Colonial Economies and Societies
Pt. 2: African Identities
“Africans dance. They dance for joy, and they dance for grief; they dance for love and they dance for hate; … Far more exotic than their skin and their features is this characteristic of dancing; ...

Perhaps all that paragraph should be put into the past tense, or rather into the passing tense....”

[Geoffrey Gorer, Africa Dances, 1949]
“Africans used to dance until their families and clans were destroyed, until the constantly gnawing anxiety about taxes and military service and distant work clouded their lives, until missionaries forbade dancing as heathenish, and administrators stopped dancing because it disturbed their sleep or prevented people working, until they lost the physical strength necessary for the dance. They still dance in small villages where there is no administrator, no missionary, no white man.”
This quote is about:

- colonial images of who and what an ‘African’ is
- collapsing of economic and political into the cultural and religious
What is missing is an understanding of what this multi-faceted process has created:

- of Europeans
- of Africans
- of Africa
Figure 4.1. The three religions. Sketch by Samuel Crowther Jr.

African Identities: Religion

Issues in cultural and social change:

- what colonialism meant for African religions
- relationship between religion and education
- relationship between education and social change
- relation between these, health and medicine
- relation between education, politics, power
African Identities: Religion

- By early 20th century, nineteenth-century missionaries already had impact

- ‘African’ versions of European church proliferated (Catholic, Protestant, etc.)
African Identities: Religion

Christianity posed problems for religious Africans:

"We used to talk a lot about Christians. Even now we do. We don't think a lot of Christians. We don't believe in Jesus. We used to pray in olden times to our native god, Mwari, and to the midzimu, for rain. It always helped. Now we pray to Jesus and the rain never comes."

(From ‘Statement of a non-believer’, Rhodesia 1937. See ‘Additional Readings’ for full account).
Christianity simultaneously attracted and repelled:
- resembled aspects of indigenous faiths (e.g. the role of saints in Catholicism)
- repelled because it was either contrary to indigenous beliefs (e.g. bride-wealth, polygamy) or incongruous with those beliefs (e.g. heaven/hell versus the role of the ancestors)
An oriṣa-house of Yemoja, Abeokuta.

Christianity was also the ‘door’ to the Colonial social and economic world: culture, class, education

Rev. Samuel Johnson and his wife at their wedding.

In Peel, Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000)
African Identities: Religion

Christian Converts (Congo) Woman second on right from Rev. Phillips was favorite wife of King; is now deaconess of the Church (1900).

Christian Converts celebrating with a Christmas feast (1900)

[Rev. W H Bentley, Pioneering on the Congo, 1900:119, 165]
“The people of the Congo, as we found them, were practically without religion. Fetishism takes its place in the list of systems of religion, but it must be considered as a negation, rather than anything positive; the absence of all which we understand as religion. There is no worship, no idolatry in Fetishism, only a dark agnosticism, full of fear, helpless and hopeless. Although the people are given up to this dark superstition, they are not atheists – the Bantu race has everywhere the name of God.”

[Pioneering on the Congo, 1900]
(above) Mission House, Bopoto (Congo) c.1900.

(right, top) Fetish image ‘Nkindu’, Zombo (Congo).

(right) Bopoto funeral dance.

Re. W.H. Bentley, *Pioneering on the Congo*, 1900: 294, 246, 225]
Islam was also an African religion. Unlike Christianity’s relation with various ‘pagan’ religions, its relation with Islam was one of distance and respect:

- a religion ‘of the book’
- had ‘clergy’ Europeans could identify
- had embedded bureaucracy, associated social welfare system
Mosque at Kemta, Abeokuta. (Southern Nigeria)

Islam competed with Christianity in colonized world.

Islamic manuscripts from Timbuktu
(http://www.sum.uio.no/research/mali/timbuktu/libraries.html)
Recent Maulidi [‘The Prophet’s Birthday’ celebration]
Lamu, Kenya
Religion important to women as well as Men:
women are on their way to see a Marabout
(Islamic savant / mystic)

To become Christian was also to become educated, at least at the elementary Mission-directed schools which predominated. . .

And vice-versa, for the most part.

(see “Togo School Exam” in ‘Additional Readings”)
- Initially indigenous elite (Muslim and others) avoided Christian schools: sent children of slaves, former slaves
  - where this continued (e.g. the Sahara, Northern Nigeria), new social problems created
  - economy grew demanding literate, European language-speaking workers
  - regions, people ‘left out’ of colonial world
Even where benefits realized, opportunities were few -- and for the few:

- British West Africa: handful secondary schools by 1930s (e.g. Yaba College, Nigeria; Achiomota College, Gold Coast).

- East, Central regions: Makerere College, Uganda (1933)

- South Africa: Fort Hare (1916)
Even where benefits realized, opportunities were few -- and for the few:

- French West Africa: Ecole William Ponty (Dakar) 1920s

- Egypt and Tunis: better opportunities in conjunction with traditional Islamic institutions
African Identities: Education

Everywhere, being educated meant:
- speaking European languages
- wearing European clothes
- eating European food
- accepting European ideas
- internalizing European identity!
Seretse (future ruler of Bechuanaland) studying Law and Administration.

Charlie Sjonje (Kenya) studying Arts.

[RHW Shepherd & BG Paver *African Contrasts*, 1947:53]
But what did being educated to ‘be European’ mean to a black African in Colonial Africa?

What did it mean to significant class of ‘mulattos’ – children of European men and African women?

(See “Africa Dances: the Mulatto” in ‘Additional Readings’)

“Cookery classes in Lovedale [missionary centre], Cape Province, SA. Few Native girls have the advantage of a training in domestic science; those who do make apt pupils” [RHW Shepherd & BG Paver, African Contrasts, 1947]
African Identities: Education

Aburi Girls' School (Gold Coast, 1898)

[Rev. D. Kemp, *Nine Years at Gold Coast*, 1898:204]
A set of “do-don’t” messages about Good Housekeeping:
industriousness, cleanliness, safety

NR Hunt, Colonial Lexicon, 1999: 271]
South African men leaving the electric train which has brought them from the ‘suburbs’ (townships) into the city where they work.

“In a single generation, these people are expected to step from the pace of the ox to the tempo of modern civilisation, where time, speed and proficiency are the essence of progress”

Francophone West Africa:

- policy of *assimilation* provided avenue to become ‘Black Frenchman’

- policy not practical: by mid-1920s, over 13 million Africans in A.O.F.

- 1926 fewer than 50,000 had achieved goal of citizenship, most of those in Senegal

- 1945 still fewer than 100,000
Shaped social and political profile of educated elite:

(e.g. Blaise Diagne, Senegal)

Member of French Parliament; tried to obtain French citizenship for all Senegalese - failed.

Supported conscription in WWI, forced labour; saw colonialism, ‘sacrifices’ as way forward - ‘modernization’

(1872 – 1934)
British West Africa:

- “Social-hybrids”, “been-tos” (as in ‘been-to-Europe’) characterized educated elite
- accepted European beliefs about progress, modernization, role of ‘middle class’
- well represented among professionals in main cities
Believed in:

- European concepts of unity, nationhood to overcome pre-colonial tribal divisions
- European governmental systems to overcome pre-colonial multiplicity polities, ruling systems
Colonialism also realized in health, nutrition, practice of medicine:

- Cross cut gender roles in households, age-grades, social hierarchies; undermined power traditional healers (men, women)

- Initially men, later women drawn into health care: e.g. mid-wives, nurses.

- European belief system intruded at most basic and personal level
Traditional treatments could still be purchased. Here, “discussion on the curative powers of dried sand-shark”.

[RHW Shepherd & BG Paver, African Contrasts, 1947: 127]
Traditional Healer:

“Witch Doctress whose sombre figure still throws a dark shadow of ignorance and fear over the lives of many.”

African Identities: ‘New Medicine’

Students spend a year at Fort Hare, then go on to Johannesburg for training as “Medical Aids”.

[Shepherd & Paver, African Contrasts, 128]
Native Nurses c.1930 working for Union Miniere du Haut-Katanga. (Congo)

[NR Hunt, A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, 1999: 177]
African Identities: ‘New Medicine’

Yakusu (Congolese) mid-wives c.1931

"Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition... Out of imperialism, notions about culture were classified, reinforced, criticized or rejected."

[Culture and Imperialism, Edward W. Said]
African Identities

On the one hand:

Emergence of new social classes, growth of urbanization and extended ‘world’ in which some Africans worked and traveled -- led to break-down of traditional community, ‘ethnic’ identities.
On the other:

Insecurity of these new situations often caused Africans to re-invent (if not ‘invent’) bonds of so-called “tribal affinity”.
The impact of being both European and African (both ‘white’ and ‘black’) had deep psychological implications as well, as Franz Fanon chronicled in his disturbing work, based on his practice in Algeria.

[Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York, 1967; see ‘Resources’ for additional readings on Fanon]