



Afrocentrism Ideology: The Way Forward For African Development

UZOMA OLUCHUKWU OKOYE (Ph.D)

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

NWAFOR ORIZU COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, NSUGBE, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This work examined Afrocentrism as an ideology and theory that will enhance and boost African development in all ramifications. It clears the air that development started from Africa and that African states had never lacked developmental plans and strategies. It advocates for African development style that will be African centered and not Western or Eastern centered. It advocates for the eradication of the European order that places Africa as a periphery continent. It explains Afrocentrism as not against emulating the western style of modern development but it is of the view that such adopted style should be converted to suit African setting. This ideology projects Africa as a superior and not inferior continent as envisaged by the international community and needs Africa to be free from dependency syndrome. Ex-post-facto research design was used to collect relevant data from secondary sources. The findings showed that Africa is seen as an inferior continent that cannot help itself and does not have good developmental plans. The work recommends that Afrocentrism ideology should address the egocentric and corrupt nature of the African political elites. It should enhance enthroning African brotherhood against ethnicism and fight against rules, norms, cultures and dominant hierarchies that affect citizens from engaging in developmental processes. Obnoxious cultural practices that affect development and progress in the African setting should be totally eradicated.

Key Words: Afrocentrism, Eurocentrism, Development, Civilization and Colonization

I. Introduction

The African experience has been filled with combating historical tradition that portrays it as an inferior race and people. African has been viewed in the world as the Dark Continent, heathens and

barbarians. This has made Africans not to have credible position among the so called civilized people. This world view nullified the history and culture of Africans and imposed Europeans to lead Africans including Diaspora blacks towards achieving civilization, development, historical and cultural rebirth (Smedley, 1993; Adeleke, 2015). The European invaders dictate the political, social and economic trend in Africa. They fashioned developmental terminologies which are developed, undeveloped, developing, first world, third world, etc. Africa fell as developing or third world countries and has been passing several phases of European experimentations with them (Chukwuokolo, 2009).

This has led African countries to achieve civilization and development which had led to globalization and globalizing of the black race. It has brought about changes in the perception and attitudes of Africans by believing in the superiority of the Europeans and that development of Africa can be achieved by these invaders. Khor (2001) commented on this view by stating that:

The reason for the changing perception and attitude towards globalization are many. Among the important factors are the lack of tangible benefits to developing countries from opening their economies; despite the well publicized claims of export and income gains, the economic losses and social dislocation that are being caused to many developing countries by rapid financial and trade. Liberalization; the growing inequalities of wealth and opportunities arising from globalization; and the perception that environmental, social and cultural problems have been made worse by the working of the global free market economy.

The above view made it clear that the European form of civilization to Africa has not been beneficial. The developmental standards cannot be achievable. The reason is because development is measured with Eurocentric parameters and not



Afrocentric indexes. Kemet (1990) cited in Mgbheadichie (2015) stated that, in Eurocentric methods, they usually seek to realize phenomena in the European experience as if it were universal, while the Africans cannot question the centrality of European view in matters pertaining strictly to Europe. Kemet went further to state that Afrocentrists must always challenge the position of European on others. This is in line with the view of Molefi Asante, a proponent of Afrocentrism who argued that Afrocentrism must directly challenge Eurocentric views and dimensions on African (Asante, 2003). All the above assumptions made it clear that Africa is helpless in the hands of its external invaders. Therefore, Africans should then have a rethink on Africa and resist western and eastern marginalization and domination, reposition Afrocentric ideology to challenge retrogressive strategies of the western and eastern blocs, have sense of self-actualization built on the African peoples interests, position Africa as a centre not a periphery, rewrite the history of Africa and project positively its culture and belief thereby making Africa a subject and not an object that is used by the external actors to achieve their own national interests. This stated ideology of repositioning Africa continent positively to enable Africans to achieve its development by themselves and forms the bases of this work.

Conceptual Clarification of Afrocentrism and its Theoretical Underpinning

Afrocentrism means African centredness. It is an attempt to put Africa's records right, place Africa people within their historical framework and a demand that the contributions of Africans in all areas of civilization be reflected in world history (Onyewuenyi, 1993). Onyewuenyi (1993) added more that:

The Afrocentric movement is a series of activities by concerned Africa and African-American Scholars (AAS) educators and directed towards achieving the particular end of ensuring that the African heritage and culture, its history and contribution to world civilization and scholarship are reflected in the curricula on every level of academic instruction. Advocates of Afrocentrism demand a reconstruction and rewriting of the whole panorama of human history in its account of the origin of mankind, the origin of philosophy, science, medicine, agriculture, architecture, etc.

It had been argued that Eurocentrism has destroyed African culture, dehumanized the consciousness of blacks and arrested their economic and cultural developments. It represents a potent

threat to the cultural, social, economic and political development of blacks. In order to combat Eurocentrism, a framework of reference where phenomena will be viewed from the perspective of the African person and which will be appropriate to the centrality of the African person therefore become imperative (Asante, 1991). Afrocentricism is a theoretical and methodological framework which enables examining and interpreting issues from an African-centered point of view. Scholars of Afrocentrism have capitalized on three major objectives which are:

- i. To establish the antiquity of history and civilization in Africa.
- ii. Affirm the influence of Egyptian civilization on ancient Greece and Africa's superiority over European civilization.
- iii. Proclaiming the universality of the African worldview (Bernal, 2001).

The proponents of Afrocentrism substituted Afrocentric theory for Eurocentric thereby presenting Africa as the originator of world civilization. They presented ancient Egypt as the epicentre of science, philosophy and mathematics. They clarified that the Greek scholars studied in the ancient Egypt before they returned to shape their western civilization. This therefore means that the Greek who are the originator of western civilization were taught and mentored by the ancient Egyptian (Walker, 2001; Shavit, 2001; Adeleke, 2015). In addition, on theoretical bases Shavit (2001) described the ancient Egyptian and Greek teacher-student relationship as "Afrocentric Greek depending theory". The logic of this theory is that since ancient Greece is the fountain of western culture and civilization, and it is observed that Greek culture was mainly influenced by Egypt, it is therefore reasonably argued that western civilization is a product of Africans (Shavit, 2001). This is more evidently the reason for Africans to have a psychological rebirth and mental re-examination of who they are, their abilities and capabilities so as to restore their fallen egos and reclaim their status in the modern world.

The Afrocentric construction of African identity did not separate the continental Africa from Diaspora blacks because of shared history and culture (Wright, 2007). They believe that both are confronted by similar problems and challenges such as political domination, cultural alienation, economic marginalization, poverty, neo-colonialism, etc. Both of them have common interests and have in one way or the other



cooperated in achieving the said interests (Asante, 1999; Holloway, 2005).

The Importance of Afrocentrism to Africa's Development

African development as perceived by Marcus Garvey's is a constant and consistent African search for self-improvement. Before the era of colonialism, African people, like all other human beings, constantly and consistently improved their lives and life chances. They were inventive and innovative in many ways (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Asante & Abarry (1996), captured African works of imagination, invention, cultural dynamism, political engineering, religious and economic sophistication, and originality. Africans are pictured as active and independent domesticators of plants and animals. They improved their technologies from stone to iron tools. They migrated in search of better environments that enhanced life chances. They formed socio-political systems: lineages, clans, chiefdoms, kingdoms, states, and nations of different sizes and complexities. In the likes of other human beings, Africans even meditated on the meaning of life itself, on their origins, as well as on what being human meant.

The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish (Ngugi wa Thiong, 1986).

Development is partly a struggle to end dependency and a re-humanizing process after long years of denied humanity. Africans has continued facing various processes of alienation and dispossessions. Consequently, the idea of development for Africans is the struggle for restoration of denied ontological density. There is the existence of ideas of the 'zone of being' and the 'zone of non-being'. This explains the African idea of development as part of long-standing struggles to rise from the 'zone of non-being' to the 'zone of being'. The zone of non-being is a colonially

invented space to which African people were forced to inhabit. It is characterized by depravity and suffering (Frantz Fanon's 1968; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Inevitably, African leaders so much relied on the post-1945 developmental promise to the extent that they strongly believed that decolonisation would not only result in taking over of the colonially crafted colonial state, but that they would achieve full sovereignty, which would enable them to launch autonomous developmental trajectories aimed at not only reducing the inequality gap between economies of ex-colonies and those of erstwhile colonial powers, but also improving the socio-economic conditions of the formerly colonised peoples. However, many years after colonisation, the promised land of development remained an illusion (Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodriguez, 2002).

The continuous dependency of most African states on Eurocentricism has actually made Africa to lose focus and continue to have substandard developmental indexes in virtually all aspects of its socio-economic sectors. The external factors have actually hindered African development. Before the coming of the Europeans, African states had their developmental policies and programmes and were acting Africans before the era of colonialism. From the era of colonialism to this neo-colonial era, African states have been pursuing shadow. The Europeans have set a standard and rules that must be met by both them and Africans. These rules are easily met by them because the rules were set according to their standard and benefits.

The introduction of western democracy, the international Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, Washington consensus, trade liberalization, globalization, privatization and deregulation tendencies has widened the gap between Europe and Africa. African states were put under the same rules with Europe without considering the existing gaps (Xavier, 2019). In order to continue domination of Africa and to continue domination of Africa and to prove that Eurocentrism supersedes Afrocentrism, the African political elites are used as tools against Africans. This has led to the production of egocentric, corrupt minded and nepotism political elites who have enjoined the western world to continue undermining the development of African Sates in all ramifications.

Afrocentrism intends to restore psychological re-examination and mental emancipation of African citizens to enable them regain their abilities and capabilities on how to develop Africa without relying on western countries to carry out this developmental agenda. On this, Moses (1998) stated that:



Afrocentrism argues for an African-centered world view and seeks to include African contributions to the world alongside and sometimes in place of those of Europe. It challenges the Western historical perception of European pre-eminence in art, culture, science, religion and philosophy.

In support of the above, Onyewuenyi (1993) opined that Afrocentrism demand a reconstruction and rewriting of the whole panorama of human history and ensure that African contribution to world civilization and scholarship are reflected in the curricula mo every level of academic instruction. Afrocentrism focuses on retracing the steps of Africans on dependency syndrome which has been ravaging the development of African continent. It centres on making Africans look inward to ascertain what is best for Africa. This best must be designed by the Africans as it will suit Africa. The reason for this is because the Europeans copied from African civilization and refashioned their form of civilization as it suited them. Today, they claim that civilization emanated from Europe because Africans abandoned their own model and look forward to adapting to the European developmental models which till present has devastated the continent and left it as a substandard continent. The colonial and neo-colonial era dominated by the western colonial masters of Africa has virtually made all African states mono-economy based much on production and exportation of raw materials which has become a big challenge to our quest for real industrialized development.

The above is backed by Morasso (2019) who stated that the mono-productive structure and a peripheral international insertion destined to the exportation of raw materials, as well as from the conditions of underdevelopment that have not been able to reversed in spite of economic growth, are consolidated as part of the development challenges that undermine the foundations of the image of Afrocentrism. Africa has been fighting for a space to originate new economic ideas and imagine new development alternatives suitable for the African reality and experience but such space has always been denied by the western world and recently China (Amin, 1990). It is obvious that the west brought globalization. This globalization has not only led to the marginalization of Africa but also denied it the possibility and prospects of auto-centred development, by regarding Africa as a follower society in the image of hegemonizing and globalizing west (Jinadu, 2008). Globalization divided and balkanized Africa carving out, in the form of colonial rule, political, economical and cultural spheres of influence and weakening the

ability of African countries to act collectively to defend their common interests. This is why there is compelling need for collective action at the Africa continental and Diaspora levels by African countries to deepen and consolidate and move the state capacity building project in Africa, in the context of continental integration process forward, so that common problems of state capacity facing them can be more collectively handled (Jinadu, 2010).

The development of Africa needs achieving common interest approach. This involves pursuing development through a common interest perspective, to bring about human progress in Africa through restoring human dignity to the African people, promote progressive African social and political values and defend the African personality. There is also need to develop the human potentials of Africa and include the people in the development process in order to build collective capability and capacity to act as stakeholder and to fully participate in shaping international norms and agenda (African Union, 2006). Okpalike opined that priority has to be given to the African mind because a developed mind can evolve, initiate, advance, maintain and sustain development. This will enhance to bring a philosophy of African education to deconstruct the converted African mind (Okpalike, 2014; Getye, 2021).

Africans are envisaged as people who cannot help themselves. The Europeans see and believe that without them bringing real development to Africa, that Africa will remain impoverished. To the Euro centric, nothing good comes from Africa. On this, Messay argued that epidemic diseases, violence, terrorism, natural disasters and despotic rulers are peculiar to Africa and equally not Africans nature. He stated further that canonization of western science as the sole solution to African predicaments is devaluing African systems of thought. African beliefs are scrutinized according to scientific criteria of the west and declared unfit while those of the west are internationally accepted (Messay, 2004). Western media in most cases broadcast ills about Africa. It portrays Africa as the only continent with lots of problem. They show the world that all African countries are economically impoverished and that the continent is a barrel of poverty. Africa is portrayed as a desert, non-fertile land, slum, etc. The citizens or people are portrayed as criminals, violent, cruel, brutes, nasty, lazy, greed, selfish, dependents, expectant, inferior, rebellion, disloyal, dishonest, inhuman and immoral. The continent is seen as darkness and tribalism (Nothias, 2016; Getye 2021).



The potentialities of achieving sustainable development in Africa are embodied in the African way of life which embraces the modes and forms of communication, construction of reality, identity, morality, values and attitudes. It requires building on the useful past to achieve high level of life to meet societal needs. It demands harnessing cultural abilities and complementary responsibilities to respond to problems confronting our social existence. Afrocentrism offers opportunity for cultural freedom and confidence by grounding African perspectives on African experiences. It recognizes her cultural diversities and appreciates its values. It promotes creative, values, attitudes and discipline that enhance quality, creativity and initiative that are fundamental for full and sustainable development. It instills credible value system that can inspire self-confidence and cultural identity that are vital in achieving sustainability. It provides conditions for harnessing relevant knowledge, to learn from our experience and that of the west such as valuable principles of creativity and insight from the west and not just to copy consumption and dependency pattern. Afrocentrism portrays the principle of cooperation, respect of human dignity and regional integration. It projects that Africans can develop communally in the context of freedom, personal liberty and collective liberation in their quest for sustainable development (Mazuri, 1990; Kinyanjui, 1993; Asante, 1988).

The above shows that Afrocentrism is not isolationism. It entails thinking and acting African. It believes in changing the narrative of Africa to better. It creates an enabling environment where Africans can emulate from the good policies and programmes from the west and make them African, rooted in African culture and beliefs. This ideology enables Africans to adopt a kind of democracy and economic developmental strategies that is built in African culture. On this, Asante stated that in Afrocentricity, the opening consciousness is assumed to be an awareness of the off-centeredness of Africans as a result of alien military, cultural, and social intrusions that have dislocated African people, basically taking Africans off of their own physical and spiritual terms (Asante, 2017).

II. Conclusion

Africa has never lacked development initiatives and plans. The problem of Africa is having a kind of development outside the template of capitalist and classical economic thoughts which is very automatic in nature. Africa needs development that is African centred, that will accommodate its norms and values devoid of

discrimination, marginalisation, ethnic bigotry, egocentric leaders. The proponents of Afrocentrism are of the opinion that West and other neo-colonial entities should allow Africans to run their own form of development. The ideology intends to bring about real mental emancipation of Africans. It has a course of making Africa look less important in the eyes of the world rather a continent that will join in shaping the world economic order. It projects that Africa should be allowed to set its own standard just like the Western and Eastern part of the international community.

Way Forward/ Recommendations

- i. Afrocentrism ideology should address the egocentric and corrupt nature of the African political elites.
- ii. It should enhance enthroning African brotherhood against ethnicism. Eradicating ethnic bigotry will enhance integrated development where all African states will join hands together to solve each countries problem irrespective of religion, language, colour and country.
- iii. It should fight against rules, norms, cultures and dominant hierarchies that affect citizens from engaging in developmental processes. Obnoxious cultural practices that affect development and progress in the African setting should be totally eradicated.
- iv. It should enhance gender equality. Women should not be discriminated. They should be allowed to use their talent in carrying out developmental agenda.
- v. It should fight against marginalisation and discrimination by African traditional practices.
- vi. Should create strong institutions to promote positive changes in archaic and unrefined traditions and culture.
- vii. Western lives, plans and ideologies should be altered to suit African setting.

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