



REVISITING THE DISCOURSE ON AFROCENTRICITY AND AN AFROLOGICAL METHOD

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Abstract:

The debate on Afrocentrism and its place in the communication theorizing has not been settled. While few colonizing nations pursued a policy of assimilation of the colonized, language, and by extension culture is gained through habituation, there ought to have been a deliberate effort by the African intellectuals to propose other world views in addition to the Eurocentric view which had already been codified. Afrocentricity, presented in the manner in which it has been so far appear to be a rebellion against anything European. This should not be the case. In this article, I have established that there is a strong case to recognize that there are different worldviews which emanate from the diversity of human race and none is inferior or superior. The Afrocentricism paradigm is an invitation by and for scholars to begin to deconstruct cosmological, ontological, epistemological, axiological and aesthetic issues from an African orientation as opposed to seeing these issues in the Eurocentric manner in which they are packaged and presented to the academy. First, while agreeing Afrocentric paradigm is a metatheory and can be applied in any human inquiry, we are involved in from agriculture to mathematics as and when the paradigm gets fully developed, probably we need to rename it Afrological Theory to avoid the 'centric' tag which tend to be antagonistic or sees everything in binary opposition to that other. Secondly, in response to African-American unique position and experiences, I propose we isolate an African-American orientation or Afriamericentric tradition to capture their unique cosmological and epistemological views. Thirdly, since Ubuntu appear to cut across many African settings, it should be Africa's contribution to humanity, and we should codify its tenets and develop into it into the Ubuntu theory or philosophy, an idea alluded to in

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Obonyo's (2011) article or in the very least as an organizing framework from which many frames of Africa may be explored.

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Introduction

According to Jackson, L (1997), Afrocentricism is an ideological orientation that places [should place] Africa at the centre of the analysis of human evolution. Another view is that Afrocentricity is a conceptual system that structures the way in which human beings engage the world. While Molefi Asante argues that Afrocentricity demands an epistemological location that places the critic/scholar inside the African experience and African ideals and values at the center of inquiry framed by African codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, and myths that give meaning to the history of the African subject and a sense of place in the world arena. In this sense, he proposes to the academy an alternative worldview from an African lens by Africans.

These suggestions appear very 'romantic' to an African reader because of the way they are packaged. But we need to critically examine the propositions to establish if they are cogent enough to settle the debate or open new lines of thoughts. Before I agree or disagree, I want to state human beings from early to 'modern' man are products of the environment, culture, language, and spirituality among others. These aspects must implore us to see the multicultural dimension of the human race. Seen in this manner, it simply means our view of the world around us and how we interact with it cannot be the same. The Eskimo and the Hoi Hoi of Kalahari have different world views and ethos. In as far as the proponents of Afrocentricity are suggesting another view of the world or orientation, then I agree but caution that the idea is a mere abstraction in literature and need not be seen in concrete terms. It should not be seen as a rebellion against anything European or North American. Unfortunately, the language itself we use to reject European hegemony and their edifices that we adorn like a tie (a functionless piece of wear) is a testimony of how far we have moved away from anything African! The African is not late for anything. They are in their time zone and Europeans too are on theirs. But the two are not in some hole where they do not affect and influence the other.

The Afrocentricism paradigm is an invitation by and for scholars to begin to deconstruct cosmological, ontological, epistemological, axiological and aesthetic issues from an African orientation as opposed to seeing these issues in the Eurocentric manner in which they are packaged and presented to the academy. The challenge Molefi Asante

and Jackson and other Afrocentrics are throwing to the scholars is that we should not continue to view knowledge and its philosophical foundations only from Western eyes. They invite us to ask....was/has there not been an African philosophy? What is the African perspective about life, aesthetics, axiology and rhetoric? Willems, W (2014), although suing for de-westernization of media culture suggests that the epistemological growth of media and culture in the Eurocentric perspective must have benefited from African Scholars or scholars theorizing with an African orientation. This argument appears to suggest that the knowledge so created cannot be 'owned' by the North nor the South. It becomes a global intellectual property and this view is also supported by Thussu, K (2012) on what he thinks of 'English' Language.

Looking at Africa in totality including the diaspora clearly shows the futility of looking at a 'composite African'. There is no such a thing as a composite African. Readings from Berger and Luckmann, (1966) clearly suggest that human person is a product of different socialization processes; imbued with different languages which themselves are embodiments of values and environmental exposure/influence. The reality we proclaim is only limited to what we know and our experience. Reality is a relative construct. In other words, the African mind is not uniform and its orientation about knowledge and the world they live in cannot be the same. Specialization in the many activities we are involved in bring in a diversity and richness. We have priests who intercede for us with the 'gods', engineers derogatorily referred to as Blacksmiths, artists- fine and oral who record our world or recreate them through poetry and music. These should not be demeaned while glorifying those from the North.

The question we should be grappling with right now is –which parameters is the scholar using to investigate human behaviour in all its forms- i.e. all disciplines? So far these parameters have been developed in western civilizations and applied in African contexts without question. This is the narrative we need to change but must go beyond rejecting Western models to proposing alternative models. Am reluctant to call them Africentric models and will probably be considered as alternative viewpoints to enrich what is already available to humanity. I suppose Asante, cited by Jackson (1997) somewhat alludes to this fact- ...*'that we should not avoid celebration of Greek and Roman intellectual traditions and their relevance as conceptual and methodological tools for rhetorical criticism, but that those traditions should not be utilized to overshadow other cultural and intellectual legacies'*. We too should celebrate African sages' wisdom as proposed by Odera Oruka as we do with Aristotle.

I disagree with the suggestion that all Afrocentric discourse implicitly and or explicitly addresses the issue of liberation in the African American perspective. Liberation in the sense of a colonized people is a political process. Unless we view it as liberation from cultural, economic, language, and tribal domination the narrative will

not change. I now discuss what and how an Afrological tradition, metatheory and method in Communication should be reintroduced in the academy scholarly discourse.

According to Jackson (1997), Africology differs from Afrocentricity in that Africology refers to the systematic study of Africa and African Philosophy. Afrological inquiry is based on the African orientation to the cosmos as suggested by Molefi Asante, himself having been influenced by Cheikh Diop. According to Jackson, the objective of Africological thought is to reintroduce the African cultural personality to mainstream scholarly discourse, an idea that has apparently been played down by European and North American historians in the last two centuries and especially by white women, black women and black men. Historian Odera Oruka has very illuminating principles on how an African Philosophy should be viewed or must evolve.

Jackson (1997) further posits that the bone of contention is that some scholars such as Cornel West have suggested that Afrocentricity be viewed as cultural democracy, while Henry Gates suggests that a tradition should not be defined by a pseudoscience of racial biology or a mystical essence called Blackness (1999, 339). Other scholars (Bellhooks, Michelle Wallace) have contested Afrocentric scholarship, which they contend promotes hegemony and or essentialism. In my view this criticism should also apply to Eurocentricism! Depending on which orientation a scholar views the world; such labels should go both ways. What is needed is an appreciation that there is another view, not inferior or superior to the other. So reducing such an important discourse to blackness or whiteness is being academically naïve and immature. Nationalism whether white or black is and should not be part of this discourse. And indeed, this is affirmed by Maulana Karenga's Kawaiida theory (cited by Jackson), which is essentially a Black Nationalist Theory not a metatheory nor is it a conceptual rubric of Afrocentric paradigm.

Afrocentric paradigm is a metatheory and can be applied in any human inquiry we are involved in from agriculture to mathematics as and when the paradigm gets fully developed. But probably we need to rename it Afrological Theory to avoid the 'centric' tag which tend to be antagonistic or sees everything in binary opposition to that other. It is sobering to note, and contrary to critics, and according to Jackson, Afrocentricity does not ignore the significance of other cultural ideologies associated with the likes of Kahlil, Khayyam, and Gita to name a few. He further suggests that these culturally significant leaders and texts address meaning-centred cosmologies that speak to the values and sensibilities of distinct cultural heritage. This view is in consonant with my suggestion that Africological Theory is a better route to begin a systematic study about Africa and to place something concrete at the academy.

These concepts of centricism- whether Chinese, European, African, Asia or Arabic or to add icing on the cake- Kikuyu, Yoruba, Tshona, Ankole, Digo or Amu-centric will remain changing targets. At no time will these targets be met because each of these people are themselves changing through assimilation of other influences and them too influencing others. Asante recognizes this too, thus Afrocentricity 'offers the possibility of a non-hegemonic alternative perspective in the understanding of human expressions in our diverse multicultural society. Most importantly, however, unlike Eurocentric theories, Afrocentricity does not bear a totalitarian spirit because it does not seek to replace "white knowledge" with "black knowledge" (Asante, 1998: xi). Furthermore Asante sees "the Afrocentric idea as a model for intercultural agency in which pluralism exists without hierarchy and respect for cultural origins, achievements, and prospects is freely granted" (1998: xii).

This discourse on Afrocentrism will remain just that unless the discussion refocuses to seeking to codify knowledge as seen by various speech communities in Africa. I must add that African American is except the skin colour is really an American. They have been removed from the African soil for centuries and their culture and orientation is truly a hybrid. The African American is merely nostalgic about an African experience they know nothing about. In this context, their view of the world cannot be same as those of native Africans who have never left their abodes. However, even these too to some degree have been influenced by colonization and now globalization. Perhaps we need now recognize and isolate an African-American orientation or Afriamericentric tradition to capture their unique experiences and cosmological views.

Harris, cited by Jackson suggests that 'consciousness shapes behaviour and being...and goes on to add that an afrocentric orientation is one which asserts that consciousness determines being. We must appreciate that cultures are dynamic and affect human beings from cradle to when we breathe last. Jackson sums up this debate by suggesting that Afrocentricity is an ideological venture, not an epistemological moment and I would add- an ideological venture which should be sensitive to various existential orientations. Since there is no such thing as a universal culture, or universal humanide, except for biological functions like feeding and reproductive activities, I hold the view that each community is distinct and there is a case for preservation and exclusion on cultural and language industry. Metatheory scholars need to understand black or white experiences by using instruments specifically 'designed to uncover those symbols, codes and motifs that are culturally particular ...and these instruments for African American rhetoric tend to be Africological in principle [or Arabcological, Asiacological, Chinacological in principle]. Asante himself contends,

“By regaining our own [African] platforms, standing on our own cultural spaces, and believing that our way of viewing the universe is just as valid as any, we will achieve the kind of transformation that we need to participate fully in a multicultural society. However, without this kind of centeredness, we bring almost nothing to the multicultural table but a darker version of whiteness” (1998: 8)

I have one small problem with Asante though- his use of the words ‘regaining our platforms’- I do not agree that we need to regain anything because nothing was taken away. It is the African intellectual who is on the dock in the academy. The jury is out that we are guilty of appropriating western or Eurocentric worldviews on the African scene. By now, we should be stating that this or that is our ontological, cosmological, axiological, epistemological or aesthetic stand and their basis as Africans albeit in our multi-cultural nature. At least Ubuntu cuts across many cultures and it may prove to be the unifying factor in motley of concepts. When we accept our minds to be colonized, even spiritually, we cannot turn back and mourn. It’s a choice we made to accept Westernization in all its forms!

How should Afrocentricity be applied in communication? Communication cuts across all disciplines and should be used in solving universal problems rather than African problems. We should be stating that this knowledge or perspective is Africa’s contribution to the academy without being apologetic or comparing this contribution to others. Afrocentricity method is interdisciplinary in nature and scope. Even when message developers want to change behaviour, it is the mental frames they target in behaviour modification. Jackson citing Asante suggests that Afrocentric epistemology should be used to explore, uncover, and use codes, paradigms, symbols motifs and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data. All these attributes have a communications angle and involve abstractions. Therefore, and as suggested by Turner, (1991) cited by Jackson, Afrocentric worldview should be informed by: Interconnectedness of all things, collective identity, oneness of mind, body and spirit, consequential morality, time and spirituality. These principles unfortunately or fortunately are African, and to some extent Asiatic too.

Scholars from Africa and theorizing about African philosophy should use Turner’s principles as frames of reference. This type of thinking and perspective is captured by Obonyo (2011), who argues that communication theorizing for Africa must draw from its uniqueness. He does not entirely suggest the Afrocentricity route but Molefi and Jackson’s influences are easy to discern. He notes ‘there should be a broad

agreement that there are unique peculiarities that demand that Africa isolates what is relevant and place it in Africa's unique situation and weave out of that a mosaic framework that reflects Africa's reality. Citing Berger, he gives an example of western democracy which he contrasts to the African situation which is propelled by political propaganda. This, he argues means the concept of media as a watchdog cannot apply in Africa as it does in Western democracies. Media in Africa therefore has to be alive to this suggestion as it plays its 'watchdog' role.

Delores P. Aldridge, (2000), also suggests that Afrocentric theory merits strong support because of its call for a counter-hegemonic discourse to break the cultural and social domination of Eurocentricity on the lives of black and other people of color. She further posits that proponents of this theory contend that the construction of a new African identity and an interpretation of the world from an African psychological, spiritual, and cultural frame of reference are critical in ending the subordination of Africans in America by Anglo-American social and cultural structures. Aldridge's discussion based on what she thinks higher education in America should be like is balanced in that she argues at university level the curriculum has to expose students to different world views and perspectives. Continued exposure of students to one worldview perpetuates the myth that knowledge must come or manufactured from the North. This narrative needs to change and the African academic has to lead the way.

Obonyo introduces the concept of *ubuntu* advanced as a factor marking the ground in which media in Africa operates (Blankenberg 1999). As Ramose (2002) explains, *ubuntu* is the heart of African philosophy, and Africanness would be impossible to understand without appreciating *ubuntu*. While Blankenberg examines the application of this philosophy to media practice, it is safe to argue that most Africans would sympathise with the position she presents and generalise it as representing an African world view, since, as Shaw summarises it: "*This brings to mind the African worldview of ubuntu, which is an ancient African ethic, a cultural mindset that tries to capture the essence of what it is to be human*" (2009: 493). Ubuntu would fit in many of Turner's, (1991) principles which he suggests should be used to appraise Afrocentricity. And probably, Ubuntu should be Africa's contribution to humanity, and we should codify its tenets and develop it into the Ubuntu theory or philosophy, an idea alluded to in Obonyo's article or in the very least as an organizing framework from which many frames of Africa may be explored. Obonyo too tacitly explains ethnicity is another frame which defines African politics and probably a media theory could be developed that takes cognisance of this reality.

In theorizing for Africa and for Africans I need to echo what Delores P. Aldridge, (2000) states: The contributions of these theorists (in reference to Asante, Karenga, Diop among others) are prominent in the society-wide dialogue on multiculturalism with the

influence of Afrocentric ideas increasingly seen in traditional disciplines as scholars in psychology, education, even medical practice, [and I add communication too] seek to apply the term to their approaches to studies of black life and community.

Fox R, (1992) introduces a very interesting spin to the whole discourse of Afrocentricism. He distinguishes between two brands of Afrocentrism, "hard" and "soft." Soft Afrocentrism reflects the quite reasonable understanding that persons of African descent, for whom the hyphen in African-American is both a separation and a connection, have a complex cultural inheritance including Africa and a derived Africanness. Soft Afrocentrism, then, is an awareness of, and an engagement with, the root of one's roots. Hard Afrocentrism, on the other hand, is a mirror image of Eurocentrism, in which everything else is placed at the margins. Hard Afrocentrism of the Leonard Jeffries variety is thus as problematic as the Eurocentrism it seeks to counter but which it ultimately replicates in its fundamentalism and hierarchicalism. Fox's article written in subtle sarcasm, nevertheless raises an important dimension. If the impression or intent of Afrocentric proponents was to replace everything European with Africanness, then I think the whole debate would be lost. The Afrocentrics are saying yes, we have heard you, but also see this or that construct in this dimension. It calls for an appreciation of a world view seen from an African lens. Communication theorizing, and indeed all other disciplines theorizing would benefit from the soft angle, and the world would be a better place to live in as human beings. After all, whiteness and blackness and the associations which go with 'other' are socially made constructs.

Conclusions

I have three observations. First, we have established that there is a strong case to recognize that there are different worldviews which emanate from the diversity of human race. While agreeing Afrocentric paradigm is a metatheory and can be applied in any human inquiry, we are involved in from agriculture to mathematics as and when the paradigm gets fully developed, probably we need to rename it Afrological Theory to avoid the 'centric' tag which tend to be antagonistic or sees everything in binary opposition to that other. Secondly, in response to African-American unique position and experiences, I propose we isolate an African-American orientation or Afriamericentric tradition to capture their unique cosmological and epistemological views. Thirdly, since Ubuntu appear to cut across many African settings, it should be Africa's contribution to humanity, and we should codify its tenets and develop into it the Ubuntu theory or philosophy, an idea alluded to in Obonyo's article or in the very least as an organizing framework from which many frames of Africa may be explored.

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