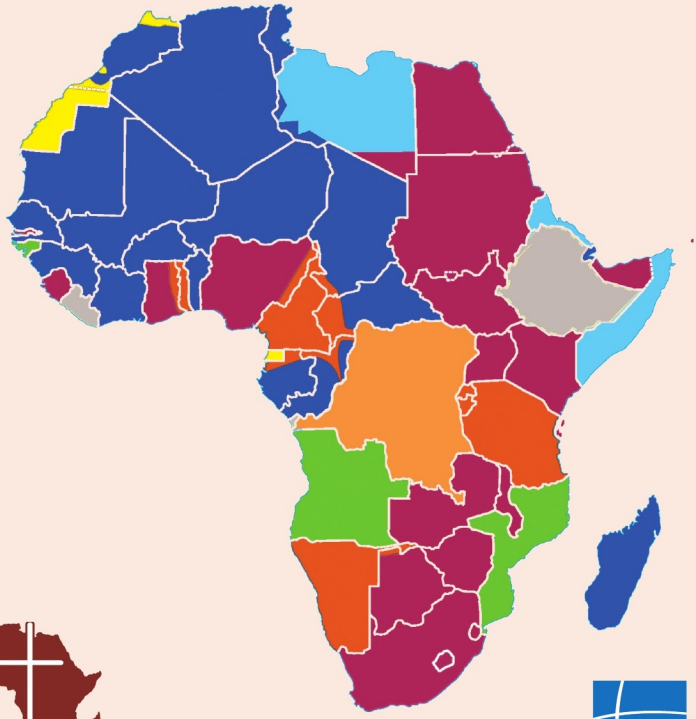
African Theological Impulses

1

Global Decolonization and Reparation Debates

African Christian Perspectives



AACC-CETA

Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene

All Africa Conference of Churches (Ed.)

Global Decolonization and Reparation Debates

African Christian Perspectives

African Theological Impulses

VOL. 1

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African Theological Impulses Series

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in partnership with *Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene* (Erlangen Publishing House for Mission and Ecumenism)[1] proudly presents the first volume of the African Theological Impulses Series dedicated to *Global Decolonization and Reparations Debates: African Christians Perspectives.* This series accompanies member churches and stakeholders in addressing contextual theologies across the continent. It brings together the voices of church leaders, ordained and lay theologians, and religious practitioners whose research contributes significantly to the ongoing global debates on decolonization and reparations from an African Christian perspective. Furthermore, this inaugural publication marks a major milestone for AACC as it steps onto the international stage through this new partnership. This work enriches contemporary research, making it an essential resource for member churches, theological institutions, partners, and stakeholders alike.

1 The "Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene" (Erlangen Publishing House for Mission and Ecumenism) is a publishing house of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany, closely connected to the center "Mission EineWelt". It is located in Neuendettelsau, Bavaria.

Acknowledgement

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), through its Theology and Interfaith Relations Unit, has continued to accompany its member churches in addressing emerging contextual theologies on the continent. Over the last five years, the AACC has held a series of symposia on Misleading Theologies from which articles were presented and edited into books. In addition to the Misleading Theologies series, the AACC has held a consultation on African Perspectives on Decolonization and Reparations Debates in Global Christianity from 3rd to 6th June 2025. From the articles presented during this consultation, this publication **"Global Decolonization and Reparations Debates: African Christians Perspectives"** has been produced.

This has materialized because of the hard work, commitments and research of the contributors as well as the mutual and financial support from our ecumenical partners. Therefore, we are thankful to all the contributors who made immeasurable efforts and dedicated their valuable time to researching, writing, presenting, and refining their articles for this publication. We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to all the peer-reviewers. We do also thank our ecumenical partners Kerk in Actie, WCC and EMW for their financial support of the Misleading Theologies Annual Theological Symposium series, from which this publication originates. Furthermore, we are thankful to our partnering publisher *"Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene"* and their team co-publishing with us. We are also grateful to all others who contributed to the publication of this book in one way or the other.

The Editors

Foreword

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is a continental ecumenical body that was founded in April 1963 in Kampala, Uganda. It is the largest association of Protestant, Orthodox and Indigenous churches in Africa, comprising 218 members that include churches, National Councils of Churches (NCCs), theological and lay training institutions, and other Christian organisations in 43 countries. It accounts for over 200 million Christians across the continent. Being one of the most prominent regional ecumenical organisations, the AACC continues to promote human dignity, peace and justice in different parts of Africa. To achieve this, the AACC has accompanied member churches in promoting relevant contextual theologies as a response to emerging false doctrinal teachings and harmful religious practices since 2019.

From 2025, AACC started engaging in other contextual theologies debates, such as the African Perspectives on Decolonization and Reparations Debates in Global Christianity, which took place from 3rd to 6th June 2025, and from which this publication on "**Global Decolonization and Reparations Debates: African Christians Perspectives**" has been produced. This publication brings together diverse contextual voices from church leaders and theologians, among other stakeholders across the continent, to constructively engage in the ongoing global debates on decolonization and reparations. This publication contextualizes African Christian perspectives on various aspects of decolonization and reparations, including the concept of decolonization and reparations, African churches' involvement in colonialism, neocolonialism and decolonization, mission and colonialism, biblical perspectives on reparations, cases for internal reparations and colonialism, decolonizing Christianity and reclaiming African spirituality as well as prophetic advocacy and forgiveness in the context of reparations among others.

This publication is the 1st in a series of books to be published in partnership with *Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene*" ("Erlangen Publishing House for Mission and Ecumenism") addressing contextual theologies in Africa. This is an additional AACC engagement in constructive conver-

sations on continental theological issues as our contribution to the global debates. Therefore, the impactful voices of various African church leaders have provided critique as well-balanced nexus between the call for decolonization and reparations in the context of missions and geopolitical interests.

We highly appreciate and recognise all the efforts and time invested by all the contributors in researching, preparing, writing, and presenting their respective articles for this publication. It is my prayer that this book will benefit the reader with insightful information regarding the Global Decolonization and Reparations Debates from the African Christians Perspectives. It is my hope that it will useful to all in society, including churches, theological institutions, as well as well as mission agencies. Likewise, it will be a catalyst that ignites further constructive debates on the issues of decolonization and reparations

Rev. Dr. Fidon Mwombeki
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Nairobi, August 2026

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Introduction

JOHN NGIGE NJOROGE

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), through its Theology and Interfaith Relations Unit, held a theological consultation with the theme: "African Perspective on Decolonization and Reparations Debates in Global Christianity" at the Desmond Tutu Conference Centre in Nairobi, Kenya on 03rd to 06th June 2025. The consultation aimed to provide a platform where AACC, as a moral voice with significant presence across the continent can contribute to the current debates on decolonization and reparations discourses. This is to the courtesy of its ongoing theological accompaniment to the member churches and other stakeholders through addressing contextual theologies. In addition to its Contextual Misleading Theology Series, AACC made a deliberate decision to have articles presented during the consultation edited and published into this book.

This publication is a collection of articles presented during the consultation that brought together theologians, church leaders, and scholars, to constructively contribute to the ongoing global debates. Actually, the issues of decolonization and reparations have raised questions among African churches as well as their ecumenical partners. One of the pertinent questions that required critical consultation is: is the whole idea of decolonization or decoloniality an African agenda, driven by African voices and priorities? This kind of crucial question underscores the need for church leaders and theologians to grapple with the complexities of decolonization, ensuring the answer is both authentically African and globally relevant, rooted in faith and informed by African lived experiences.

The call for decolonization and reparations is gaining momentum globally, prompting a critical examination of the origins of the decolonization agenda, how deep it cuts into the African aspiration and how African churches can even start that conversation. The Churches in Africa, and in their moral and spiritual leadership need to discern and reflect on this crucial debate and demand reparative justice for historical injustices. In this framework, the AACC through the consultation joined the African Union which designated the theme of the year 2025 as: Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations. In enriching the debates

on reparations, this book articulates various perspectives including; a). Issued apologies made by several countries, mission agencies and/or other organizations, b). Theology of forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, and c). How to deal with internal reparations and geopolitical interests in handling the return of (some stolen, some gifted) African artifacts now in the West. These perspectives have raised questions such as: are churches really interested and keen on receiving these artifacts in archives of mission agencies? And where should they be returned to and kept? These questions keep the conversations ongoing beyond this publication.

This book is divided into three parts including Decolonization, Reparations as well as Models and Approaches to Decolonization and Reparations respectively.

Part I presents articles on Decolonization. Decolonization in Africa is understood from the context of colonialism and its effects on the African church and society at large. It clarifies colonialism as a system of political, economic, social-cultural, and spiritual control by the colonialists, mostly European powers which introduced new structures and ideas that reshaped African people's identity and uniqueness. The effects of colonialism are stated to have been far-reaching, affecting every aspect of the colonized societies, including their governance, education, religion, language, and culture. Economically, culturally, socially, and spiritually, the legacy of colonialism is still tied to colonial ideologies, institutions, and cultures. Decolonization as a concept is enunciated to involve political liberation, the reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and histories that were marginalized or erased under colonial regimes. This concept also expresses itself in decoloniality, whose emphasis is on recovering and revitalizing indigenous identity, culture, and spirituality. However, genuine decolonization requires critical engagement, not rejection in totality.

Decolonization and reparations in African Churches contexts started taking place hand in hand with the struggle for political independence of Afri-

can countries, for example the emerging of some of the African Independent (Initiated) Churches (AICS). It is noted that decolonization was not merely the departure from colonial effects, but missions did not leave after the political independence; some did not release church leadership positions to Africans. This has also made the discussion on decolonization not only a political agenda but also one that is to be discussed in churches. Efforts were made by the churches during and even after the attainment of independence by African nations to gain church independence. Despite the attempts to decolonize, the effects of coloniality have made it difficult for ex-colonized people to climb up the ladder of the global powers' hierarchy. Africans have remained at the bottom, where norms and rules are imposed upon them from the capitals of the North. Although for years, Euro-Americans have been blamed for Africa's development crisis, there are internal factors that affect the critical aspects of development.

This part notes that one specific attempt to decolonize churches and make them truly independent was the pronouncement of the Moratorium[1]. This was one of the first African church attempts to declare that African church needed independence. To change the relationship and modes of interaction from master–servant, superior–inferior, it was good to stop the inflow of missionaries and donor funds to the African churches for them to be free. Despite this attempt African churches continued to depend on its "mother churches" financially and consequently asked for their financial assistance. The ties between the "mother churches" and the churches introduced in Africa still exist even in the present day.

This part concludes by articulating how dialogues on decolonization have continued to take place, mostly focusing on theology and church structures, theological framework on decolonial approaches to the church involvement in today's colonialism, neocolonialism and mission. It has been asserted that different contextual situations determine particular mission reactions to colonialism. For example, during the struggle for

1 Moratorium was a call by African churches to stop receiving missionaries and money from the North in order to engender true self-reliance and governance of the African churches.

political independence, in some parts of Africa, the missions stood in the middle, supporting both the colonists as well as their African Christians. Over the years of independence of churches in Africa, there are evident changes made in liturgy and theology, ecclesiastical structures and leadership, as well as decolonization of theological education, which speak to the broader decolonization agenda.

Part II presents articles on Reparations. This part starts with an article on the biblical perspective and theological understanding of reparations. Under this session, the concept of reparation is linked to principles of justice, restoration, forgiveness, and healing of the community. The Old Testament and New Testament shed light on these issues and the theological significance of reparations in the framework of Christianity. Furthermore, the concept of reparation, also referred to as restitution is tied to notions of justice and of bringing communities back to a place of healing. The Old and New Testaments discuss these themes and their theological implications of recompense in the sense of forgiveness and restoration.

Apart from the biblical perspective and understanding of reparations, this part articulates the Mission of African Churches and the Question of Post-Colonial Reparations. This is presented in the context of historical injustice where the continent was fragmented into colonies established primarily for economic exploitation. Without seeking to replace the indigenous populations, the colonial powers imposed their political and economic domination in order to enrich the economies of their respective states. This was through systematic looting of the natural and mineral resources of the colonized territories. The colonial enterprise also led to the dehumanization of colonized peoples, the destruction of indigenous civilizations, and the disruption of the natural course of development of African societies. All these colonial injustices call for reparative justice.

Further, this part presents an interesting contemporary understanding of reparations from economic and ecological perspectives. These perspectives are mainly under restorative justice directly informed by the United

Nations (UN) 2006 Resolution as well as by the Organization of African Unity and later the African Union (AU) focusing its 2025 annual theme on Reparative Justice. The contemporary focused injustices are not only limited to colonialism, slavery and apartheid, but also include debt crisis and climate change affecting Africa today.

Interestingly, this part concludes by resurfacing the call for internal reparations as a complexity resulting from interwoven relationship between churches and colonialism in Africa. This section presents an oversight, if not amnesia, regarding the harm Africans inflicted on one another by fighting and/or collaborating with the colonial governments, and how these Africans benefited from colonial systems. Equally, some European Christian missionaries in Kenya were implicated in the effects of colonialism and coloniality, while their successive churches benefited and inherited from them, and these aspects are similarly unattended to in the ongoing African Union reparation debates. Despite the continued call for reparations by the African governments to the former colonizing nations, there is no call made for missionary organizations and the African churches that inherited resources taken from marginalized communities by their predecessors for reparations. This section advocates for the use of social reconstruction model and legal frameworks to address internal reparations through church-targeted legislation.

Part III presents articles on Models and Approaches to Decolonization and Reparations. It starts with examining how African churches can reclaim their theological voices in decolonizing Christianity. It is evident that, in decolonizing Christianity, theological reflections blended with historical and political analysis have been applied as a method of examining the legacies of colonialism. In applying this method, churches have attempted to decolonize various aspects of doctrines, leadership, and prophetic witness within given ecclesial frameworks. This section asserts that African theologians and church leaders have been reconstructing Christianity through African lenses, incorporating indigenous philosophies, languages, and values into theology, liturgy, and community life. For exam-

ple, in Nigeria and across Africa, some churches have embraced indigenous knowledge and practices, challenged ecclesial dependency on the West or the "mother churches", and spoken out on issues of reparative justice. In addition, decolonizing Christianity involves both shedding imperial legacies and proactively shaping a faith that resonates with Africa's cultural dignity, pursuit of justice and healing.

This part continues to assert African Churches' prophetic advocacy and forgiveness in the context of reparations as an important approach to achieving reparative justice. Despite the historical injustices experienced in Africa, churches are called to be the light and salt for the nations (Matthew 5:13-16); the conscience of the nations, and the voice of the voiceless. The churches cannot get away from this nature of prophetic advocacy. This section affirms that if the churches are to be prophetic in any meaningful sense, they will need to be exemplary. The churches must set an example in living the high moral standard and other values consonant with the will of God. This has to go along with the aspect of forgiveness and healing. In the context of forgiveness, healing and justice it is importance to call for repentance in the context of reparative justice.

Furthermore, this part turns to African Liberation Theology as a principle of decolonizing theology in Africa. African Liberation Theology can be understood as integrating African philosophical, religious, and cultural ethos with theological themes emerging in the response to the needs of today. The attempts made are on inculturation, contextualization and reconstruction of theology by African theologians. Developing these paradigms proves to be shaping theological discourse in Africa and beyond. For example, the acceptance of contextualization as a tool within the postcolonial framework for understanding African realities has become a crucial strategy for decolonizing African Christianity. In addition, Reconstruction Theology, which calls for Africans to rebuild the destroyed and exploited resources in Africa and its spirit is a proven motion of deconstructing colonialism and neo-colonialism. Therefore, recalling the liberation theology paradigm is essential to enable the continent to foster a spirit of self-es-

teem and a sense of self-worth in the face of our distorted identities and the exploitation of our natural and human resources. This would result in achieving a reconstruction that leads to the holistic well-being of African peoples.

Finally, Part III concludes by exhorting that reclaiming African spirituality is an ideal approach to decolonize Christian worship. This exhortation is based on the fact that Christianization in Africa was largely introduced through colonial channels with theological frameworks that demonized African spirituality. It is noted that some missionaries dismissed indigenous religious practices and beliefs as pagan or morally inferior, suppressing African worship symbols, rituals, and cosmologies in favor of Western liturgical forms. Yet African spirituality, rooted in communal identity, reverence for ancestors, and harmony with nature, remained a vital expression of divine encounter. For example, among the Chewa people of Zambia, practices like invoking the god of rain were deeply theological, reflecting a worldview where the divine was intimately involved in nature and society. Notably, many Africans actively resisted this cultural and religious imposition, preserving and defending their spiritual heritage against colonial and missionary pressures.

In conclusion, the possibilities of reclaiming African Spirituality as an approach to decolonize Christian worship gives an opportunity for seeking biblical truths compatible with contextual relevancy, expressed within peoples' cultural frameworks. This is possible in areas of decolonization including; a). liturgical reform (integrating African symbols, music, and rituals), b). epistemological shift (centering African hermeneutics and knowledge systems) c). institutional transformation (revising governance, curricula, and leadership) and d). reparative justice (addressing historical harms through truth-telling and resource equity).

PART ONE: DECOLONIZATION

Concept of Decolonization in Africa

HELEN OLOMU ISHOLA-ESAN

Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to explicate three fundamental concepts, namely, Colonialism, Decolonization, and Neo-colonialism, as core terminologies in discussing the subject of Decolonization in Africa. It adopts the descriptive-historical research methodology by drawing from the wealth of knowledge in literature to explain the concepts. The concept of Decolonization in Africa is understood from the context of Colonialism and its effects on the African church and society at large. It clarifies Colonialism as a system of political, economic, social-cultural, and spiritual control by the colonialists–European powers which introduced new structures and ideas that reshaped African people's identity and uniqueness. The effects of colonialism are stated to have been far-reaching, affecting every aspect of the colonized societies, including their governance, education, religion, language, and culture. Economically, culturally, socially, and spiritually, the legacy of colonialism is still tied to colonial ideologies, institutions, and cultures.

Decolonization as a concept is enunciated to involve political liberation, the reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and histories that were marginalized or erased under colonial regimes. This concept also expresses itself in decoloniality, whose emphasis is on recovering and revitalizing indigenous identity, culture, and spirituality. The paper argues that genuine decolonization requires critical engagement, not wholesale rejection or uncritical acceptance. Key findings include a Decolonization agenda requiring six decisive steps, such as: contextualization of theology and worship; engaging prophetically in socio-political issues; being rooted in African identity, yet globally engaged; education, ecumenism, and inter-generational transfer; addressing socio-political realities; and African identity in Christian theology and global relevance. Neo-colonialism as a concept refers to the continuation of colonialism through these dimensions: economic, cultural, ideological, and political. It presents African identity and African authenticity as the original and what Africans claim to be with respect to values and cultural heritage. The paper concludes that Africans need to decolonize Western philosophy to colonize African philosophy in their expression of Christianity, acknowledging African nature/African-ness with due respect to African values of God, praxis, in-culturation, and acculturation.

Keywords: Colonization, Decolonization, Neo-Colonialism, African identity, African authenticity.

Introduction

African worldview comprehends the concept of decolonization in the context of African colonialism and its effects. This is borne out of experiences of the replacement of one system with another that reshaped African people's identities, cultures, spirituality, and mindsets.

Colonization was a system of governmental, economic, social-cultural, and spiritual domination by European powers who introduced brand-new orientations and human activity that dehumanized African people, particularly through subjugation, victimization, and convulsive racial discrimination, which undermined African cultural heritage and uniqueness. The concept of colonialism and its effects is explored in this chapter along the lines of its far-reaching consequences on every aspect of colonized African society.

The actions of the colonialists, which took place during the colonial era and were expected to end after African countries gained independence, have continued through the network of Neo-colonialism. Therefore, the debates and determination for a continued decolonization agenda are apt. Thus, the concept of decolonization, which broadly refers to the process through which former colonies gained political independence from colonial powers and the dismantling of colonial legacies in every sphere of life, including economic, cultural, educational, psychological, and epistemological, is articulated holistically for a better understanding of the subject matter addressed in this chapter – Concept of Decolonization in Africa. Moreover, Neo-colonialism as a concept refers to a continuation of colonialism after the gaining of independence. The necessity of decolonizing colonial Western epistemology to imbibe African epistemology in the expression of theology and in practical Christian work, concerning acknowledging African nature, values, and culture, is emphasized.

African identity and African authenticity refer to being genuine, original, real, and being what we claim to be. It categorically states that to be truly African is to remain true to African values and cultural heritage. African identity and authenticity connect with our perspectives, unique experiences, and lived realities within our context and confines in all ramifications. African identity is constructed very much as an individual, plural (because within the African setting, cultural differences abound), and yet, as a similar or homogenous identity following a tradition that perceives certain theological traditions. For example, South African theological tra-

ditions as "Black theologies," Kairos, or political theologies, and East African theologies as "culture-oriented theologies.

Aarde (2016) states that Black theology is a theology that gave human dignity and a black identity to Black South Africans. Black theology in South Africa confronted the imbalances of power and abusive power structures through a declaration of human dignity and the uniqueness of the identity of black people. He articulates that the biblical narrative of the Exodus is definitive in American black theology and liberation theology in overcoming oppression understood as political victimization. However, it is worthy of note that Black theology in South Africa is not primarily about power and economics, but more about the rediscovery of human dignity and black identity and, to a lesser extent, about victimization. Black theology in South Africa was born in the context of the South African liberation struggle and was synonymous with the apartheid struggle. The black consciousness movement affirmed the dignity of South Africans and their history, and helped them rediscover their identity (Aarde citing Motlhabi, 2009). It is an interpretation of American black theology that is honestly and authentically an African black experience within the complexity of the meaning of blackness in South Africa (Aarde citing Pinn, 1988). The Kairos theology in South Africa was simply a rebirth from the third wave of black theology discourse. Kairos theology was the rediscovery of the role black theology played in the restoration of black South Africans' human dignity and black identity.

East African theologies as "culture-oriented theologies refer to contextual approaches (focusing on inculturation, African Traditional Religions, community, and contextual interpretation) that align Christianity with original worldviews. For example, Oduor (2021) enunciates the necessity of a contextualized Christology that is cognizant of the African realities and heritage to make the message of Christ at home to the indigenous African audience. Accordingly, it calls for a supremely considerate understanding of the "history of the African people, the African primal religions, and most importantly the African culture. The understanding of these critical issues that together construct the identity of the African will enable the presenter of the Christological message to present the person of Christ that is relevant and addresses the perennial problems that are faced by African communities" (p.58).

Oduor (2021) refers to Mbiti's work titled "Some African concepts of Christology," in which Mbiti made a diagnosis in defining the African Church as "a Church without a theology, without theologians, and without theological concern." According to Mbiti (1970, p. 430), the problem is that "Chris-

tianity has Christianized Africa, but Africa has not yet Africanized Christianity." Mbiti believes the practice of Christianity for the African should align with her identity and heritage. David K. Tarus and Stephanie Lowery (2017, pp.306, 312) support this view when they said that Mbiti's understanding of African identity and community is derived from and rooted in Africa's heritage and African life being centered on community.

Colonization and Its Effects

Colonialism is a political and economic system in which a powerful country exerts control over weaker territories, often exploiting them for resources, labour, and strategic advantage. This erodes identities and causes loss of cultural identity as well. It typically involves the establishment of colonies in foreign lands, where the colonizing power imposes its governance, culture, and economic structures. According to Robert J. C. Young (2001), in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, colonialism was not just an economic enterprise but also an ideological project that sought to justify domination through discourses of racial superiority and civilizational missions. Colonizing nations often portrayed themselves as bringing "civilization" to the "uncivilized," masking the violence and exploitation that characterized colonial rule.

The effects of colonialism were far-reaching, affecting every aspect of the colonized societies, including their governance, education, religion, language, and culture. Frantz Fanon (1963), in *The Wretched of the Earth*, explained that colonialism was a totalitarian system that dehumanized colonized people and violently reshaped their consciousness. Fanon emphasized that colonialism did not just conquer land; it reshaped the identity of the colonized, causing psychological trauma and internalized inferiority. Through institutions like schools and churches, colonial powers systematically replaced indigenous beliefs and practices with European norms, thus eroding native traditions and self-worth. Specifically, some effects of colonialism are as follows:

a. Economically, colonialism established extractive systems that benefited the colonizers while impoverishing the colonized. Colonized territories were forced into mono-crop or raw material economies that served the industrial needs of Europe, creating dependency and underdevelopment in the colonies. Falola (2020) citing Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, argues that colonialism was not a vehicle for African progress but a deliberate strategy of economic extraction and suppression of development. He contends that Africa's current economic challenges can