher Columbus and the descendant of other immigrants who constitute present day citizens of the United States.

With the understanding that it is never too late make right a wrong, the actions of the Cities, States and Universities in the United States who decided to, at last, stand up for truth and justice has laid a foundation that can only be built on, going forward.

Not only other States in the United States need to follow the footsteps of the courageous States who renamed Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day, but several formerly colonized countries in Africa, as well.

For indeed, sometimes prominent and sometimes dotted across formerly colonized states of Africa are names of colonial masters whose activities during the colonial era, in several instances, can be likened to that of Christopher Columbus.

The celebration of colonial oppression in Africa today thrives in many ways, one of which manifests in the retention of colonially bequeathed names of cities, landmarks, infrastructure, academic subjects and courses, individuals and just about anything that can be named, and has been named.

But why the fuss?

Why embark on such seemingly tedious – unnecessary, even trivial, some might opine – endeavor as a change of name across Africa, especially in such suggested magnitude?

Does Africa not have more pressing, weightier challenges to contend with?

The short answer is that indeed, at the core of much of the weight that constitutes Africa's challenges are the labels and names Africa has allowed the world to place on it, or has inadvertently placed on itself.

Names usually denote appreciation, some sort of acceptance, no one names a child after a horrendous disease, say Ebola or even the milder Malaria.

Essentially, we name to remember for good usually, therefore, there is a cogent and urgent need for a paradigm shift that will manifest outwardly in the rejection of certain names and labels, intended to shame, denigrate and control the mind of Africans.

More specifically, as a people group, the broader culture of the occupants of the area South of the Sahara attach a fundamental importance to names. Within the social-psychological space of Africa, a name defines reality, experiences and even predicts the future.

People's names hold deep meanings, the names of thrones and titles hold meanings, streams, trees, buildings, landmarks, social groups and just about anything that is named, is usually backed by a story, a wish, a prophecy.

Names in many African communities act as a memory bank, an identifier, a definer and a marker for individuals, families, communities and the entire society.

If Africans do not attach meanings to names, then perhaps this piece might not be called for.

In the case of Native American Peoples, the naming of a holiday after someone whose very name evokes memories of subjugation, signifies a continued shaming of the indigenous people, a gloating over their decimation by the descendants of their oppressors.

In that same manner, a continued reference to the majestic Mosi-oa-Tunya after a former British monarch, a name given by the first European to happen upon the Fall, or retaining the name of the Capital of Republic of the Congo, named after Pierre Savorgnan De Brazza denotes a continued deference to the power wielded by the former colonial masters over Africa.

The notable exception is Ghana which changed from Gold coast, Zimbabwe from Rhodesia and most interesting was Upper Volta which 1984, changed to Burkina Faso, which means "Land of Incorruptible People" by the revolutionary Thomas Sankara.

Beyond those exceptions, a change of name across Africa is necessary and will denote a change of perception.

To establish the complete transformation of the Greek City of Byzantium, Roman Emperor Constantine renamed it after himself; Constantinople became the new capital of the Roman Empire.

In that same tradition, the idea of renaming was not lost on the colonialists when they claimed Africa and gave new names after their own kind, kin and calculations.

The renaming that should take place across Africa, it needs to be emphasized, ought to be an exercise of the heart and mind, and not necessarily of the pocket.

The way some States in the United States simply came out to declare support for right and disavow wrong, Africa's renaming exercise should be an unassuming one, stripped of contention and luxury.

Let the conversations around the renaming exercise enlighten, embolden and unify, with participation coming from all concerned persons, and let that very process and the national and community growth it will engender be the focal point.

The renaming must not be allowed to degenerate into the awarding of huge contracts by government agencies for, for instance, the redesigning of business cards, letter heads, stamps, the repainting of sign-posts, and things of such nature. No.

The most important step is the open, unanimous rejection of colonial residues in the spirit, soul and body of Africa, and the generation of authentic ideas that can lead to advancement.

It is through authenticity that real assessment can be made of strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, followed by the generation of ideas from within to address and overcome challenges.

Authenticity generates transparency, confidence springs from

transparency, creativity and innovation are the offspring of confidence.

Africa's continued advancement will be determined by the level of authenticity which citizens are bold enough to embrace as individuals, and collectively, as a people group.