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Celina Gronningsaeter discusses the findings of her joint research on British colonialism, based on interviews with academics at two leading Scottish universities..

The British empire exerted considerable influence and control over its African colonies and left many permanent legacies, one of the most important being the English language. We wish to explore the effects that this colonial legacy has had on the national identity of peoples living in these post-colonial states. In a recent university research project, we interviewed a number of academic experts about the broad theme of language and identity, with specific focus on the nature of Kenyan and Nigerian national identities. The research project presented an academic perspective on the impact of language on national identity. The interview subjects were academics at the University of Edinburgh and the University of St. Andrews who specialised in nationalism, language identity, language politics, and cultural studies.

Here we further examine the study's findings to illustrate the effect of the English language on national identities in Africa, using Nigeria and Kenya as key case studies. What this analysis makes apparent is that the English language, despite its colonial baggage, can be a promoter of linguistic and cultural diversity within post-colonial states, as populations have re-appropriated English to make it a language of their own. The possibility of such re-appropriation is contingent on government policy towards tribal diversity and socio-economic inequality, but if such policies favour diversity and social mobility, English can have a homogenising effect and simultaneously promote diversity. However, these findings do not disqualify the notion that English may also deepen socio-economic conflict and inequality in post-colonial states.

Colonialism is the domination of a stronger foreign power over a state (Mulchany 2015, 237). The process of that domination partially entails a form of cultural destruction that degrades the self-identity of the colonised (Hogan 2000, 83). Consequentially, post-colonial societies no longer under the domination of foreign powers often have to create, or re-create, an independent national identity. This is particularly challenging as many post-colonial states were created with little consideration for the existing social, lingual, or tribal divides (Mulchany 2015, 238). At the Berlin Conference from 1884 to 1885, the European colonisation of Africa was formalised, with borders determined by European powers' spheres of influence rather than existing social realities. Consequently, many post-colonial states in Africa had several official and national languages. Some individuals with the same nationality may not understand each other due to the language barriers, as in Nigeria and Kenya. There are estimated to be between 150 to 400 different spoken languages in Kenya (Obeighu 2015, 83), which has led to English becoming the preferred language of communication in business, legal matters, politics, and education in order to overcome these challenges. For example, two individuals with the same nationality but who come from different parts of the country might not be able to understand each other without a common understanding of English. In Kenya, however, there are debates as to whether English has become an organic national language or whether it is part of a colonial legacy that is erasing Kenyan native practices (Sure 2003, 259). Currently, Kenya's constitution is written in English, and the judiciary uses English, but politics are primarily carried out in Kiswahili (also known as Swahili). The parliament, however, uses both English and Kiswahili, requiring the president to be trilingual (in English, Swahili and one of the major ethnic languages) as a mandatory requirement (Mazrui and Mazrui 1993, 284). We will argue that English, and other colonial languages such as French and Spanish, can be both an organic national language and part of a colonial legacy.

English has had an undeniably profound impact on the construction of the national identity of former British

colonies, in some cases becoming the dominant language. It has been increasingly adopted by populations, particularly of younger demographics, over their ethnic language, weakening the linguistic link to their native culture (Mazrui and Mazrui 1993, 287-288). Despite this shift, the depiction of English as simply an oppressive colonial legacy that erodes native identities is overly simplistic and it undermines the agency of post-colonial peoples. The interviews we conducted posed a challenge to the view that English is solely an oppressive colonial relic, suggesting that English can have a homogenising effect whilst simultaneously promoting diversity. David McCrone, a professor at the University of Edinburgh who published extensively on nationalism, citizenship and social inclusion, explained that multiple social and political identities can exist within the same society, or within the same person, without necessarily coming into conflict with one another. In the post-colonial African countries, people can speak both English and their native language, whilst maintaining national and tribal identities.

English can also have a homogenising effect as it becomes a common language in post-colonial multilingual societies. This can erode the presence of native languages and cultural practices as English becomes a norm, creating a more homogenous national identity. Some tribal groups can be excluded from a nation's identity formation process, as it cannot accommodate the linguistic and cultural diversity within its borders. Anindya Raychaudhuri, a senior lecturer at the University of St. Andrews with expertise on the production of memory, identity, and the dynamics of language on the personal and cultural level, had a different view: by becoming a neutral language that enables communication across language barriers, English's homogenising effect can ultimately promote diversity. There are circumstances in which choosing to speak a certain native language can reflect a conscious political act, such as the promotion of separatism or supremacy. If the state chooses to utilise English at the national level, it avoids the need to give preferential treatment to some ethnic groups and languages at the expense of others and can thus circumvent some ethnic tension. This enables individuals to participate in the creation of a diverse national identity without compromising their linguistic heritage.

This complex and multi-faceted phenomenon is clearly apparent in Nigeria, where English is increasingly used as a tool with which to broach cultural and linguistic barriers whilst simultaneously eroding local languages in the home (Udofot 2015, 14). As English becomes more prominent, younger generations increasingly abandon local languages, ultimately weakening linguistic ties to cultural heritage. This phenomenon is also apparent in Kenya. A recent study showed that many Kenyans responded positively to the use of Kenyan English, which is English with some linguistic features borrowed from Swahili, in media and education. Kenyan English was, in fact, preferred over both British English and Kenyan English with ethnic markers (Kenyan English with loan words or accents derived from indigenous languages spoken by the Gikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kalenjin or Kamba people) (Kioko 2003, 130). This suggests that English is largely perceived as a national language which transcends ethnic boundaries, rather than simply an oppressive colonial legacy.

Daniel Cetra also identified several countries with multilingual societies in which English is used to overcome both language barriers and sectarian conflict. English could therefore help mitigate conflict between tribes that have been forced into the same country by colonial powers. The actions of Nigeria after the Biafran War exemplify how English was used to mitigate these tensions. The Biafran War was a Nigerian civil conflict fought over the attempted secession of the Igbo people as a result of their lack of representation in Nigerian government. Now considered genocide of the Igbo people, the Nigerian government employed starvation tactics killing between half a million and two million Biafran civilians. This conflict itself stems from British colonial policy; the British divided Nigeria into separate North, West and East regions, thus exacerbating divisions between the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo people. Nigerian scholars argue that poetry written in the aftermath of the war emphasizes the use of 'direct simple English' more than pre-war poetry does. One such scholar, Nwachukwu-Agbada, claims that the stated goal of these poets is to 'cultivate a public language, to utilise a civic medium' so as to convey an 'expression of our fragmented and tortured psyche' (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1991, 165). In this sense, direct English is used to convey a national sense of chaos and loss above and across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. English is not simply a colonial burden; it has become, in some circumstances, a vessel for the creation of a unified and diverse national identity.

One of the key challenges in the creation of a unified and diverse national identity through English is the socio-economic impact colonialism has left behind, as well as the role English has played, and continues to

play, in exacerbating these socio-economic divides. English was originally taught to colonial administrators and the upper echelons of societies. These hierarchical divisions still exist and are primarily visible through differing English language skills. In Nigeria, English language proficiency seems to be a key factor in the level of education attained, thereby giving those that can speak English well an advantage when entering the workforce (Fakeye 2009, 490).

The large differences in English fluency in post-colonial societies are mainly determined by an individual's access to higher quality education, which is primarily reserved for wealthier individuals. English, spoken or written, is thus less accessible to the population at large, is limited in its ability to negotiate language barriers and tribal conflict and, at times, even promotes conflict between social classes. This is particularly visible in the labour market of post-colonial societies, as individuals with high English skills are able to secure higher paying jobs than individuals with little to no English skills. In Kenya, the pervasive attitude towards English is that it is indeed vital for social mobility and economic success (Michieka 2005, 173). The socio-economic implications of English in post-colonial societies have led many poorer individuals and groups to see English as the basis for the formation of a bilingual elite, fluent in both English and their native language (Mazrui and Mazrui 1993, 283). English can indeed promote a united and diverse national identity; however, it can also exclude lower social classes and aggravate social divides.

We argue that English can unify more than divide because of post-colonial African societies' ability to re-appropriate English and make it uniquely their own. This can transform English from a colonial legacy to an organic national language. This is clearly the case in Nigeria, where English is increasingly becoming what Chinua Achebe, a prolific Nigerian author and essayist, described as the English language spoken "In African Tones" (Danladi 2013, 1). A key example of this would be Nigerian pidgin English, English spoken in Nigeria mixed with syntax, vocabulary and phonological characteristics inherited from pre-existing native languages (Awonusi, 1990:35). In Kenya as well, in spite of government policy, a distinctly Kenyan form of English is developing and becoming more dominant (Kioko 2001, 209). David McCrone expanded on these issues, commenting on the diversity of English languages in the world: from American, to Australian, to Scottish English. In post-colonial African societies, specific English dialects are similarly developing through different pronunciations and the creation of a new vocabulary that combines English and native words. This re-appropriation makes the history of English in post-colonial African societies less oppressive and, instead, reflects the powerful agency of post-colonial peoples. They are not merely the victims of English's influence but, rather, agents who actively interact with the language, using this colonial legacy as a tool to create a national identity that was taken from them by British colonisers.

English is seen as a colonial legacy, but it is also seen as part of the globalisation process. Viewed in this light, English becomes a useful language to speak when faced with language barriers; it is not seen as an oppressive tool from colonial times but is instead a useful medium of communication (Mazrui and Mazrui 1993, 287). English viewed as a lingua franca emphasises its ability to connect the world and plays down its connection to colonialism. Deborah Bryceson, a professor and honorary fellow at the University of Edinburgh whose research is concerned with transnational families, creole societies and migration, argues that many nations and peoples can easily make the English language their own without regarding it as a colonial legacy. She reminds us that, technically, English is part of a colonial legacy in the United States, but that is never problematised. Similarly, a large part of Nigeria does not see English as part of a colonial legacy, but as an organic part of the world's increased interconnectedness (Mazrui and Mazrui 1993, 287).

English is often seen as a problematic language in the post-colonial world. The colonial legacy of English and the socio-economic divides it exacerbates are the subjects of debate. This article has shown, however, that post-colonial African societies are not simply powerless victims of English. English can simultaneously homogenise societies and promote diversity of cultures. This allows different cultures in post-colonial African states to communicate, share and celebrate their diversity in the process of creating a common national identity. These societies have agency to transform the English language into a new one which is uniquely their own, creating their own dialect through variation in pronunciation and the acquisition of new words. English has, therefore, lost much of its solely colonial connotations and instead functions as a tool for communication across language barriers.

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