

# **Cultural Diversity in Africa: Colonial Legacy and Construction of Alternatives.**

## **Introduction**

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This dossier considers how African cultural diversity was handled during different historical periods and case studies<sup>1</sup>. The aim is to analyze whether colonization triggered or exacerbated friction in social and cultural coexistence in the contexts under study, whether these tensions remain today and whether these factors are an obstacle to political solutions which are sensitive to the recognition of cultural diversity.

The articles we have compiled certainly show that following the founding of the independent African states, there were countries that retained the colonial policies with regard to how they handled cultural diversity. These had been raised on the principle of *divide et impera* and are the cause of deadlock in conflicts or even a hindrance to other more sensitive and positive solutions for the visibility of ethnicities. Extrapolation from some of the case studies allows us to understand in greater depth some of the consequences of colonial policies in Africa. Since the emergence of slavery until the establishment of the current States, there has been a succession of exclusions, splits and hierarchies, insufficiently counter-balanced by processes of union, inclusion and egalitarianism.

One key concept in the articles is *ethnicity*, which allows us to approach African cultural diversity as an element that continues to act as a unifying and cohesive force, in part because there has been a failure to consolidate identity based on national symbols. It should be remembered that many States have only recently come into being and have not invested sufficient effort or have simply been unsuccessful in their attempts to consolidate a collective awareness as a pillar of robust national identities. As a result, ethnic identities, beyond territorial, linguistic or any other type of border, continue to provide a powerful framework for the analysis of cultural diversity in African states. Nonetheless, it is important to make clear that under the slogan “divide and rule” and assisted by the classification and formation of diverse cultural groups within each colony, the colonizing states, and their auxiliary science, constructed a set of

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analytic and conceptual tools based on the principle of ethnicity which became the essence of how to construct national identity in colonized societies. Relevant on this question is the critique of African “ethnicism” by Amselle and M’Bokolo (1985), and other subsequent reflections such as those by Blanchard and Bancel (1998) which described the subtle change in the status of Africans in the post-colonial period from the category of “indigenous peoples” to that of “immigrants”, in a theoretical perspective criticized by other such researchers as Bayart (2010).

In any case, the dossier will analyze the construction of cultural identities and the handling of the colonial diversity in territories born out of the “colonial wound” (Mignolo 2000) from the period of modern colonialism to the present day. We seek to analyze the consequences of the colonial imprint in some African states on the Atlantic seaboard and to cover a significant set of cases, territories and approaches to cultural diversity constructions. The dossier will measure colonial legacy in the present and will assess the options and criticisms of the inherited formulas for cultural diversity and their management in the sociopolitical and epistemological fields. The aim is to continue to provide complex insights into the urgent questions of citizens’ rights, also from a perspective considered both ethno-cultural and transnational, either in processes to acknowledge and promote ethnic diversity or in processes of exclusion.

Diachronic perspective has a significant part to play in this dossier as it enables us to verify the continuities which survive through time and transcend specific historical moments and periods such as colonialism, the pro-independence struggles etc. This perspective, together with diversified methodologies and data provided by anthropology, history and sociology, allows us to understand how colonization defined processes of social transformation; how it was part of the shift in social and inter-group relations; how it imposed means of social control, systems of construction and of configuration of society based on the separation of groups, on the control and encouragement of population movements; and how it impacted on the analysis of the means and strategies of resistance of one group against another, either of *racial colonial election* with slavery and forced labor, or of *transferred colonial election*, as can be seen in the heirs of colonial power in independent countries.

Arlindo Caldeira studies the social reality of Luanda (Angola) during the seventeenth century, and provides a description of the world of African slaves who made up the largest community in the city. Caldeira describes the ethnic groups from the point of view of their own features and reveals huge cultural diversity. His article assesses the transference processes between groups, the generation of means of reciprocal adaptation between the African and European populations and the process of interbreeding. He makes a historical contribution to the way in which specific social contexts have been transformed into a society that today can be considered Angolan.

In her text on resistance to colonialist conquests in the Moka Valley in the then Spanish Guinea (Equatorial Guinea), Nuria Fernández Moreno describes

the transformations of Bubi society on the island of Fernando Poo, now Bioko, which derived from two complementary movements, colonization and evangelization, which also led to territorial expropriation. Fernandez shows how the transformations were related to the weakening of the power strategies of the Bubi, since the loss of autonomy grew as colonial advance became more intense. We should point out that this kingdom is understood as a consequence of the formation of political structures similar to states, in which there is a central power figure which stands as the “par inter pares” opposed to the imposition of colonial domination. Both Arlindo Caldeira and Nuria Fernandez provide greater depth in the understanding of colonial advances from a *longue durée* historical perspective and in contexts which clarify colonization based on the occupation of land, either in the period of the slave-trade or at the outset of modern colonialism, as in the examples of Luanda and the island of Bioko. In both cases the identification consequences remain today and are still relevant in current understanding of inter-ethnic coexistence and resistance to discrimination in both contexts.

Yolanda Aixelà analyzes migration to the island of Bioko (Equatorial Guinea) since the nineteenth century, and describes the socio-cultural impact of forced laborers on the island, considered, for example in the case of the Fang, as a form of migration. Aixelà compares the hierarchic division at the heart of the Spanish Guinea colony with that which followed Independence, in terms of cultural homogenization and the negation of ethnic differences. She traces the beginnings of the *fangisation* of Bioko, where ethnicity, patronage and alienation of other groups demonstrate some of the sources of legitimization and support of the Macías and Obiang dictatorships.

These same tools of legitimization of postcolonial regimes are described in the article by Ana Lúcia Sá, which focuses on the African approach to the question of cultural diversity through the comparison of two countries which inherited colonial structures: Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Sá analyzes the discourse on social and cultural particularities and shows how they were applied by such diverse figures among the heirs of colonization as the ex-presidents or the *fathers of the nation*, leaders associated with a discourse of unity which masked a cultural diversity with negative connotations. The approach is an obvious legacy of the colonial vision; different groups who live together under a modern structure which advocates a false unity, in other words the State.

Eduardo Costa Dias also analyzes the questions of cultural diversity, national identity and the construction of the State in Guinea-Bissau. His analysis focuses on the Armed Forces and the two separate strategies of ethnicism and military intervention to demonstrate the original divisions and the justification for ethnic domination not only in the security forces, but also in the State itself. Costa Dias asks whether the ethnicization of the armed forces in Guinea-Bissau is the first step towards the ethnicization of the country, with the redistribution of privileges within the Balanta groups.

The five articles approach the continuity of colonialism from the outset of colonization until the present day, while at the same time describing the diverse strategies of colonization and of resistance, (or rather, of *re-existence*), on diverse levels while considering the construction of models of long-term social and political regulation. In this way the dossier reviews the period from the division between slave-owners (European settlers in Africa) and slaves (from their region of origin) until the constitution of the colonial state and its impact on cultural diversity, followed by the configuration of the postcolonial state and the difficulties in de-polarizing the multiple ethnic communities and combining the interests of the different groups.

In this context, the concept of violence as developed by Achille Mbembe throughout his *On the Postcolony* (2001), preceded by the insights of Fanon (1966), is associated with sovereignty, domination and the respective rights of the oppressor in the colonial and postcolonial powers, and become a handling instrument of the relations among diverse groups in different fields of social reality which encompass colonial racial hierarchies and day-to-day life in a repressive state. This becomes clear in most articles when reference is made to violence as part of processes of instrumentalization active by political-social agents in dichotomic relations lord/slave, colonizer/colonized, president/people or military/military, or as a factor of analysis in actions of protest or acceptance of these instrumentalizations. As we shall see, in all the case studies without exception, a key factor is the confiscation of the collective memory, the falsification or negation of its construction, and the instrumentalization of the discourses of unity and of fragmentation in the construction of colonial and postcolonial state models.

Therefore the question is to delve deeper into the continuities from a diachronic perspective in order to review cultural diversity in Africa, a fundamental issue in the analysis of colonial and postcolonial contexts.

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