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**Epistemic
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Abstract

Today, it is evident that the elimination of colonial administration on Africa did not solve all her problems. It is this obvious realization that led to proposing various developmental theories to help Africa surmount her undeveloped nature. This work proposes that the solution to African development lies in curing it of its Western ideational domination or rather freedom from epistemological colonization. However, with the aid of method of analysis, this work discovered that the uncritical and automatic rejection of African ideals and the uncritical and automatic preference of the ideals of the Western culture are influences of hegemonic Western Epistemology. It is on this note that this work concludes by asserting that “any attempt at considering knowledge under the lens of Western-oriented epistemology alone, is a procrustean reductionism” that should be eschewed.

Key Words: Epistemic freedom, African development, coloniality, hegemonic Western epistemology, colonization.

Introduction

The urgency of African development became a global issue after the end of colonial era in Africa. To this end, many developmental theories ranging from modernization, dependency, structuralist, neoclassical, human development, and recently, sustainable development theories were propounded in order to help Africa and other underdeveloped nations to conquer their undeveloped nature. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that Africa still remains underdeveloped despite the milestone achieved by all these theories put together. It is the contention of this work that the problem of Africa is epistemic in nature. Consequently, this work argues that one of the greatest harm done by colonialism on African soil is mental in nature and context; what some scholars would refer to as mental colonization or at best “colonization of the imagination of the dominated” in the words of Quijano (2007, p.169). Or at best a feeling of one been conditioned to attach more importance to the values of dominant (imperial) culture over one’s own. Be that as it may, for a better appreciation of the problem, Nigeria is used as a case study. Taking the economic sphere as a case in point, when a Nigerian is made to choose between Nigerian made product as against the Western product, an average Nigerian would choose the Western product over the Nigerian product not minding the fact that the said Nigerian made product may be of a higher quality to its Western counterpart. In fact, Africans regard anything Western not only as superior to its African equivalent but more as the standard. Reflecting the

same penchant, Hagedorn has this to say: “I was taught to look outside the indigenous culture for inspiration, taught that the label ‘Made in the USA’ meant *automatic superiority*; in other words, like most colonized individuals, I was ... taught a negative image of myself” Hagedorn, (1994, p.173). This is a clear “...manifestations of the inscription of hegemonic Western forms of knowledge...” Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013, p.38). It is based on this that this work is aimed to ask and unravel the following questions: What is the greatest issue clogging the will of development in Africa? To what extent does people’s perception of themselves help to either influence development positively or negatively? Has Western particularism become objective universalism?

Conceptual Clarifications: Epistemic Freedom and Coloniality

This work perceives epistemic freedom as independence from all forms of mental domination or ideological dependency of the African mind on the Western culture. Liberation from all sort of mental entanglement that tend to clog the wheel of development in Africa. In all, liberation from all forms of dependent thinking; a situation where an average African would conceive Western particularism as an objective universalism. What this work intend to deconstruct is aptly captured in the following words of Quijano, (2007):

The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalised and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers’ own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural. ... The colonisers also imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning. At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later, they taught them in a partial and selective way, in order to co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. ... European culture became a universal cultural model. The imaginary in the non-European cultures could hardly exist today and, above all, reproduce itself outside of these relations (p.169).

In other words, “one of the terrible consequences of colonialism was to destroy the full gamut of alternative modernities[sic] together with “alternative imaginations” of the world that were not necessarily influenced and unleashed by Protestantism, European Renaissance, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution” Quijano, (2007, p. 169). Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations (Maldonad-Torres, 2007).

From the above one may deduce that the idea of coloniality in a way reflects the notion of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism as we know is the persistence of the influence of the former colonial power on their colonies after the dismantling of colonial administration. Grosfoguel assertion affirm this, thus:

Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system. 'Coloniality of power' refers to a crucial structuring process in the modern/colonial world system that articulates peripheral locations in the international labour division with the global racial/ethnic hierarchy and Third World migrants' inscription in the racial/ethnic hierarchy of metropolitan global cities. In this sense, there is a periphery outside and inside the core zones and there is a core inside and outside the peripheral regions (2007, p.21).

The Genesis of the Problem

The advent of the problem is colonialism. "Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire" Maldonad-Torres, (2007, p.243). It is that part of historical events that pertains mostly to Africa, which had different impacts. Notwithstanding, the enormous unintended positive effects of colonialism on Africa, it's negative effects changed the course of history for Africans to the extent that no right thinking African would wish to experience it again. The different activities that predominated that moment were so inhuman, deceptive and brutal, to the extent that nobody can appropriately account for the number of resources that were looted from the African soil. The number of our brothers and sisters that were lost to the European mongers who claimed to be lord over them cannot be overemphasized, no less the loss of African lives at the Mediterranean Sea so much so, that recounting the story will always lead to shedding of tears. Colonialism deprived Africans of their real taste, capacities, values and integrity. The ills that was done to Africa resulted to many lapses that even the next 100 centuries might not revert it neither can it be repaid Asadu & Aguinam, (2019). In a bid to re-echo the magnitude of the negative impact of colonialism Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013) asserted that:

The colonial encounters of the fifteenth century set in motion a new constitution of the world order as Western modernity exported its darker aspects to the non-Western world. The initial peaceful colonial encounters were soon followed by direct political, social and cultural domination that engulfed the African continent mediated principally by force of arms and evangelism that mollified and softened African imagination and consciousness while stealing their souls and destroying their sense of being (p.39).

This work agrees with Ndlovu-Gatsheni opinion that a lot has already been written about colonization of Africa and how Africans resisted being dominated and there is no need to venture into that terrain here. What needs to be further analysed though is how colonialism has continued to wreak havoc on the mind of the ex-colonized after the end of direct colonialism. This can easily be captured in what is referred to as the coloniality of power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013) while discussing the contours of colonial matrix of power delineated five contours, among these contours the one that is of interest here is the domination of the forms of knowledge. This is pertinent because as Ani opined "...with the dawn of western expansionism, western-oriented mode of behaviour and knowledge acquisition became objectified and

universalized. Consequently, any form of knowledge that did not conform to the western model was deemed irrational and unworthy of scholarship” Ani, (2013, p.295).

This view is exclusivist in nature and cannot engender wholistic development. Thus, the contention of this work is that this view should be jettisoned if development is to be attained. Consequently, this work agrees with Ani who is of the opinion that:

Any attempt at considering knowledge under the lens of western-oriented epistemology alone, is a procrustean reductionism. A better decolonization of the continent can be achieved with the transformation of the mindset[sic] of Africans to appreciate their indigenous form of knowledge and incorporate it in contemporary education and epistemological discourses. Additionally, Africans ought to develop their socio-economic and political system to give the continent a reasonable power-base to assert itself and its epistemological views in the global system (2013, p.295).

As pointed out in the introduction, one of the key issues this work intends to unravel is the fact that “one of the enduring legacies of colonialism was its ability to universalize Western particularism” Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013, p.38). An exhibition of western culture as a form of super-culture. The arrogation to the Western culture as the ideal culture, that other cultures of the world will have to imitate. This was so obvious that anything Western was elevated to the level of being a true picture of ideal reality. In the words of Laclau, (1996):

The crucial issue here is that there was no intellectual means of distinguishing between European particularism and the universal functions that it was supposed to incarnate, given that European universalism had constructed its identity precisely through the cancellation of the logic of incarnation and, as a result, through the universalisation of its own particularism. So, European imperialist expansion had to be presented in terms of a universal civilizing function, modernisation and so forth. The resistances of other cultures were, as a result, presented not as struggles between particular identities and cultures, but as part of an all-embracing and epochal struggle between universality and particularisms—the notion of people without history expressing precisely their incapacity to represent the universal (p.24).

From the foregoing one would be able to deduce that all the afore said are one form or the other of the influence of colonialism on the African disposition to knowing and appreciation of reality. This has so influenced African so much so that they have come to regard and see anything western as the yardstick for measuring the ideal of anything. This influence can be seen in almost all aspect of African life. However, the following examples will serve as an evidence to press home the point. In the area of African economy, Africans are made to think that they need the assistance of Euro-American super powers before they can thrive. This is so dominant to the point that, taking Nigeria for instance what we export is determined by what Euro-American nations need. This to a large extent has made Nigeria a container nation. A country that depends largely on the importation of foreign made goods to survive.

In the area of politics, democracy is now seen as the ideal form of government despite its weaknesses. Africa is so reluctant to the point that she cannot even think out a peculiar form of government that will work for her. She is just copying and replicating anything that works

in the West. The truth is that there are other nations that are not following the trend of West in term of politics and they are progressing today. In the area of religion, African Traditional Religion is seen by most Africans as a fossil material. In fact, some people are still propagating the idea of African Traditional Religion as a pagan and animistic form of religion. They see only the Abrahamic religion that was brought by the foreigners as the authentic religion. For them African Traditional Religion is a form of primitivity that need to be overcome.

More still, in the area of education, most African curriculum is fashioned in line with Euro-American curriculum. Children in primary school are made to learn and memorise European history while the history of Nigeria-Biafra war is not even taught to students. Sometimes the content of certain courses studied are irrelevant to african society. children are made to think that speaking their native language is a mark of lack of exposure and unintelligence.

African Forms of Knowing

Among scholars there is the debate whether there can be any form of knowing that can uniquely be regarded as African epistemology. This argument divided scholars into two warring camps. One group argues that knowledge is knowledge no matter the continent where it is conceived. For them rationality is the same with everybody (the way Africans think is not distinct from the way European thinks). However, the opposing group are adamant on the notion that Africans have a unique way of knowing. This group among other reason believes that even though the universe is the same and humanity are the same there is a peculiarity in the way the universe is perceived. This for them is informed by the fact that the environment and the experience of a people are unique to them thereby to an extent determine the way that particular people conceptualize reality.

Africa is a continent that suffered and experienced multiple levels of subjugations and denigrations that affected its identity formation and ways of knowing. Consequently, Africa has a unique epistemology that is distinct from the Western forms of epistemology. In African epistemology, an individual is insufficient to attain knowledge alone without doing so in a social context Ajei, (2007). Ernest A. Ruch notes that the African knower thinks in, for and through his/her society. Via one's participation in the social context, one knows. In this respect, knowledge comes as a given via tradition, ancestors and heritage. Here, the acquisition of knowledge becomes a 'we' enterprise. It is on this backdrop that some scholars argue in favour of the position that, before the invasion of Africa by western imperialism there were various forms of knowing that were original to the African man – intuitive, religious and mythological. "Although science is also considered as a means of knowledge acquisition in Africa, it does not account as the only valid and genuine means of knowledge acquisition as propagated by the Western tradition" Ani, (2013, p.298). However, with the advent of colonialism, those various forms of knowledge acquisition in Africa were side lined. In fact, "intentionally and unintentionally, colonialism and Western civilization suppressed African ways of life and thought processes" Ani, (2003 p.303). Hence, Ani was moved to note that "...with the dawn of Western expansionism, western-oriented mode of behaviour and knowledge acquisition became objectified and universalized. Consequently, any form of knowledge that did not conform to the western model was deemed irrational and unworthy of scholarship (2003, p.295). This to a certain degree elevated the inferiority of the African minds to the status of being the true nature of an African.

Little wonder some academics opined that "the denigration of African-oriented epistemology in contemporary academic considerations in Africa is consequent from a long history of racial debasement of the humanity and rationality of Africans as well as the historical Western superiority context" Ani, (2003, p.296). Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2013) affirms that:

It is therefore important to track the mechanics and manifestations of the inscription of hegemonic Western forms of knowledge and coloniality of power and to unpack how colonial modernity succeeded in pushing African forms of knowledge into the barbarian margins; and by that fact depriving African people of initiative and agency to take control of their destinies (p.38).

However, the contention of this work is that it is high time Africa exorcised itself of this European negative baggage. There is the need to perceive reality not only as projected by European. Africa needs to accept that there is alternative way of appreciating reality aside the euro-recommend ways. In fact, as Ani, (2013) would say,

Any attempt at considering knowledge under the lens of Western-oriented epistemology alone, is a procrustean reductionism. A better decolonization of the continent can be achieved with the transformation of the [mindset] of Africans to appreciate their indigenous form of knowledge and incorporate it in contemporary education and epistemological discourses. Additionally, Africans ought to develop their socio-economic and political system to give the continent a reasonable power-base to assert itself and its epistemological views in the global system (p.295).

Consequently, to cure Africa of its epistemological colonial hangover, there is need not only to resuscitate its forms of knowing but also to rebrand it in order to serve its proper purpose. Indeed, what is being fought for is not a total rejection of Euro-American knowledge system but a democratization of this hegemonic knowledge so that it recognizes other knowledge systems from the ex-colonized world as equally important and relevant. This is pertinent because:

The tragedy of the African continent and its people is that of forced 'dependency' and reduction of Africans to 'copycats' of other people. Africans were bundled, entangled, woven, and entrapped into the colonial matrix of global power that is tilted in favour of the Northern industrialized nations economically and politically. This entanglement is underpinned by what Mignolo correctly termed 'tyranny of abstract universals'. The dependency I am talking about is an epistemological one that is at the base of all African economic, political and social problems. It is a result of imperial and colonial processes of silencing, decentring, and relegating of African epistemologies to barbarian margins (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p.47-48).

Decolonization of African Epistemic View of Reality: A Panacea to African Development

It is unarguably true that African thought process and pattern is largely dominated by Euro-American influences. This is manifest in almost all aspect of African reality. In the field of politics Euro-American ideologies hold sway. In the education sector, African curriculum is tailored with Euro-American standard in mind. In the health sector African medicine is not even considered but Western orthodox medicine. The question is how will Africa be able to compete favourably with the West, when they are the ones determining what is to be studied,

what an authentic education is, what is right or wrong, what form of government to be adopted etc.

This section intends to unravel how the emancipation of African epistemic view of reality will spur development in Africa. By emancipation of African epistemic view of reality, what is implied is a situation when African thought pattern and system would be freed from Euro-American influences. This to an extent will bring about resuscitating core African epistemic values and incorporating them into the Western forms of knowing or even equating it with/to same.

The paradigm that this work is proposing is best represented in the idea of Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* where he propagated the idea that virtue lies in middle. In other words, virtue lies in the mean between two vices - the vice of excess and the vice of deficiency Aristotle, (1941, p.958). One advantage of this stance is its recognition that any form of extreme is a vice. In other words, proposing that only African way of approaching reality should be adopted is wrong so also advocating that only European way of perceiving the world should be harkened to is also wrong. What should be done is to harmonise these various forms of knowing to engender proper development.

Truth be told, one of the effect of colonialism, if not the greatest (like we already pointed out) is the fact that the minds of the colonized has been deformed and truncated in such a way that it accepts the ideologies of the ex-colonial masters as the only viable ideology. Some scholars recognized this truism when they argue that:

Mental colonization is the hardest part to decolonize and the worst form of colonialism. It stole the African souls, invaded their consciousness, destroyed and distorted their imagination of the future. This crisis was well captured by Zeleza when he posited that: 'Foreclosed are the possibilities of visioning a world beyond the present, imagining alternatives to capitalist modernity.' It was so terrible that even those Africans who initiated the political decolonization of the continent were the worst affected by mental colonialism. All of the founding fathers of postcolonial Africa were graduates from colonial schools and Western universities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p.50).

From the foregoing, one can call this phenomenon colonial mentality. Colonial mentality is an ideology rampant with most colonized nations. An indoctrinated acceptance of the former colonial master's ways of life as the representation of the objective ways of approaching reality. Colonial mentality as explained by David and Okazaki, (2006) is "the perception of ethnic and cultural inferiority, a form of internalized oppression, that is 'a specific consequence of centuries of colonization ...and it involves an automatic and uncritical rejection of anything ...[African] and automatic and uncritical preference for anything ...[Western] '" (p.241). It is noteworthy that we add here that our focus is when this un-criticality is experienced in the knowledge sphere. In other words, a situation where this uncriticality has taken the centre stage in a peoples thought patterns and ways of appreciating reality.

Consequently, one may not be adjudged wrong if one opines that:

Knowledge production in Africa is deeply ensnared within the colonial matrix of power and reproduces Western ideational domination on the African continent. What is needed in Africa

is a decolonization of knowledge consisting of a double movement of consistently deconstructing and fracturing Euro-American 'geo-political location of theology, secular philosophy and scientific reason' while at the same time 'simultaneously affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied by the rhetoric of Christianisation, civilisation, progress, development, market democracy (Mignolo, 2007, p.463).

To achieve the epistemic freedom or what in some quarters is regarded as a call for liberatory Afrocentric epistemology as a remedy to the hegemonic Western epistemology; there is need to champion what may be regarded as a re-education of the African mind to begin to appreciate good African ideologies and values. This re-education needs to begin with informal education and articulated then properly in the various African school systems. This is consequent upon the fact that the way a nation interprets her reality gives rise to its ideology or worldview. This interpretation is the onus of education; and as we know, a nation's education contributes in the way her citizens perceive reality. Thus, her perception of reality forms her ideology; and as we know the ideology of a nation charts its path to development. Another way of avoiding this hegemonic western epistemology is to uncover the root of African inferiority complex. An average African sees him/herself as basically inferior to the Whites. This issue is endemic in the African continent. In fact, it has led to poor self-esteem among most Africans. The issue of African poor self-esteem goes back to the period of slave trade. During the period of slave trade and colonialism, Africans were labelled sub-humans and even incapable of self-thought. For the Slave masters, it is their onus and responsibility to help Africans conquer their unthinking ability. This notion today is still in vogue, although no longer championed from the angle of colonialism and slave trade but perpetrated through various media that tend to portray anything Western as the ideal culture; whereas its African counterpart is used as a perfect example of inferior reality. Therefore, there is need for Africans to develop self-confidence. This is one of the remedies that will deliver them from this peril.

In addition, there is need to develop a home grown form of governance. A system of government that is truly African. This is because this idea of copying and replicating anything that works in the Western world without evaluating its effectiveness in the African world is anti-African development. No nation works totally through imitation. Look at China for instance, they are developing despite the fact that they are not following European ideologies sheepishly. Therefore, it is high time that Africa becomes pragmatic thinkers by initiating what works in the peculiar African situation. What we are suggesting is not to jettison anything Western but to adapt intelligently those things that can help in our case. The way a nation interprets matter gives rise to its ideology or worldview. A nation's ideology defines its values, its goals and its overall attitude to life. A nation's ideology is its mission statement. The ideology of a nation charts its path to development with what is truly African. This will develop a sort of hybrid system of governance for Africa that solves Africa's peculiar problems.

More still, there is need to exorcise African knowledge bank from its Western inclinations. This is because the forms of knowledge available in the African schools especially in the universities today, still takes their curriculum from Western knowledge bank. To demonstrate the near helpless state of African universities in charting a new cause for Africa Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2007) says:

African universities have not managed to produce knowledge for African freedom and empowerment because they are largely operating as Western institutions located on the continent.

African intellectuals continue to operate within the episteme constructed by the West. They have not managed to successfully counter epistemologies of alterity that continue to subordinate and subjugate everything African, if not totally ignoring it (p.63).

Hence, the goal of epistemological decolonization cannot be achieved if African nations cannot distance itself at least and in part, from Western theories that tend to promote their ways of doing things. This will go a long way into de-assimilating Africans from internalized Western forms of knowing. In other words, when, African nations must have developed, localized and decolonized its education then, African development would be in the offing

Conclusion

So far, the work has been trying to justify the need for epistemological freedom in Africa. It started by establishing the fact that, notwithstanding elimination of colonial administrations in Africa, yet, Africa is still not free from the influences of colonialism which manifest itself in various ways; especially in the intellectual domain. The work conceptualized Coloniality of power. Thus, it makes bold to say that, manifestation of Coloniality of power in the form of knowledge, was the central focus of this work. The work went on to establish that the uncritical rejection of one's own ideals and the uncritical preference of the ideals of the dominant culture are influences of hegemonic Western Epistemology. It also reiterated that the undue quest to lighten one's skin and also the desire to speak foreign language in defiance to one's own language are some of the effects of devalued African epistemology. It went on to suggest that "there is need for an African epistemological rebellion entailing putting the African experience at the centre of intellectualism and the African taking a leading role in the production of situated and relevant knowledge" Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2007, p.52). It also pointed out the need for democratization of systems of knowledge. It is on this note that this work concludes by asserting that knowledge should not be considered only as presented by the West alone, in strong terms this should be eschewed. The fact is that Africa cannot develop at the same pace as Europe and America without putting into consideration her peculiarities. Thus, charting a new way of doing things that is not only unique to her but also not dominated by Euro-American knowledge influences.

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