

Post-Colonial Identity Crisis and Partnerships with Europe: An Black African Historian Defends Prof. Bruce Gilley

By Mukui Waruiru

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Prof. Gilley's critics may not be aware that there is a growing friendship between former European colonial powers and formerly colonized nations of the Third World. This is happening among European nations that do not speak English and their former colonies, because of the threat to their languages resulting from the great power of the English language. One can regard the partnership as similar to colonialism, but both sides are benefitting equally. According to Mark Robson of the British Council, English has 1.75 billion speakers. The world colonialism does not have the same stigma in non-English speaking nations in the Third World, that it does in English speaking countries.

The nations of Latin America, most of which are former colonies of Spain and Portugal, have formed strong political, cultural and economic partnerships with former colonizers. These nations broke away from Spain and Portugal in the 1820s, but have been strengthening their friendship in recent times. There is an organization known as the Organization of Ibero-American states, and it has 27 members in Latin America as well as Spain and Portugal. The organization promotes education, science, technology and the arts among member states.

France has formed alliances with its former African colonies in order to promote the preservation of the French language and literature published in French. The International organization of La Francophonie focuses on preserving the French language from the growing influence of the English language in their countries. The countries have a shared interest ensuring that their novelists, poets, film-makers, playwrights are known all over the world. In Third World countries that do not speak English, they value their culture more than they value the British concept of individual and economic freedom. If they are given a choice between being free from colonialism and losing their culture, and being recolonized and protecting their culture, they would rather choose to be recolonized. For Francophone and Lusophone Africans who are Catholic, being a cultureless person is an experience that makes life empty and meaningless.

The Portuguese speaking countries of Africa, as well as Portugal and Brazil, have formed the Community of Portuguese Language Countries. The purpose of the organization is to promote the Portuguese Language and Literature that is published in Portuguese. Members include Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, and Portugal. They co-operate on defense, tourism, economics, and in the preservation of the unique history of their peoples.

For people in the French, Spanish and Portuguese speaking nations of the world, working together to keep alive the memories of their ancestors is what enables their countries to have an existence that goes beyond material existence. People in English speaking countries may not choose re-colonization, but they have to ask themselves whether they should choose to do something that proves that we are not a culture-less people. For example, we can have a William Wilberforce Day, which honors all the people in the past and present, who fought to end global slavery, the greatest human rights achievement of the English-speaking world. We could have a Protestant History Month, which honors all Protestant clergy and laymen, who fought to promote education, health care and women's rights in different parts of the world. If the English speaking nations cannot honor their cultural ancestors who sacrificed so much and helped so many people, then we have to ask ourselves – what benefits are we receiving from our so-called 'freedom'. A concept of 'freedom' that exists to promote nihilism is worse than slavery.

One can view membership of the European Union as a voluntary form of re-colonization, in that it is an attempt to revive the Holy Roman Empire that was established by Emperor Charlemagne in the year 800 AD. Charlemagne's Empire was centered around Germany and France, and it was this empire that gave the people of Europe a common unifying culture. In the EU, Germany and France have disproportionate influence in policy making, and the smaller EU nations are willing to go along with this arrangement. I am sure most editorial board members of the *Third World Quarterly* do not have a problem with the existence of the EU.

Finally, we need to remember that the majority of nations in the world were created by ethnic Europeans, and that includes the majority of North American, South American, Caribbean, African, Pacific and Asian nations. An extreme anti-colonialist ideology has caused some Third World nations such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo to have a severe identity crisis, and in such nations, civil wars are common. It is extreme anti-colonial sentiment that is a threat to world peace, not the pro-colonial views that have been expressed by pro-Western thinkers in the Third World who identify with the Western human rights tradition.

Prof. Gilley has cited the late Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, as an admirer of some aspects of colonialism. To this list, you can also include the Kenyan writer, Charity Waciuma, the South Sudanese poet and novelist, Taban Lo Liyong, and the Tanzanian social scientist, Godfrey Mwakikagile. Toning down extreme anti-colonialist worldviews will actually lead to the saving of the lives of tens of thousands of people who die each year from tribal conflicts caused by a post-colonial identity crisis.

The editors of the *Third World Quarterly* should reinstate Prof. Gilley's article. He was merely describing things that have been going on in non-English speaking Third World countries.

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