



Medicine and Empire: Africa

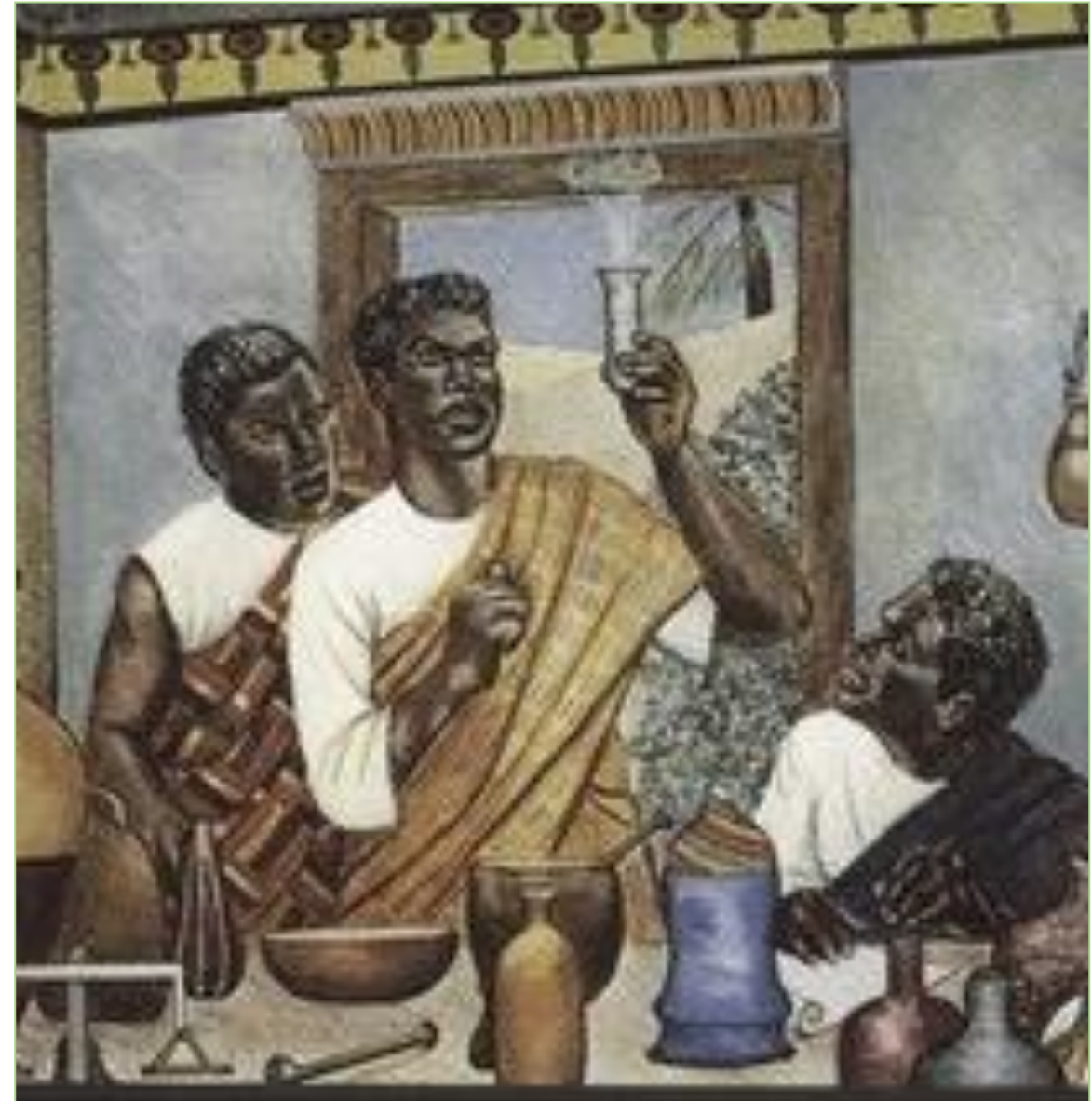
Term 1: Week 5

Dr. D. Kembabazi

Lecture outline

- African medical systems and cultures
- Race Science and the colonisation of Africa
- Medicine as an instrument of the empire
 - The colonial medical systems
 - Gender and colonial medicine
 - Medical Moral discourses
- African Agency/response
- Conclusions

Image and Source: Chemists in the ancient city of Ghana, West Africa: University of California Digital Library
<https://calisphere.org/item/0ceacff4b9e175a5cfde81b762d56f18/>



African medical systems and cultures

- A wide range of healing practises existing side by side in precolonial Africa
- Abroad range of specialists:
 - Medics and Surgeons (Science-based/informed diagnosis and treatment)
 - Specialists in supernatural

The following documentary which touches on some of the healing practices in the Great Lakes is recommended. You must be logged into your Warwick Library account to gain access to the programme via Box of Broadcasts.

[Lost Kingdoms of Africa: Bunyoro and Buganda \(originally broadcast on BBC4 in 2013\)](#)



African medical systems and cultures: The C-section

- 19th century travellers reported witnessing advanced medical procedures in Africa e.g., amputations and c-section
- In 1879, a British medic Dr RW Felkin witnessed a c-section in Uganda, East Africa

Image: Illustration from Dr R. W. Felkin's description of the Caesarean section as published in the Edinburgh Medical journal, 1884.



African medical systems and cultures: The C-section

- Alcohol was used to disinfect the surgery site
- An assistant coagulated bleeding vessels with a red-hot iron,, the wound closed with metal spikes
- Felkin left stayed for 11 days, leaving a recovering mother and baby

Image and caption “Curved knife, steel, with wooden handle, used for Caesarean section, from Uganda, 1830-1879....The curved knife was collected by Dr Robert Felkin, who witnessed its actual use in Uganda, Central Africa, in a Caesarean section.”

Museum<https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co105552/caesarean-knife-uganda-c-1830-1920-surgical-knife>

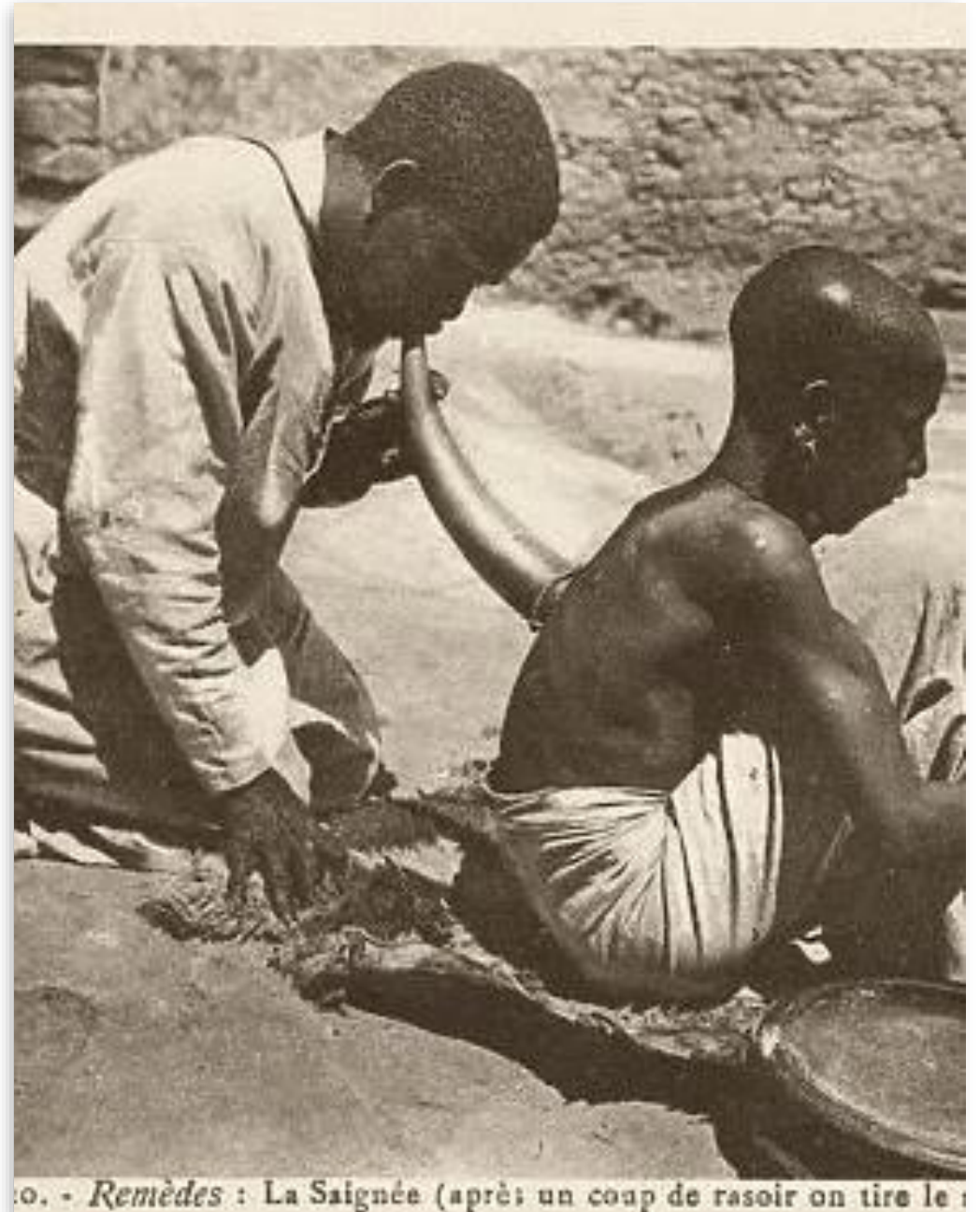


African medical systems and cultures: The C-section

- Other surgical procedures recorded as early 1845 in modern day Kenya, Sudan.
- Ferkin's account was the first credible eyewitness account
- Yet under colonialism, indigenous knowledge systems were dismissed as
 - Superstition
 - Ignorance
 - savagery.

Why?

Image: Bloodletting in abyssinia <https://www.prints-online.com/ethiopia-africa-bloodletting-7223337.html>

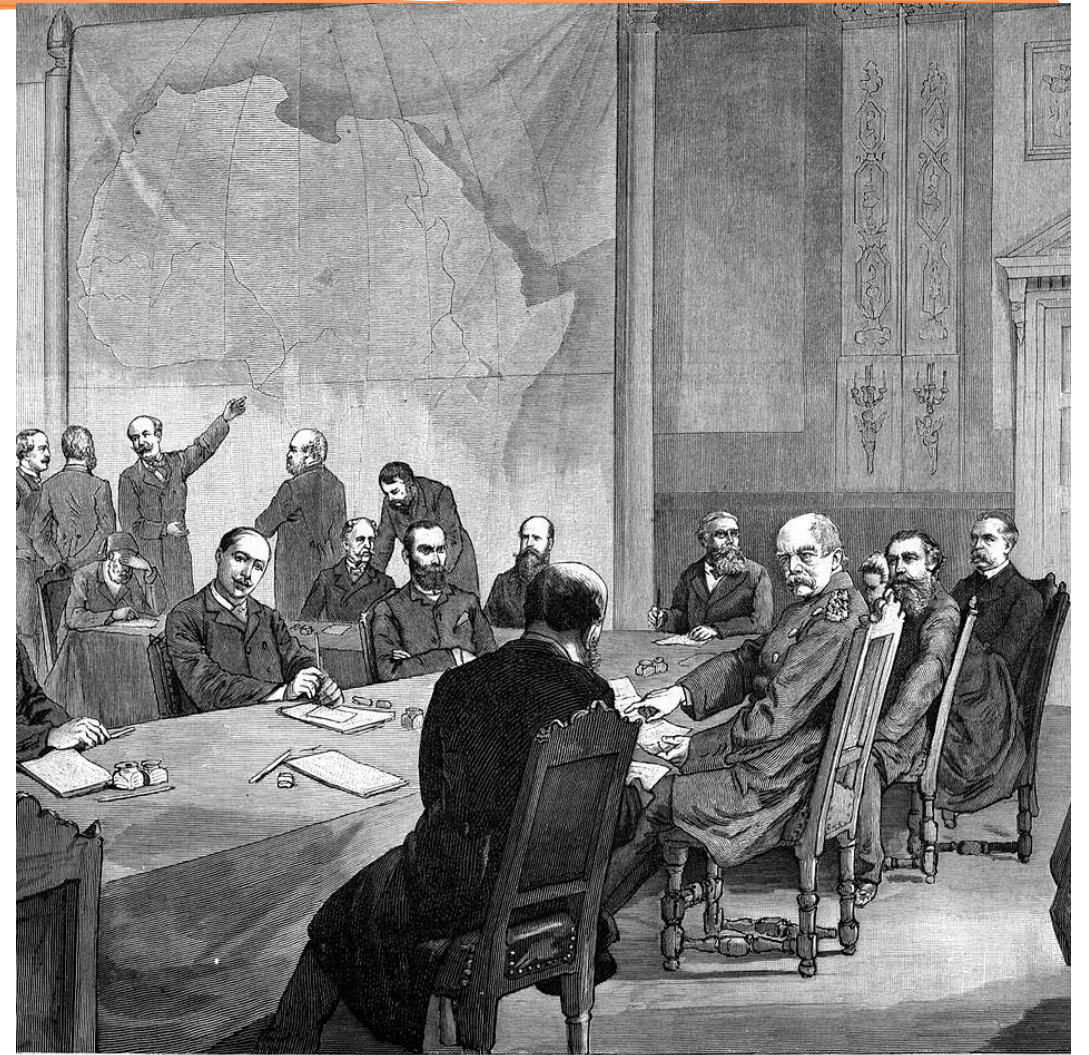


Race science and the colonisation of Africa

- Pseudoscientific racism and social Darwinism reach peak in 1880s,
 - coinciding with the European Scramble for and colonisation of Africa:

“I’m determined to get my share of this magnificent African Cake.” King Leopold II.
See Episode 6: The Magnificent Cake of Africa
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4B3K0VjbQBg>

Image: The Berlin Conference where Europeans divided Africa amongst themselves



ment. de Coarcel, Marquis n. Penafiel, Graf de Kannay, Haffon, v. Kuffenow, Graf Benomar, Henry Sanford, Fürst Bismarck, v. Dind, Freiherr v. Bilde, Süd-Palcha, Graf Bonfeldt, v. D. Stroten, Hejndre, Graf Szedenyi.

Medicine as an instrument of the empire

- Pseudoscience racism justified the use of violence/ colonialism: “higher races” to conquer and govern “lower races.”
- Social Darwinism, racial science set the tone for Europeans engagements on the continent

BY RUDYARD KIPLING.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden—
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine,
And bid the sickness cease!

The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go, make them with your living
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden—
And reap his old reward—
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humor
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light—
“Why brought ye us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?”

Take up the White Man's burden—
Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloke your weariness,
By all ye will or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your God and you.

Medicine as an instrument of the empire



THE WHITE (I) MAN'S BURDEN.

- From bible-carrying Christians to ‘science’ minded medics, Africa in Western discourses, emerges as:

“a repository of death, diseases and degeneration, inscribed through a set of recurring and simple dualisms—black and white good and evil, light and dark.” (*Megan Vaughan, Curing their Ills*)

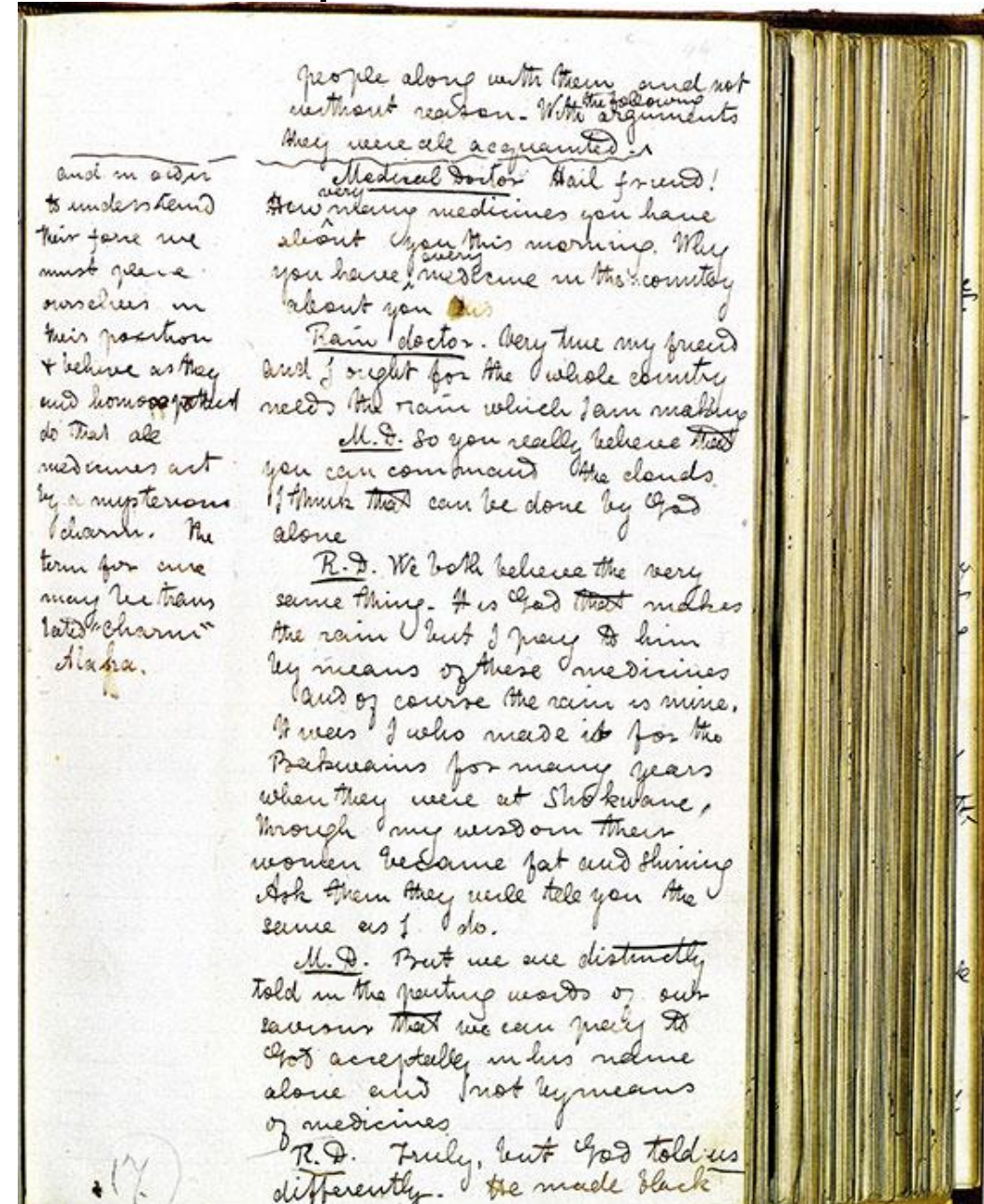
Image: ‘The White man’s Burden’ mocking European claims of civilisation

Medicine as an instrument of the Empire

- Thus, dichotomies in European medical discourses about Africa:
 - Modern vs traditional,
 - Light, good vs Dark, evil
 - Science vs ignorance, superstition
 - Doctors, surgeons vs witchdoctors

Image: The famous conversation between missionary doctor David Livingston and an African 'rain doctor' from modern day Malawi, c1850

Ref. David Livingston *Missionary Travels and Researches in Southern Africa, 1857*



What does Colonial Medicine tell us about the empire project?

- Colonial medicine as a lens through which to analyse colonialism and its philosophy:
 - Anxieties of the empire
 - Limits of colonial medicine
 - Racialised nature of modern medicine
 - Use of medicine to control and subjugate the conquered populations
 - Power relations between coloniser and colonised

Image and Source: The snake, the symbol of medicine, is presented here by Punch magazine in 1906 as a symbol of European imperial greed. It depicts the Belgian King as a snake.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_congo_rubber_cartoon.jpg



Medicine as an instrument of the empire

- Colonial medicine served as an instrument of the empire and imperializing cultural force
- Europeans unable to penetrate the interior of Africa until 1850s when quinine was discovered
 - West Africa referred to as ‘the Whiteman’s grave’

Image: 19th century European colonizer carried in a hammock by four African porters. (Photo by Ipsumpix/Corbis via Getty Images). The movement of people spread diseases



Colonial Medicine as an instrument of the empire: Medicine and Racial discourses of difference

- The establishment of colonial medicine enables a large movement of agents of the empire: soldiers, administrators, merchants and settlers into Africa
- Large number of European settlers; anxieties about
 - ‘the declining fitness of the ‘imperial race’
 - reductions in fertility and birth rates
 - high infant and maternal mortality’
- Colonial medical system is first and foremost developed to address the needs of the white populations



Colonial Medicine as an instrument of the empire: Racial discourses of difference

- But late 19th and early 20th century saw outbreak of epidemics
- At first, panic and concern that European populations would be affected
- But it became clear that diseases among Africans threatened the labour force/ the empire
 - Thus, medical systems is developed to address diseases among Africans

Image: European Hospital, Kenya.



Medicine as an instrument of the empire: The colonial medical system

- Two racialised medical systems manned by missionaries (mostly to treat Africans) and military (mostly to treat Europeans)
- Outbreak of epidemics justified:
 - racial segregation
 - excessive, coercive forms of medical interventions

Image (undated) Pascal James Imperato and Sister Edward Marie of the Kowak Catholic Hospital vaccinating school children against smallpox at Utegi, North Mara District, Tanganyika
Territory <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10900-014-9928-5>



Medical experimentation

- Colonial states were generally impoverished
 - relied on brute force, surveillance and control
- public health needs of addressed through piece meal through sporadic militaristic campaigns
- Medical experimentation was rampant

Image: Sleeping sickness camp in Entebbe, East Africa, 1906/Alamy



Medical experimentation

- The campaigns coincided with European penetration of rural Africa
- Villagers were forcibly examined and injected with medications, with severe, sometimes fatal, side effects.
 - Some drugs for treating sleeping sickness caused blindness
 - Administered to all even those without the disease
 - Forced injections every few months
 - Some drugs considered too dangerous for Europeans given to Africans

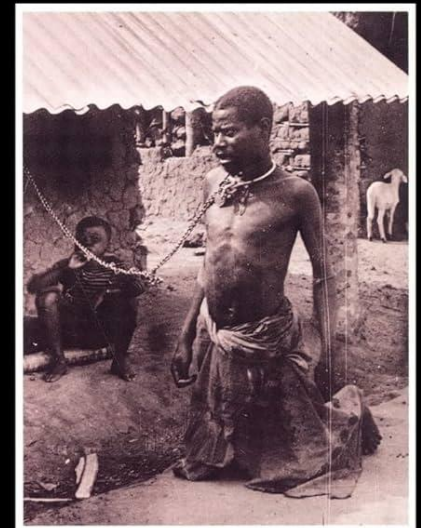
Image: A Belgian doctor in Congo performs a lumbar puncture (source Maryinez Lyons: The colonial Diseases)



The Colonial Disease

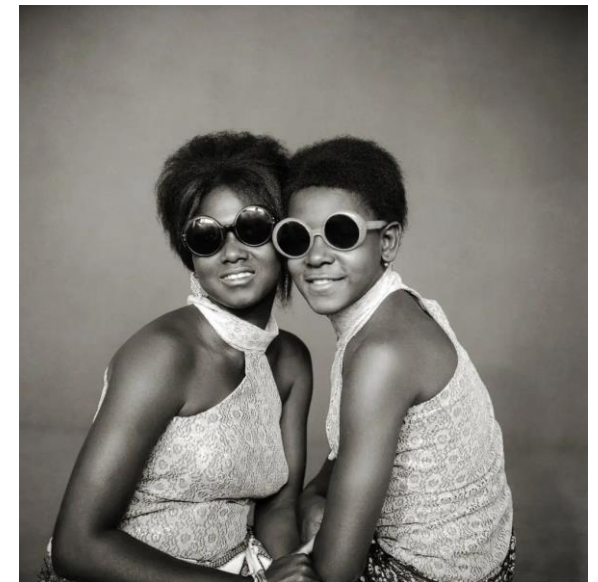
A social history of sleeping sickness in northern Zaire, 1900–1940

MARYINEZ LYONS



Gender and Colonial medicine: Medical moral discourses

- A history of STDs show that medical systems were not only racialised but also gendered
- Medical moral discourses emerged to explain the presence of sexually transmitted disease
- Female sexuality emerge as a threat to societal wellbeing



Images: Above: Freetown, Sierra Leonean women 1920s,
Below: Bamako Mali young women 1965, McKinley
Collection

Gender and Colonial medicine: Medical moral discourses (British colonies)

- Panic over sexuality and especially female sexuality were tied to racialised concerns in metropole (Britain)
- in the colonies, medical moral discourse were transformed by the realities of the empire:

Image: Second World War poster by the British Armed Forces
<https://hist259.web.unc.edu/contagious-diseases-acts-1864-1866-and-1869/>



Gender and Colonial medicine: Medical moral discourses

- E.g. in Buganda, a key region for British expansion into Uganda, it was estimated that:
 - 80% of the people were infected with syphilis
 - Infant mortality rate was 50 to 60%
 - Syphilis threatened the reproductive potential of Ganda women
- Fears that Ganda people would become extinct
- Spread of VD's blamed on
 - Christianisation, 'modernity,'
 - end of slavery
 - And polygamy reduced men's authority over women
 - loss of men/elders control over female sexuality

Image: Missionary medics celebrating the birth of babies in Mengo hospital



Gender and Colonial medicine: Medical moral discourses

- Venereal Diseases conceived as a ‘diseases of immorality.’
- Patients treated for venereal diseases were often subjected to ‘moral rehabilitation’ in form of Christian instruction
- Thus, Christian medical doctors used medicine to evangelise/convert Africans

Image: Patients' room (with religious symbols) and open-air clinic in early 1900s Uganda: mercury injections were followed by Christian instruction

Original caption: “Beckenham Bed, with patient convalescing after having a compound fracture of the left femur and Miss Timpson seated to the left, Mengo Hospital, Uganda Archives & Manuscripts
Keywords: Beds; Patient; Matron; Kampala; Albert Ruskin Cook; Africa; Bed; Convalescence; Patients; Church Missionary Society; Uganda; Missionary Medicine; Hospitals”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katharine_Cook#/media/File:Patient_convalescing_and_Miss_Timpson_Welcome_L0038270.jpg



African Agency/ response

Did Africans, embrace colonial medicine, reject it?

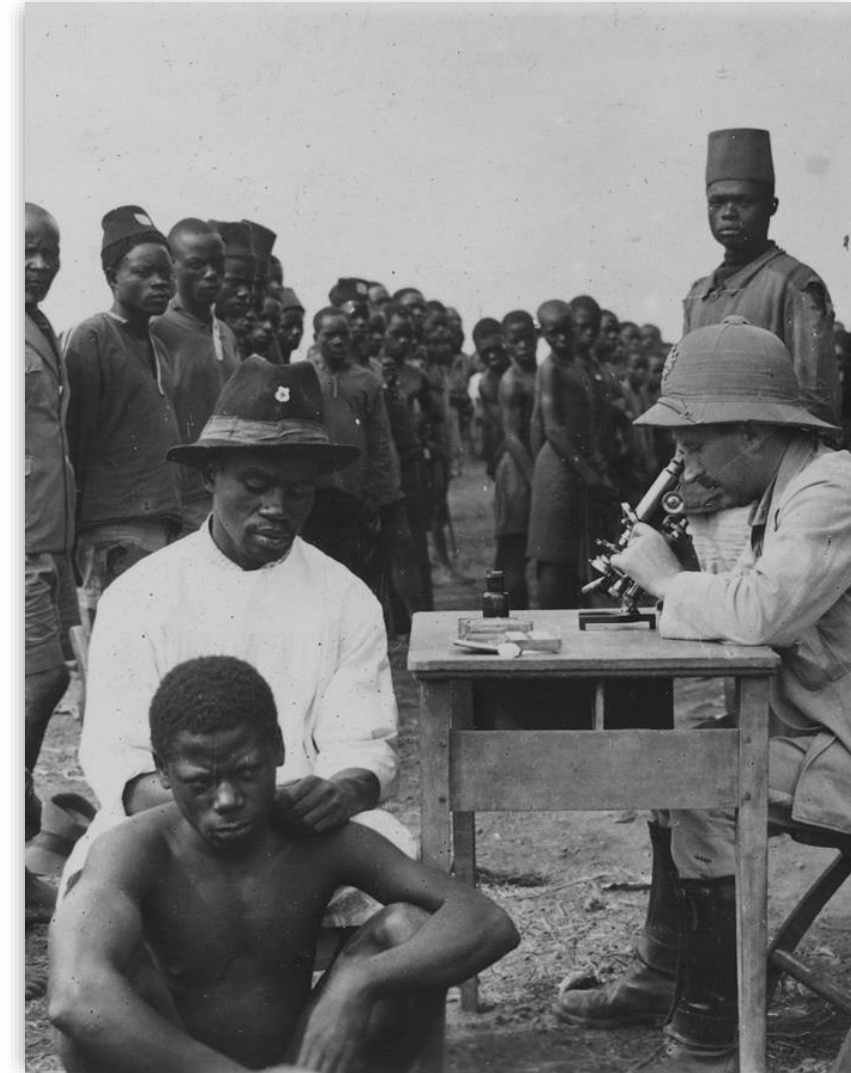
- There was resistance, selective incorporation, adaptation and reinterpretation according to local meanings of health and healing
- Western medicine shared some similarities with African practices like bloodletting, surgery
- medical missionaries encouraged a sense of fantasy: some likened themselves to 'sorcerers'

Image: Bloodletting in abyssinia <https://www.prints-online.com/ethiopia-africa-bloodletting-7223337.html>



African Agency/ response

- Sometimes there was negative response due to;
 - The 'nature' or practices of western medicine: use of injection, blood infusions, anaesthesia etc
 - Coercive nature, and its close link to the colonial state
 - The Christianisation element of medicine
 - The experimental, used of painful, dangerous cures e.g. mercury ointments for venereal diseases
 - leading to acute mercury poisoning and sometimes death



African Agency/ response

- Anti-western medicines groups such as the Bamalaki/ Malakites:
 - A Christian separatists group founded in 1914 in Uganda
 - believed it was an affront to God's power to take medicine (for people and animals)
- The colonial state reacted by:
 - Confiscating and killing uninoculated cattle
 - Bamalaki chiefs were dismissed from colonial government
 - houses of followers frequently raided and fumigated



African Agency/ African chiefs

- African chiefs co-opted in colonial medical systems
- But the role they played depended on colonial power/method of administration employed by colonialists
- In some parts indigenous medicine was tied to political power
 - Chiefs stood to gain by aligning themselves to indigenous healers
- But Chiefs also cooped colonial health services to claim legitimacy
 - encourage their subjects to patronise western medicine
- Note chiefs had to serve both the needs of their people and those of the colonial government

Image: in 2016, Rebecca Kadaga, Speaker of Uganda Parliament caused outrage among Ugandan Christians when she was spotted coming out of a healer's shrine.

Kadaga visits Busoga shrine for thanksgiving

© May 23, 2016

Kadaga comes from the royal Baiseigaga clan, the biggest in Busoga, which is believed to have its roots at Nhenda hill, where all clan members are mandated to visit at least once a year to either pray for their desires or to thank the gods



African Agency/ response

- African assistants were incorporated into colonial medicine
- No attempts made to incorporate African medicine men and women
- Racism prevalent in colonial medical
 - African doctors struggled to be recognised until the end of colonisation

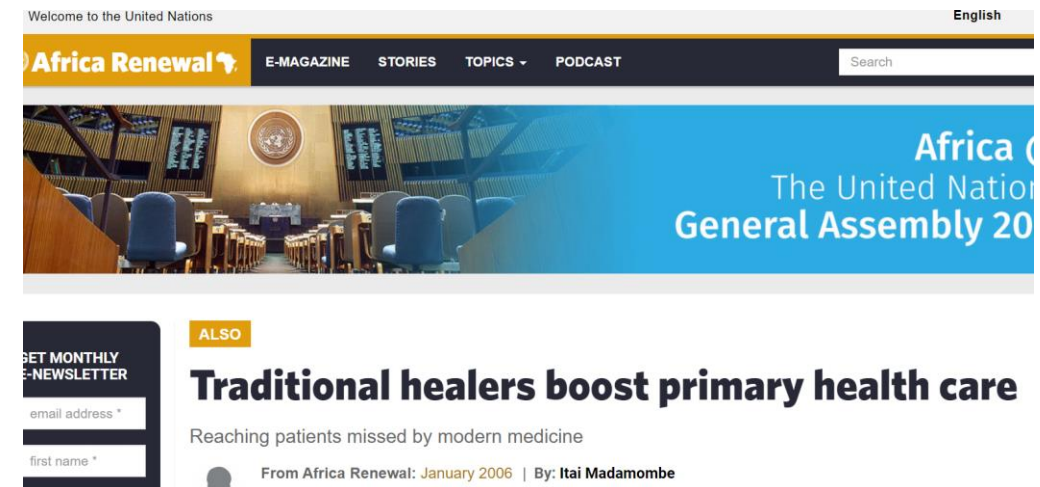
Image: African medical assistants, Kenya National Archives
UK/Creative commons



Conclusion

- The history colonial medicine is an illuminating way to examine the power and limitations of the empire:
- Colonial medicine was promoted as proof of Europeans superiority
- Colonial medicine justified the empire but also revealed its limits
- African medical systems were severely disrupted, but were resilient and adaptive
- Africans indigenize elements of western medicine which seemed more effective
- Today, Africans continued to blend indigenous and western:

“Traditional medicine refers to the knowledge, skills and practises based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, used in the maintenance of health and in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.... Herbal treatments are the most popular form of traditional medicine and 70% to 80% of the Region has used a form as primary health care. One third of the population lacks access to essential medicines and the provision of safe and effective traditional and alternative remedies could become an important way of increasing access to health care services. Tried and tested methods and products....In South Africa, the plant *Sutherlandia microphylla* is being studied for use in HIV patients. The plant may increase energy, appetite and body mass in people living with HIV.” <https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/traditional-medicine>



COMMENTARY

What do Pfizer's 1996 drug trials in Nigeria teach us about vaccine hesitancy?

Belinda Archibong and Francis Annan
December 3, 2021



Medical colonialism to day

- The legacy of colonial medicine, its dark aspects of surveillance, medical experimentation still felt to day
- Scholars have linked colonial medical campaigns to present day mistrust of some aspects of western medicine
- The recent Covid epidemic reminds us of the ways in which disease and medicine in Africa continue to be racialised.

Opinions | Coronavirus pandemic

Medical colonialism in Africa is not new

Remarks about testing coronavirus drugs on Africans part of pattern where some bodies are dehumanised, others protected.

'Not guinea pigs': Africa vaccine trial suggestion sparks uproar

Two prominent French doctors have triggered a storm of criticism after discussing on a television program the idea of testing a vaccine for coronavirus in Africa. One of the doctor's employers said an edited clip of the discussion had led to 'erroneous interpretations'.

Issued on: 03/04/2020 - 19:37