

The West Taught Africans Christian Forgiveness While Practicing Strategic Forgiveness

Much has been said and written about the impact of colonialism on African communities: the occupation and consolidation strategies, as well as the transformation of the way Africans think about themselves. Moreover, as the younger generation gets to know about this ugly past, they raise status-quo challenging questions against the fabric of our societies. Most of the discussions regarding Africa's occupation focus on economic and political infringements done to African communities, with the most audacious ones tackling the moral issue of colonialism namely, the distortion of the African psyche and imagination. Rarely, however, do we discuss the most subtle but decisive aspect of colonialism, one that profoundly altered who Africans are: religion.

It's a bit circular but the effectiveness of religion as a tool for the submission of Africans goes a long way in explaining this hesitation to confront the religious question. The reluctance pertains to the very goal of religion: to numb pain and shift the responsibility for the cause of the pain. In other words, the fact that religion is not challenged in equal measure like the other facets of life under colonial rule is itself proof that its goal was well achieved: to shift the responsibility of colonial violence to an abstract entity thereby neutralizing the ability of Africans to defend themselves from this violence.

Otherwise, why ignore something that played a decisive role physically, psychologically and emotionally in disarming a people and neutralizing their innate ability to defend

themselves given the magnitude of the violence? Naturally, the reaction to trauma is silence.

Consider the natural response of any living being towards violence. These are usually two-fold. First, defence. This is an instinctive reaction for a fight-or-flight response towards perceived harmful events; it is an immediate physiological response while fighting for survival; this reaction is how all living beings are wired in response to a threat of violence.

Second, the prevention of similar violence from happening again. This is not an immediate natural human reaction. The oppressed blown by the brutal shock from their first encounter with their oppressors don't immediately have the presence of mind to think about preventing it again. Hopefully, any human reaction can be (un)tamed, especially in the long run. Doing so, however, requires a sober introspection and an intentional shift of mindset away from mere activities that don't secure protection to a mentality that ensures self-reliance.

The only efficient counter-strategy when attacked is an equal or, even greater, offence. This is the reason why countries with nuclear power respect each other: more or less equal destructive force. The higher the ability a community has to defend itself, the more respected and feared it is. Religion is not even involved in this matter. In fact, the danger of religion is that it prevents the oppressed from being aware of the rude reality that no other entity can protect them. Moreover, it lures them into the false idea that their fate is protected by the power of their faith or their belief in a supernatural being, which disarms them and shifts the responsibility they have to defend themselves from aggression to an external entity.

Worse still, religion has devastating implications when it comes to preventing violence. The prevention of violence requires an identity, an ideology, a constant clarity of mind of the interests at stake. Shared values and beliefs in a

community as a shield that allows self-actualization are essential ingredients in the task of preventing the recurrence of mistakes that destroy societies. Even when past occasions of violence happened out of some distortion or temporary societal contradiction, these factors remain valid. Furthermore, these shared values serve as a common human experience and a collective conscience that differentiates what is bad for society – and punishes it – and what is good, and rewards it. Either way, these shared values/experiences, and not any other external entity, should be the only community's lifeguard.

Further, religion fundamentally disrupts that social cohesion by degrading 'worldly' issues to a low rank and upgrades the ability to only focus on heavenly matters as wisdom. What happens next? Active religious people no longer even identify themselves first as members of their communities anymore, but as children of the same 'God' that was used to numb their pain and expose them to defenceless aggression. Crucially, because only those who know who they are – their cultural identity – truly understand their interests, this distorted identity of a heavenly community ranks these interests higher in the priority order of concerns than the "worldly" interests. Ironically, this conflicting paradigm makes them continue to pray and work to preserve what is supposed to be refuted, fought against, and even sometimes, utterly destroyed.

It is exactly for this reason that some strategies used during colonisation specifically targeted the ideological fabric of African societies by using every means necessary, even the most mundane things were not left out. Ranging from naming rituals, economic habits, to spiritual practices, no stone was left unturned, which shows the extent of the submission that was desired. And these things, as small as they might seem, cloud the mind of the oppressed and prevent them from choosing their allies. If anything, this mindset makes them label their oppressors as friends and their 'brothers' as enemies.

Ultimately, the occupied territory is not only physical but mental, thus making the oppressed begin to take the interests of the coloniser as their own: they see the coloniser's interests as worthy of preservation and are even ready to die while protecting them. The religious person's life is wrapped around their newly manufactured virtuous and 'heavenly' beliefs.

Christian forgiveness

One of these beliefs is the Christian concept of forgiveness. That concept is so subtle and difficult to pin down; overlooking it is almost a natural instinctive reaction. Here is an attempt to describe it:

In most faith-based religions, the burden of forgiveness lies on the shoulders of the oppressed, not those of the oppressor. Let that sink first. In addition to already being psychologically and emotionally stressed, the oppressed are supposed (and expected) to bear the stressful responsibility of forgiving the oppressor. In other words, if they fail to forgive their oppressor, they are, once again, labelled immature or unforgiving. In a situation they didn't create, they find themselves in a double tragedy; the physical stress of being oppressed and the emotional stress of being compelled to forgive. The oppressor, on the other hand, wins twice; the physical satisfaction of gaining power and the emotional satisfaction of being relieved throughout the forgiveness process.

The guilt of the oppressed for their 'lack of courage' in forgiving their oppressor becomes the focus, acting as a shield behind which the guilt the oppressor has for committing the crime hides.

Therefore, the Christian concept of forgiveness is a twisted idea that is designed to completely distract the oppressed from the aetiology of the situation: the oppressor's greed and

superiority complex that should be dealt with by giving him a taste of his own medicine. He gets away with violence because it hides behind the etiquette of reserving revenge for 'God'. What happens in that process is that the oppressed forget themselves and end up bearing the burden of their own oppression. They resent their human nature of defending themselves despite that everyone else is doing that and acts as if it is virtuous to be humiliated. They find themselves turning the other cheek in a world where an eye is for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

The colonial apparatus needs the forgiving, pious and good Christian African leaders to stay afloat. In fact, it is an imperative necessity. This explains the vital place of Christianity in a post-colonial era. It numbs our own pain while promoting "love" for all nations. The oppressed must be obsessed by their perceived (in)ability to forgive their oppressors. They must be so consumed by that distraction (without realising it is one) that they won't have the clarity of mind to demand accountability from their oppressor for his deeds. Better still, the oppressor should not be discomfited by being reminded of that past so that he completely forgets his legacy of oppression. In return, his magnanimity gifts the oppressed a fresh start with the same people who won't let go of the power that was acquired in the said period. That is oppression at its finest. Therefore, the whole point of Christian forgiveness is a distraction that aims to maintain the status quo of the structure of oppression. Its very promise of an everlasting life represents death since nothing happens until heaven is achieved, and heaven is not possible without death. The coloniser creates heaven on earth through exploitation and demands of the oppressed to wait for their heaven in death.

Strategic forgiveness

Intra-group relationships are different from inter-group relationships, especially in terms of conflict resolution. The

French say “Le linge sale se lave en famille” to illustrate intra-group relationship dynamics. Family, being the place where interests are shared, is the only platform for forgiveness. Indeed, for a family, a country or a nation to thrive, forgiveness is imperative. However, there’s no place for forgiveness in inter-group relationships. Only interests matter in those relationships! For the violence to be justified and reproduced in inter-group relations that are not based on mutually rewarding terms, Christian forgiveness is essential. It is the only remaining alternative that humanizes the oppressor and has the oppressed normalize their oppression without needing recourse for self-defence.

In other words, those seeking to distract others from pursuing their interests preach Christian forgiveness in order to prevent competition over said interests. The pursuit of interests ruled the world when 22 African presidents were assassinated one by one. Pure, rational and measurable interests continue to rule the world. Therefore, accountability must set the tone in inter-group relationships. [Forgiveness is reserved only for those with whom interests are shared.](#)

The post-colonial world has the oppressed thinking they are virtuous when forgiving and forgetting what happened to them, without realising that in adopting this posture, they are exposing themselves to the same or similar oppression and humiliation. [The use of history as a stepping stone to reach higher altitudes and make better strategic partnerships is much wiser than forgiveness.](#)

It is, therefore, essential that discussions taking stock of the subjugation of Africa tackle this issue of religion because religion is politics and economics by other means.