Rethinking Knowledge Production in Africa: 'Afrocentric Epistemology' as an Emancipatory Discourse, Biruk Shewadeg, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Ethiopia

Abstract

Afrocentric epistemology' implies an inquiry that seeks to escape from a Eurocentric hegemony in knowledge production, in combination with a search for an alternative epistemic order situated in the African weltanschauung. Mainstream organizational theories in the social sciences and humanities remained as bare reflections of the collective European subjectivity and Western dominant ideology, a posture that negates the world views of Africans. A proper African episteme will of necessity de-exoticize Africa and correct its reduction to banalities of want and despair. However, cognizant of the limitations and partiality of all knowledge and a vigorous need for studying Africa in its own specificity, an emancipatory discourse first aims to re-problematize explanations of phenomenon related to Africa away from Eurocentric attitudes and conceptual frameworks. Emancipation of the discourse needs to rest on its pragmatic adjustment regarding Black disorientation, de-centeredness, and lack of agency via epistemic anarchy. Ngugi's linguistic concerns are also essential to avoid disenchantment of an Afrocentric epistemology couched in a former colonizer's language.

Keywords: Afrocentrism, Afrocentric-epistemology, emancipation, African-vernacular

Conceptualizing Afrocentrism

"*Placing African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior*" is Asante's (1987:6) understanding of the very idea of Afrocentrism. He presented it as a discourse that fundamentally seeks to uncover and use paradigms that may reinforce the centrality of the African ideal as a valid reference for acquiring and examining knowledge. In an attempt of re-valorizing the African place in the interpretation of Africans, the Afrocentric discourse Milam argues, challenge the "*foundations that Eurocentrism is grounded in explaining Africa*" (1992:12).

As a framework from which the world is approached from an African perspective, Afrocentrism puts the people and culture of Africa as the general focus that represents an African world view.

Afrocentrism begins its analysis with the assumption that Eurocentrism has destroyed African culture; de-Africanized the consciousness of blacks, and crippled their economic and cultural development (Asante 1991). Eurocentrism is thus presented as a potential threat to the cultural, social, economic, and political development that made the African human experience, Mbembe (2001) argues, to constantly appear in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through a *negative interpretation.*

Afrocentrism thus, seeks a solution which may include strengthening the development of an Afrocentric epistemology and making Africa one foundation in generating knowledge. This knowledge would ultimately become emancipatory and a defensive weapon against a

pervasive and domineering Eurocentric worldview. The Eurocentric scholarship has led the *"African history and reality lose any specificity, and with it, we also lose any but an invented notion of Africa"* (Mamdani, 1996).

Afrocentrism, as a philosophy that affirms blacks as an *"active historical agents"*- is vital in reversing a perennial misrepresentation of African history and culture and in enhancing self-esteem. This makes the discourse in need of a vigorous contention against European sole hegemony in knowledge generation, and offering Africans an ennobling, short of however 'exaggerated' and 'mythologized' versions of reconstructing the African past.

In such a way Afrocentrism requires an absolute abolition of the West from the center of African reality (Asante, 1988). Mamdani, magnifying the perennial Western domination of knowledge production in Africa, coined the idea of '*history by analogy*' and argues:

> *"… analogy seeking turns into a substitute for theory formation. The Africanist is akin to those learning a foreign language who must translate every new word back into their mother tongue, in the process missing precisely what is new in a new experience. From such a standpoint, the most intense controversies dwell on what is indeed the most appropriate translation, the most adequate fit, the most appropriate analogy that will capture the meaning of the phenomenon under observation."* (1996:12)

The central tendency of such a methodological orientation, in view of Mamdani, is to lift a phenomenon out of context and process. The result is nothing but a 'history by analogy'. But, the Africans, in light of the Afrocentric discourse, can see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginal on the periphery of political and economic experiences, only when they view themselves as centered and central in their own business.

As a paradigm, Afrocentrism enthrones the centrality of the African as expressed in the proper forms of African culture, and activates consciousness as a functional aspect of any revolutionary approach to phenomena. This compelled the Afrocentrists not to engage in a futile quest for the presence of a collective sense of Africanity- common experience of the African world. They would rather question centrality, control of the hegemonic global economy, marginalization, and power positions as crucial in articulating the African quagmire.

Afrocentrism addresses how the unbalanced relation since 15th Century that is where the West has started its contact with the continent thereof, has resulted in a unidirectional narrative of human history. It questions how the West sought to assume the right to tell its own stories and others solely from its own vantage point. It challenges the overall Western monopoly in knowledge production which unmasks the undeclared assumption that only the West is legitimate in producing and disseminating its produced knowledge. As it is an experience from a certain segment of humanity, Afrocentrism challenges the universal pretension of the Western epistemology to be incomplete and often distorted when it comes to problematize others' phenomenon.

Afrocentrism by virtue of its call for an Afrocentric epistemology counters this with the assertion of legitimacy of African ideals, values and experiences as a valid frame of reference in pursuant of an intellectual inquiry. As Mamdani might aver, what one has to argue against should be a Eurocentric discourse that "*dehistoricize phenomena by lifting them from context, whether in the name of an abstract universalism or of an intimate particularism, only to make sense of them by analogy*" (1996:13). Mamdani's endeavor rather is to establish the historical legitimacy of Africa as a unit of analysis.

It is important, however, to note that Afrocentrism does not represent the other replica of Eurocentrism - total claimant of control over the monopoly of knowledge. It rather seeks to mature relationship to other cultures, neither imposing nor seeking to advance its own material advantage. Here, an epistemic critique may arise on the issue of relativizing knowledge. Michel Foucault's (1980) exposure of the enigma of Power-knowledge nexus would inform how the two can reinforce each other. Afrocentrism in this regard strives fundamentally for centering African culture and claiming it as a valuable part of humanity that attempts to fulfill Africans role as a legitimate partner in a multicultural discourse- something constructed together. It only seeks to broaden the horizon of knowledge production through what Wimmer (2002) may call '*polylogue*'.

Generally speaking, Afrocentrism as Asante noted, adhere to the idea that "… *all people have a perspective which stems from their centers ... while Eurocentrism imposes itself as universal, Afrocentrism demonstrate that it's only one way to view the world*" (1988:87). Furthermore, in demonstrating as to how the European early history of renaissance has a concomitant with African root, early Afrocentric intellectuals embarked up on the "stolen legacy" discourse.

The Notion of "Stolen Legacy"

Africa, in view of Eurocentrists, was no more than objects in history, little beyond a Hobbesian "state of nature". As Mbembe noted, Africa,

> "*is never seen as possessing things and attributes properly part of "human nature"... its things and attributes are generally of lesser value, little importance, and poor quality. It is this elementariness and primitiveness that makes Africa the world par excellence of all that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks of nature in its quest for humankind*" (2001:1).

This can clearly be observed in the Hegelian notion demonstrating Africa saying,

> "*The Negro ..., exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thoughts of reverence or morality – all that we call feeling – if we are to comprehend him: there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this character... in Negro life, the character point is the fact that consciousness had not yet attained to the realization of any substantial existence ... thus distinction between himself and the universality*

of his essential being, the African in the uniform, underdeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained. ”

However, early Afrocentric scholars rejected such nullification of African history and civilization. The late Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) constituted the ideological bedrock of the Afrocentric genre of this sort. He rejected the *“Hamitic interpretation of ancient origin, and affirmed the civilization for Negroid origin and character”* (Adeleke, 2015:7). In the same vain, taking Egypt as an important factor in Afrocentric discourse, Asante writes:

> *“Afrocentrism reestablishes the centrality of ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) civilization and the Nile valley cultural complex as points of reference for an African perspective in much the same way as Greek and Rome serve as reference points for the Western world.”* (1987: 9)

Asante observed that Egyptian civilization is both the foundation of Africa's classical civilization and progenitor of European civilization.

Other Afrocentrists as that of Richard Bell (2002), in the same vain, represents ancient Egypt as a birth place of Science, Philosophy, and Mathematics; a place where Greek scholars went to study prior to shaping Western Civilization. Thus, the Greeks acclaimed progenitors of Western civilization, were borrowed copiously from, ancient Egyptians-Africans. This compelled Shavit (2001) to come up with a thesis – “Greek dependency theory”.

The argumentation behind the thesis is that if ancient Greek is the foundation of Western culture, if it could be proven that Greek culture was heavily dependent up on Egypt, it seemed reasonable then to depict Western civilization as a product of Africa. The ‘Stolen Legacy’ thesis thus, developed with the alleged recognition of Greek Science and Philosophy is a product of an Egyptian influence. Western civilization, based on what the thesis claims, is a result of ‘stolen’ ancient Egyptian-African legacy. The identification of the Alexandrian conquest of Egypt as epochal in this theft and pillage is a case in point. Greeks scholars allegedly collaborated with Alexander on his rampage through Egypt, and pilfered the ancient accounts and treasures of the Egyptians temples. This being the case however, the colonial enterprise Bernal (1991) argues, making it necessary to denigrate all things black and African as it needed to establish the superiority of European thought. Therefore, an Afrocentric epistemology obtains an indispensable role in countering such downgrading discourse of the West. Afrocentrism, as any other conceptual ideas met with critics which the following discussion treats.

Critic of Afrocentrism

Lefkowitz (1996) could be described as one of the fiercest critics on Afrocentrism. His central thesis centers on whether ancient Egypt or what is known in the literature as Kemet had any influence on Greek civilization or not. He further took issues with the idea of “Afrocentric essentialism” which uses *“Africa to advance a monolithic and homogenous history, culture, and identity for all Black people, regardless of geographical location”* (2009:11). By mythologizing identity, Adeleke argues, *“Afrocentrists were able to impose a unified identity on all Black people, ignoring the multiple complex historical and cultural experiences”* (ibid:

91). Adeleke's objective, is to offer what he calls "*an exposition and critique of the cultural, social, historical, and indentitarian implications of the essentialist tradition in contemporary Black cultural nationalist thought as theorized in Afrocentrici*ty" (ibid: 10).

The other critic arises from Afrocentrism's inconsistency with globalization. Enthusiasts predict the imminence of global "cultural citizenship" as globalization erodes national, ethnic, racial or other primordial constructions of identity (Cohen, 1997; Adeleke, 2010). The notion of global "cultural citizenship" suggests the possibility of transcending the limitations of national, racial or ethnic constructions of identity. It also implies the capacity to engage multiple cultural experiences without being boxed in, or restrained, by one's original identity.

Afrocentrism however is presented to promote uniqueness for a certain segment of humanity. There is a widespread belief that the world is becoming one "global village", and that technology is breaking down cultural barriers. Consequently, increased interactions relentlessly brought the realization that '*engagements, contacts, interactions, mutuality and shared experiences rather than differences, define the human experience*' (Adeleke 2015: 209).

Critique of the Critics

Regarding the first critic, one can rightly challenge the critic itself given the fact that while the debates among historians and classical scholars on who influences who are not likely to end, it is important to recognize the fact that the contributions of ancient African empires to world civilization has either been ignored, distorted, misrepresented or completely reduced to nonentity in world history by Eurocentric scholarship (Alkebulan, 2007).

On the globalization factor, Afrocentric scholars, deem this broadening of the human experience pregnant with hegemonic implication that could perpetuate a global system of unequal relationships. They discern the threat of a neo colonial situation within this global framework, which would facilitate European and super-power dominance over, and threat to the survival of, weaker nations and peoples. Afrocentric scholars magnify this image of a supra-European hegemonic and destructive cultural force. Europeans have used, and would continue to use, culture as a weapon of domination. They have objectified and denigrated Africans and successfully constructed a hegemonic world order in the past, and nothing in the new global horizon suggests a different outcome. To Afrocentrists, therefore, Europe's cultural threat to blacks is perpetual and absolute (Adeleke 2015: 209).

Afrocentric scholars are deeply suspicious of any global cosmopolitan construction of identity (cultural citizenship). The cultural implications of globalization add urgency and tenderness to the Afrocentric notion of cultural threat, since culture is perceived as a critical front in the war against Eurocentric hegemony. Globalization is portrayed as '*fundamentally a disguised European hegemonic force, a post-modern metamorphosis of nineteenth century imperialism*' (Adeleke 2015: 209).

This new global imperialism, Afrocentrists aver, has shed the blatantly racist arrogance, and ideological and militaristic characters of the past, and is now cleverly disguised as an

internationalist, worldwide phenomenon that supposedly would benefit all of humankind. Asante's cultural paranoia is worth recalling: "*We are seriously in battle for the future of our culture. Afrocentric vigilance is demanded to preserve our culture*" (Asante, 1988: p. 49). The notion of 'Afrocentric epistemology' then is a precursor in a move towards this vigilance.

Theorizing Afrocentric Epistemology

Afrocentric epistemology is the study of the African concept of knowledge. It is a branch of African philosophy that deals with knowledge. It engages with the nature and concept of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge can be gained, the ways in which one can justify an epistemic claim or validate a knowledge claim and other related issues. Afrocentric epistemology consists of how African sees and talks about reality. There are several elements, Asante writes:

> "I*n the mind of African that govern how humans behave with regard to reality: the practicality of wholism, the prevalence of consciousness, the idea of inclusiveness, the unity of worlds and the value of personal relationships*" (2000: 126).

These, in Asante's idea constitute the elements of the African mind. They frame as Jimoh & Thomas (2015: 20) argues, the "*African conception of reality, and they are the basis in which claims are made by the African. African theory of knowledge is cultural or social as other epistemologies.*" It denotes an epistemology that is consciously situated within a particular cultural context. It is essential and necessarily rooted in African ontology.

Since epistemology constitutes the claims we make concerning the facts of our experience world views, it validates the necessity of the relationship between ontology and epistemology for this relation is crucial to recognize, understand, and authenticate our cognitive claims. As Ruch & Anyanwu succinctly writes:

> "*We must know that the basic assumptions, concepts, theories, and worldview in terms of which the owners of the culture interpret the facts of experience. Without the knowledge of the African mind process and the worldview in to which the facts of experience are to be fitted both the African and European researchers would merely impute emotive appeals to cultural forms and behavior suggested by same unknown mind*" (1984:146).

With a philosophy of integration and principles of understanding, the African cultural world differs intrinsically from the Western world of ideas, particularly with regard to what constitutes trustworthy knowledge and reality. In the traditional African thought system, as Ramose (2003) might argue, there is a concrete existence of man and nature. African tradition considers the two not in terms of separate ontological existence, but in terms of conceptual neumercality. The Separation of man and nature, therefore, is impossible for the African.

These two are, in Jimoh & Thomas (2015:3) conception "*sacredly united.*" Thus, the African world is a unitary world as different from the analytical and pluralistic world of the Western thought. Owing to the reason that the African ontology represents a unitary world, not

attending the problem of knowledge by dividing its domain in to the rational, the empirical, and the mystical of African epistemology may not be surprising. The three constitutes a single way of knowing in both the intellectual and concrete division of reality. Therefore, the traditional African epistemology goes beyond the outer reach of formal logic and acknowledges the irreducible mystery of the transcendent; while a Western scientific paradigm maintains methodological and mathematical formulations.

The African epistemology sees man and nature as one inseparable continuum, so to speak. This made subjectivism and objectivism, not to constitute a problem in African theory of knowledge. They are rather subsumed in the unity of existence. In such unity, the subject gets to know the object. This may not be possible in a condition where subject and object are detached. African epistemology does not demarcate between the epistemic subject and the epistemic object. The epistemic subject that experience the epistemic object and the epistemic object which is being experienced are joined together in such a way that the epistemic object experiences the epistemic object in a sensuous, emotive, and intuitive understanding, as well as through abstraction, rather than through abstraction alone which characterizes Western epistemology.

This, in the "normative" understanding of epistemology may raise questions of justification. And, regarding justification for a claim made, Aja (1993) argues that the problem of knowledge in the African worldview to be found in ascertaining whether or not what is claimed as knowledge is actually knowledge rather than mistaken opinion on the one hand, and the means or source of acquiring knowledge on the other. He thus sought confusion between knowledge and the source of knowledge in African epistemology. Anyanwu and Ruch (1984) however address the issue of justification claiming that,

> "*Knowledge therefore comes from the cooperation of all human faculties and experiences. He sees, feels, imagines, reasons, or thinks and intuits all at the same time. Only through this method does he claim to have knowledge of the other. So, the method through which the African arrives at trustworthy knowledge of reality … is intuitive and personal experience.*"

In the African epistemology thus, there cannot be knowledge of reality whether it's the noumenon or phenomenon as far as Kant (1998) is concerned, if man detaches himself from reality. The subject, therefore, has to be involved in seeing and thinking, experiencing as well in conceiving reality. This validates the idea that experience is vital in the cognitive process. This is where Senghore's (in) famous 'Emotion is Negro, Just as Reason is Hellenic" can be situated. Knowledge in Africa therefore, consists of imagination, intuition, feeling, and abstraction. Cognition in the African worldview seeks oral tradition of music, folklore, proverb, etc. with the literacy advancement; the analytical discursive and rigorous logic that dominated the western tradition would help to open the African thought system to a scientific system. Furthermore, the African epistemology conceives knowledge more as a product of societal convention rather than an objectivist phenomenon. This make the justification of knowledge claims to be within the context of knowledge whereby the knowledge is made. Therefore, it is not only senseless but would "*yield no results to find justification for a claim*

made in one cultural context in another as the standards of both contexts may be incomparable" (Jimoh & Thomas, 2015:5).

Any epistemology and the African one in particular tend toward the view that human and socio-cultural factors necessarily interfere with human understanding and therefore help to define rational certainty. While restriction to the scientific method of abstraction and bifurcation of reality in to subjective and objective in consonance with its ontology characterizes Western epistemology; The African epistemology in consonance with the African ontology conceives the world as a basic unitary system therefore considers reality as interwoven and connected (Senghor, 1995). That is why the African epistemology sees beyond the issues of distinction between knowledge and belief, the subject and object, the noumenon and phenomenon.

The domain of knowledge in African epistemology is not polarized between the doubts that assail epistemic claims and the certitude that assures our claim. As per the claims of Afrocentric epistemology is concerned, Culture plays a vital role in the cognitive understanding of reality and as Brown (2004) argues "*unless one is intimately familiar with the ontological commitment of a culture, it's often difficult to appreciate or otherwise understand those commitments.*" Thus, understanding the African cultural and ontological conception of reality is crucial to enable us to understand the African approach to knowledge. Furthermore, for the African, there is more to reality than what is within the realm of empirical inquiry. In this regard, Brown writes:

> "*a fundamental tenet of traditional African culture is that there is more to reality and to the realm of experience than that which is readily accessible through empirical inquiry, and that one acquire an understanding of natural phenomena by appealing to experiences whose characterizations are not empirically confirmable but are nonetheless warrantable assertible*" (2004: 159).

An Afrocentric epistemology accepts the idea that the essence of life and therefore of human being is spiritual. But, this is not the denial of the material life: however when all is done and said, what remains is the indivisible essence of life, i.e. the spirit – ultimate oneness with nature, the fundamental interconnectedness of all things, and not the appearance of things. Therefore, Afrocentric epistemology is a reflection of the primacy of the spiritual, the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, and the interconnectedness of all things as well. "*The integration of spiritual and physical principles, may however be challenged by an environment dominated by rationalism and empiricism*" (Mazama 2001:14).

As a matter of fact, however, the spiritual component of nature that influences human experience and perception, Appiah (2005) argues cannot readily be explained by empirical verification. It rather is explained by the causal efficacy of the spiritual component of nature. "Spiritual component of nature" signifies incorporeal components that have consciousness. That means they own awareness of nature as humans have. And, apparently, they constitute a capacity to respond to perceptions.

In such a way Afrocentric epistemology represents a major departure since the fundamental Western ontology towards knowledge is that science is the primary determinant of what is real and what is not. Anything that cannot be supported by science is considered a metaphysical fantasy or mere superstition. By contrast, it's worth to note that not all of Western religion is supported by science, yet it's not presented as a metaphysical fantasy or mere superstition. Rather, it is seen as *"grounded in the literatures, doctrines, dogmas, revelations, and historical traditions that have shaped political policies and norms"* (Brown, 2004:159). It further gives meaning and purpose to the faithful as well as motivates scientific inquiry and great art. It deeply promotes Western civilization a moral structure on which human behaviors are guided and judged. This being the case, many western intellectuals view traditional African culture as a myth, a metaphysical fantasy, or religious superstition. They conceive the African culture as lacking the grounding that Western culture claims to have. It's here that the Afrocentrists are expected to make the unorganized organized, the uncoordinated and coordinated, and give pattern to such knowledge and keep it entrenched in the academia. Equivocally they have to also do away and emancipate from the "normative" perception of epistemology that corners those knowledge systems that may appear strange.

Why Emancipation?

Afrocentrism's ultimate aim is liberation. The Afrocentric epistemology which is the extension of Afrocentrism must generate a knowledge that will free and empower the Africans in the course of mental decolonization. It is in this light that Afrocentric epistemology is claimed to be 'emancipatory'. The liberation achieved contends and rests up on Africans ability to systematically displace the Western way of thinking, being, feeling, and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience. Epistemological centeredness Mazama (2001:14) argues becomes a key idea behind this emancipatory discourse. As Asante writes, Afrocentric epistemology:

> *"Establishes a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspectives of the African person ... it centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world. This means that we examine every aspect of the dislocation of African people; culture, economics, psychology, and religion" (1991:172).*

As an intellectual inquiry, Afrocentric epistemology studies ideas and events from the standpoint of the Africans as key players. This discourse, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of Africa's own reality, is a fundamentally empirical project. It laid down the ways in which Africa asserts itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of mental colonization. Afrocentric epistemology produces knowledge not only for the sake of it but primarily for the sake of liberation and emancipation. In this way, one can argue that Afrocentric epistemology does by no means represent a disinterested pursuit of knowledge only. It brings a paradigm that can activate our consciousness to be of any use to us. The discourse has to have an aim of defending the cause of educational social justice. Its emancipatory nature offers an important discursive space to rupture the culture of dominance that represents a monocultural system of thought. The Afrocentric emancipatory discourse has

to "*expand horizon of the curriculum to include the valid achievement and knowledge of the Africans*" (Dei 1994:3).

The emancipatory discourse led by Afrocentric epistemology seeks the African experience to determine all inquiries that denote the importance of the spiritual, the necessity of immersion in the subject, a due consideration of holism, and the way in which intuition can be relied up on. Deconstructing what Udefi (2005) calls "colonial Myth on Africa"- which involves the denial of rational thought, civilization, history etc. to African and Africans is crucial. The colonization of Africa was based on the ideological framework that Western reason and civilization was superior to the non-Westerners, particularly when that culture is African. And, the knowledge generation in the Afrocentric epistemology has to be liberating and emancipatory.

However, the Afrocentric epistemology has to make sure that conceptual decolonization may not be fully attained in a condition where its language itself is a colonial. Moreover, it might be a paradox when Afrocentrism condemns mental colonization in which the condemnation itself is made through a colonial language.

Emancipation vis-à-vis the African Vernacular: A concomitant

> "*How did we, as African writers, come to be so feeble towards the claims of our languages on us and so aggressive in our claims on other languages, particularly the languages of our colonization?*" Ngugi (1995:287)**.**

"*Language is a technology of power*" Fanon (1967) argues. Colonialism made possible with a total dismantlement of people's material wealth and culture. Propagation of colonial languages at the detriment of local languages was part of the colonial enterprise. Domination of the people's language by languages of the colonizing nations Ngugi argues "*was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized*" (1986:18). Mental colonization is indeed impossible short of an imposed colonial language since language is a collective memory bank of a society. In this regard, Ngugi avers, "*Europhone-African literature has stolen the identity of African literature*" (2009:51). Colonial language policies and colonial schooling systems systematically degraded African languages by forcing Africans to speak colonial languages and this created "*feelings of inferiority in African peoples*" (Lunga, 1997:37-38). Ngugi disclosing the adamant fixation of the post-colonial intelligentsia in the ex-colonial language claims:

> "*In all other societies, writers, keepers of memories, and carriers of national discourse use the languages of their communities; but the postcolonial intellectuals prefer to express communal memories in foreign languages, which, in the end, means sharing those communal memories with the foreign owners of the languages or among themselves as a foreign-language-speaking elite. The result, really, is an intra-class conversation of elite that, cocooned from the people by the language of its choice and practice, conceives of itself as constituting the nation all by itself*" (2009:56)

The Afrocentric discourse then may lose its sense while neglecting the language factor as one important element in a way of developing an emancipatory discourse.

Fanon (1967) scrutinized the way colonized peoples participate in their own subjection through internalizing inferiority. Internalization or what he calls "epidermilization" of inferiority is collective self-hatred and preference for the colonial language and its culture on the part of the African is one of the symptoms. Colonized peoples, forced to speak colonial languages, tended to adopt colonial ways of thinking and to identify more with the colonizing are alienated from their own languages and culture.

The debate about the appropriateness of colonial language as a language of literary and cultural expression in postcolonial Africa symbolizes the contradictory impulse in Africa's engagement with the colonial.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kenyan writer and critic and an accomplished writer as well, is one of the chief proponents of the argument against English language to be a language of literacy in post-colonial Africa. Learning and promoting African indigenous language has to be, Ngugi (1986) argues, a means of confronting the language problem in post-colonial Africa. His rejection of his "Christian name, James, and the adoption of his "native' name," Wa Thiong'o, which means son of Thiongo" (Lunga 1997: 40), shows his unshakeable stance on the language factor.

Ngugi's bold rejection of English is further marked when he refused to write in that language. He rather opts for Gikuyu- his 'mother' language - one of the Kenyan indigenous languages to write. His book of essays, "*decolonizing the Mind* (1986)" documents his politics of language. This book of essays up until his return in 2009 with his "Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance" marked his departure from English. He writes, "*This book … is my farewell to English as a vehicle for my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way*" (p. xiv).

Ngugi identified the continued use of English as a perpetuation of imperialism. His rejection of English marks and executes his ideological confrontation with English. His decision to reject English is necessitated by his conviction that English cannot be freed from its racial and colonial assumptions of superiority and authority. He strongly argues that mental decolonization that emancipates Africa from the hangover of colonialism is unattainable without a divorce from colonial languages. For Ngugi, the struggle against colonial and neo-colonial domination includes resistance and rejection of colonial authoritative discourses.

Bakhtin's (1981) engagement with the idea of authoritative discourse has a resonance with Ngugi's stance on the language factor. Bakhtin describes "authoritative discourse" as a discourse that exerts power and influence over us. He describes how the influence of another's discourse in the process of ideological formation assumes an authoritative quality. According to Bakhtin, authoritative discourse,

> *"[D]emands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us. Quite independent of any Dower it might have to persuade its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse" (1981: 342).*

Likewise, Ngugi describes English as functioning in such an authoritative fashion. He considers the school as the site of such deployment of authority and power. He writes:

> *"The settler despised peasant languages which he termed vernacular, meaning the languages of the slaves, and believed that the English language was holy. Their pupils carry this contempt stage further: some of their early education acts on receiving the flag were to ban African languages in schools and to elevate English as the medium of instruction from primary to secondary stages. In some schools, corporal punishment is meted out to those caught speaking their mother tongue; fines are extorted for similar offenses"* (1986:59).

In its association with holiness and the imperial, English operates at elevated, sacred, and epic zones. Ngugi's description of English corresponds with Bakhtin's identification of authoritative discourse as the "Sacred Writ," a language "that must not be taken in vain" (1981:342). Ngugi's *"resistance of English in favor of his native language can be regarded as a struggle against the authoritative demands of English"* (Lunga, 1997:41). His philosophy and ideology of language – culture influences his sharp arguments against writing in English. For him, as for many other Afrocentrists, language, besides being simply a means of communication, is a carrier of culture.

Ngugi's view of language echoes positivist notions of language which cast language as either a code or simply a transparent vehicle for transmitting meanings and ideas. He identifies three essential aspects of language as culture. The first cultural aspect of language is that it is a product and reflection of history. His observations about language and history point to his sensitivity to language as an embodiment of a particular historicity. Similarly Bakhtin (1981:66) argues that Language will always carry the "*survivals of the past*". Secondly, language has a "*psychological role in mediating between self and self, self and other and self and nature*" (Lunga, 1997:42). Ngugi's conception of language in its mediating role is similar to Bakhtin's dialogic view of language. In his study of language in society, Bakhtin reminds us that language as a pluralist construct:

> *"lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word is half someone else's. . . the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language. . . but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, sewing other people's intentions; it is from there that one must make the word and make it one's own" (1981:293).*

The capacity to transmit or convey images of the world and reality through spoken and written words is Ngugi's third identification of a language. In his view therefore, a particular language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. The particularity of the sounds, the words, the word order in phrases and sentences, and the specific manner of laws of their ordering, are what distinguish one language from another. He writes, "*a specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history*" (1986:15). His conception of language as a representation of particular or specific culture or reality does promote a difference and distinctiveness that may not admit any universality or commonality of languages. His rejection of colonial languages is based on his view that the imposition of colonial languages introduces a particular culture and a specific world-view that alienates colonized people from their own language, culture and universe.

This alienation, then inevitably jeopardizes the call for mental decolonization. Ngugi further associates language strongly to cultural identity. He asserts that language is central to one's cultural identity and to one's relationship with the universe. He further claims "*The choice of language and use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to the entire universe*" (1986: 4). Then how does the main tenet of Afrocentrism i.e., 'Centrality of the African ideal in Afrocentric epistemology' be practical in a situation where the African languages are neglected in favor of the colonial one? Ngugi argues, after Fanon (1967), that a sense of self on the part of African people is inhibited by use of European languages. He sees the continued use of English and its dominance in Africa as a kind of mental colonization and cultural imperialism. Ngugi regards the use of colonial languages to be a cultural and conceptual prison house that holds the African mind captive. For him, decolonization requires, among other things, an outright rejection of colonial language. He is not alone with regard to defending African vernacular, the other African writer; Onoge (1990) also argues that continued use of European languages in postcolonial Africa forces Africans to abandon their own languages and therefore their commitment to an identity based on kinship - symbolized by a shared language and religious beliefs. In the same vain, Owomoyela (1992) postulates that African languages embody what Ghanian writer Kwei Armah (1969) calls "*our way*," as well as express conceptions of reality that are specific, uniquely, African. African kinship illustrates well this relationship between culture, language and identity (Lunga, 1997:43). Owomoyela (1992) strengthening Ngugi's idea argues that language carries cultural values and distinguishes one culture from another. Language he adds, is not primarily or exclusively a means of communication, but a system of representation. For him, language represents cultural values. He associates the death of a language with the demise of a culture. Owomoyela considers African languages, cultural identity and the distinctive African ways of speaking to be at risk of disappearing with the increasing dominance of European languages in post-independence. Ngugi, Onoge and Owomeyela all share similar concerns about English. Their radical responses are necessitated by fear of cultural loss. Ngugi suggests that the continued use of English is a perpetuation of imperialism. To sum up, Afrocentrism in its fullest sense of the term is unattainable with an abandonment of African vernaculars in knowledge production.

Concluding Remarks

The Afrocentric epistemology asserts both that the African distinct cultural values, traditions, mythology, and history has to be considered as a body of knowledge that deals with the social world; and that it is an alternative, non-exclusionary, and non-hegemonic system of knowledge based up on the African experience. It investigates and understands phenomena from a perspective grounded in African centered worldviews. Afrocentric epistemology is about a critique of systems of 'educational texts, mainstream academic knowledge, and scholarship; and further validates the African experience and ontology.' Afrocentric epistemology generally speaking calls for an alternative culture to be part and parcel of the school system and knowledge.

A society's worldview, in view of Afrocentric discourse, determines what constitute a problem for them and how they address it. As a result, Afrocentric scholarship reflects the "*ontology, cosmology, axiology, and aesthetic of the Africans*" (Mazama 2001:14). It is with this assumption that it has to be centered in the African experience. Frantz Fanon's idea of liberation appears vital in this regard. As with liberation from mental colonization, there must be a transformation of the status quo as to find a foundation for incorporating alternative perspectives. This is indeed moral and profoundly political. One must take in to account the point that this process of intellectual liberation is a response to the slavery, colonialism, and imperialism since 15th century. Alternative voices are vehicles for liberating for those who demean thereof.

In most cases Eurocentrism masquerades as epistemological universalism, and political and academic projects that seek to break the silences around subordinate group's knowledge are firmly discredited. The call for multiple approaches to knowledge production appears imperative in such a case. The Eurocentric enthusiastic endorsement of hierarchical ordering has resulted in an over glorification of quantification and skepticism about anything that failed to be qualified. The 'normative' explanation of social phenomena while often presented structural forms downplays the human element and dimension of emotionality and intuition. This is a primary concern that Afrocentric scholarship brings to the debate in an attempt of creating a truly inclusive body of knowledge. In dealing with how to deconstruct the 'normative' epistemological discourse and promoting the African one, an Afrocentric discourse also gets entangled with the question of language.

Ngugi's concerns with the preservation of the vernaculars and cultures are persuasive in that identity is clearly embedded in our language and culture and therefore be kept lingua Franca in the academia is worthwhile. For, a full-fledged Afrocentric epistemology without the use of African vernacular is not only obsolete but also inconceivable.

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