

DECOLONIZATION OF THE AFRICAN MIND THROUGH INDIGENOUS EDUCATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSAL

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Abstract

The greatest damage brought by colonialism is visible in the destruction of the African mind. Based on this, many contemporary Africans now repudiate indigenous realities in preference to those which are alien. African development is however pursued with this inauthentic mentality. As such, authentic African persons are now viewed as unfashionable, non resourceful and archaic. This popular trend has direly affected sustainable development of most African nations and their larger populations. Analytically, therefore, this paper opted for the decolonization of the African mind through sound indigenous education. The study found that the authentic African mind severed by colonial orientation can be restored through programmed instructions embedded in indigenous educational curricula and continental orientations. The paper therefore concludes that Africa will be on equal stance with other continents when African people are educated to appreciate their identity and personhood as the fulcrum of their existence.

Keywords: African mind; Decolonization; Indigenous Education; Philosophical

Introduction

Colonialism was never in the interest of Africans. This was based on its predominant hegemonic domination and stand as a programme initiated for complete disordering of the African mind (Iroegbu, 2004). Colonialism was therefore a systematic programme that physically and mentally dominated, exploited and dehumanized Africans. In consonance with this view, most scholars hold that “colonialism devastated African psyche, rubbished her culture and values and left her empty of any coherent view of reality.” (Anyaehe, 2013:150). As the physical domination of colonialism seemed practically reduced in modern time; its lasting grip is still visible on the African minds. This gives credence to Steve Biko's expression that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.

Human functional mind is therefore not an empty slate. It is replete with images of materials and legacies fed into it. This mind as possessed by a larger population of Africans is still colonized by diverse colonial heritage maintained and preserved by

African political elites and leadership for their egoistic interests (Isife, 2020b). These colonial heritages include African pattern of governance which ruptures the autochthonous human mind and makes post independence Africa a continuation of colonialism (Isife, 2020a). Colonialism therefore seems to have practically gone, yet the colonial images, structures, knowledge and legacies persist in the African mind. Put differently still, the colonial clutch and the continuous erosion of the African mind have remained active. This is why a larger population of contemporary Africans still exhibit colonial character and mentality, propagate colonial standards and legacies but repudiate African indigenous values and paradigms.

Along this lane, those with positive but indigenous views are seen as unintelligent, non resourceful, unfashionable and archaic. In fact, the grip of colonialism on African psyche is too visible in the *a priori* inferiority complex still exhibited by lots of contemporary Africans. In Nigeria for instance, it is rampant to hear Igbo expressions like: *Ndi ocha akarika anyi* (white people are better/greater/stronger than us), *bekee wu agbara* (white people are spirits), etc which depict persistent colonial clutch on the African mind (Oguejiofor, 2009:1).

Meanwhile, the pristine African mind is laden with indigenous laws, customs, ethos, traditions, theories, beliefs, practices and standards through which diverse predicaments were solved and human competence and performance were enhanced (Chinweuba, 2018). This natural indigenous state of existence gave coherence to African perception of the world and played a central role in retaining the pristine African life and activities in existence. Thus, the pristine African mind reflected and fostered human social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic, technological expressions and processes that stood as a kind of indigenous education (Oyenuga, 2009). Such educational contents formed an integral system that embodies human explicative and regulatory character, and propels human performance of adaptive and integrative roles (Michael, 2008).

With the advent of colonialism and its grip on the African mind, these functional autochthonous ways of life holding Africans together have been eroded. The result is glaring in a gradual alienation of contemporary Africans from their natural consciousness and authentic being. This has hindered Africans psychologically and hampered the corresponding physical progress in Africa. This hindrance however gives clue to the fact that the pristine African mind characterized by indigenous values is a gift of nature. Rejecting such gift and embracing other minds with conflicting values amounts to operating from artificial and ineffective channels. This is so because such channels as glaring in the present African mind cannot define African originality and authenticity. Worse still, it cannot foster African confidence, strength, competence, performance and effectiveness in African environment. It rather keeps contemporary Africans in constant and unnecessary struggle to understand realities and to perform their tasks effectively.

Thus, western and other foreign minds in the African setting are devoid of that natural capacity required to comprehend and communicate total human and environmental realities. As such, a foreign mind ought not to be the basis of African perception of realities but rather an elective option to be applied when necessary. This is why this paper proposes the decolonization of the African mind through indigenous education, in order to restore Africa on her authentic trajectory to purposeful actualization.

Explication of Concepts

Outstanding concepts in this discourse are decolonization of the African mind and indigenous education. Decolonization of the African mind has to do with a kind of challenging and disrupting African assumptions of colonial superiority. Differently put, decolonization of the African mind is the “revitalization of the ways of being and knowing prior to colonization, while unearthing the manner in which colonization was achieved.” (Pratt, et al, 2018:3). Indeed, decolonization of the African mind revolves on overhauling African mode and constituents of thought. It is thus a mental revolution towards replacing negative colonial contents imbibed by the African mind.

Achebe (1975) refers to decolonization of the African mind as a process of making Africans regain belief in themselves by putting away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. In this direction, the African is meant to realize fully the need to be original and to assume full responsibility for his own progress in order to develop a new and original ideology that must evolve in his own way, incorporating his own cultural heritage, and not a poor copy of other people's cultural heritage or worldview (Oyebola, 1976). Truly, decolonization of the African mind points to a re-orientation of the African mind-set and attitudes. Bert (2019) calls it the creation of “new” people from the colonized, based on their authentic culture in order to propel them towards the future and enable them confront their present in the context of the global predicament.

Along with these, the decolonization of African mind also points to untangling the complex web of internalized oppression created by colonization. Based on this, the decolonization of African mind extends to making the colonizers recognize and challenge their own socialized presumptions of superiority. In all these, the decolonization of the African mind does not mean ignorance of foreign traditions but denial of foreign authority, withdrawal of allegiance to them and refusal of everything that will not be for the good of the colonized or add value to them.

Indigenous education is contextually an education that is traditionally practiced within indigenous African families and communities (Pratt, et al, 2018). It is an education that arises from long-term African occupancy of her continent. Indigenous education in African context comprises physical, social and spiritual contents. It is not schooling. This is in the sense that indigenous education is not institutionalized, bounded by structures and systematically governed or legislated by the state. Indigenous education is rather broader and happens more through socialization process. It is embodied in all of the cultural life and ways of African communities including beliefs, relationships, cosmology, communications, stories, folktales, proverbs, crafts and existence. In this sense, indigenous education consists of “path and process whereby individuals gain knowledge and meaning from their indigenous heritages.” (Jacob, Cheng and Porter, 2015: 3).

Nevertheless, indigenous education is a psycho-social action that instills African cultural values and heritage needed to decolonize the African mind. In fact, it is an education which prior to western invasion, constituted the development of the human person in African continent. Traditional indigenous education involved “the training of the mind to see things critically and to seek the meaning and intelligibility of things which is an important aspect of the development of the human person.” (Eboh, 2007:47). As such, it is

an instruction that inculcate a large amount of penetrating and illuminating African qualities that are unique to the African people. From this education however springs the present African philosophy which is “a multifaceted human rational endeavour consisting in plausible inquiry into issues and problems contextual in Africa” as well as “unorganized and uncritical mass of realities, beliefs and unfounded views about nature and human experience in African world.” (Isife, 2021:102). More still, indigenous education is that education behind all African historical feats prior to contact of the continent with the west. It consists of potentials, history, trends of industry, agriculture, production and services that when focused on propels African unique and sustainable development.

The Colonization of the African Mind

The Colonization of the African mind is the ideological domination of the African psyche, which separated indigenous Africans from their culture and resources and created external and internalized assumptions of the supremacy of the colonizers. This domination has resulted in Africans what Fanon (1967: xvi) calls “massive psycho-existential complex.” Hence Odimegwu (2008) is correct when he observes that the greatest tool and weapon of colonization was the colonial education (Odimegwu, 2008). This education was guided by western curriculum which largely conflicts with African worldview and thoughts. This was an education intended to uphold colonial structures, administration and objectives and to inflict great harm on the African mind and personhood which was already built from indigenous cultural values and thought. Based on these, it is obvious that colonial education was not in consonance with the being of the Africans and thus did not ensure their sustainable development. Consequently, indigenous efforts towards sustainable development remained a struggle against the tide.

Apart from colonial education, the African mind was also colonized through the lingua franca that comprises of western and other foreign languages. Isife (2020c: 120) attests that “with colonial languages standing as lingua franca in many African states, coupled with western styled education curriculum, the psyche and destiny of the indigenous Africans are still controlled.” As the vehicle of culture, these languages express, communicate, sustain and preserve western cultures in the indigenous people. Consequently, African languages and culture were relegated to a secondary place and the African mind became engrossed in colonial mentality. To relegate a language is to relegate the people's culture and authentic mind which is the heart and soul of such a language. In this condition, indigenous Africans became a people devoid of originality, authenticity and strength. Through the auspices of alien languages, it even became difficult for indigenous Africans to fully understand their environmental realities; its mechanisms and to work better. More still, Africans became a people in constant struggle to grasp realities and to implement them. To educate a people in alien languages however is to inculcate in these people the culture which those languages drive. Hence, the African products of colonial education became best described as “evolue” who are neither Africans nor Europeans but schizophrenic personhoods (Odimegwu, 2008).

Another channel of colonization of the African mind is alien religions. These religions, Christianity and Islam, became popular in castigating indigenous Africans and their pristine frame of mind imbued from their worldview. Christianity and Islam were

therefore colonial tools used to castigate Africans as primitive, paganistic, animistic, fetish and barbaric. This process propelled the tendency in Africans to denigrate everything African where possible. This condition quickened the colonization of African mind. Coupled with these, present colonial heritages in post independent Africa are also deepening the colonization of the African mind. In reference to this, Isife (2020c:126) documents:

Independence of African state was mere transformation of colonialism to neocolonialism. The attainment of political independence therefore only changed the composition of managers of most African states, not the character of the colonial era. Hence, the attainment of Independence by African states did not destroy but preserved the colonial structures and systems.

Isife (2020a:269) further observes that “the political elite cash into these problems as opportunities to confuse, manipulate and further impoverish the masses.” Hence, Post-colonial Africa is not much different from the colonial past as the masses are still being held captive, exploited and dehumanized by the political leaders. The presence of colonial heritages, as seen in both the structure and the political elite, in post independence Africa therefore still stand as tangible legacies, making visible the lasting captivity of the African mind which can only be freed through indigenous education.

Rationale for Decolonization of African Mind through Indigenous Education

Achebe (1975) asserts that Africans need to regain belief in themselves in order to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. This assertion points to the need for African mental decolonization through indigenous education to ensure African unique and authentic existence. The need for this mental revolution is among the rationale behind J.S. Mill postulation that “the lot of mankind will not improve until great changes occur in the fundamental constitution of peoples' modes of thought” (Okolo, 1993:132). On this note, Oyebola (1976) insists that the black people need mental revolution through indigenous education so as to ensure their uniqueness, progress, development of new and original ideology and full incorporation of their own cultural heritage towards sustainable and authentic existence. Supportive of these rationales, Pope John Paul II even joins in admonishing Africans to wake, stand and walk from their natural self, detaching dependence on the Western Europe and America (Onuigbo, 2005).

Decolonization of the African mind through indigenous education is therefore to ensure African authenticity which is the basis of every sustainable existence and advancement. Decolonization of the African mind will in this direction usher Africans into the authentic “basis of decision making in the face of challenges both familiar and unfamiliar” (Dei, Hall and Goldin, 2000:6). Moreover, it will offer opportunities and pave way for the exposure of the African people to other useful experiences which will support their endurance against the vicissitudes of the cosmic realm. In fact, the decolonization of the African mind will channel the people's attention to unfolding indigenous ways of knowing and being as well as the important indigenous ways to move forward. It will contribute to what it means to be free and human in African context as well as how to survive in present uncertain, changing and challenging global world.

Nevertheless, the rationale behind decolonization of the African mind through indigenous education is to set Africans on their original and authentic existential trajectory. For people are progressive in their environment when their existence guided by reason unfolds from their autochthonous nature and environment. Such environment induces a people to conjecture indigenous theories, values and invent practices and materials that will solve their peculiar problems and enhance their development (Oguejiofor, 2009). Decolonization of the African mind through indigenous education will therefore recline Africans to their indigenous base and save the African population from frictions that since independence render their development efforts ineffective. For, ever since colonial experience and its grip on the African mind, Africans as victims think and operate more from western/foreign mentality rather than their original mind. In this condition, existence among Africans has remained incoherent and devoid of authenticity and basis offered by communally appreciated values. Such values everywhere tie individuals and their particular environment; constitute the interiority of their being and their internal equilibrium that are the fulcrum of their subsequent advancement.

In the present colonization of the African mind, there has been recurring backwardness in African existence. The economy has continued to collapse, education sector has not solved African problems, political instability remains high and there is practically no enhanced infrastructure, scientific and technological advancement. These are so because the mind through these collapsing African sectors is engaged lacks authenticity. It was therefore a case of approaching African problems from western/foreign perspectives. As such, the result of such encounter has not been much effective in African environment; hence the great need for decolonization of African mind.

In congruence with these understanding, Dalhatu and Bagaji (2014) agree that western grip on African mind deprives the African people of quality education, good housing, industrial and technological feats and advancement, comfortable life and stable identity; but paves way for more human agitation and societal instability. To these, Akintoye and Opeyemi (2014) add that allowing the trend will deprive the future African generation of qualified and quality human resources to initiate, develop and sustain any science and technology in the continent. Plagued by colonized mind, African situation is worsened by many African elites and leaders who work against decolonization of African mind through their selfish activities and leadership policies.

Indigenous Education in the Decolonization of the African Mind

Effective decolonization of the African mind warrants awareness of colonial impact on African people and society. It as well needs an indigenous understanding of how application of foreign mind and approach in African context yields little result and mar African chances of emancipation (Pratt, et al, 2018). These are to be followed by reframing the liberated African mind with indigenous education stemming from African worldview. The place of indigenous education is therefore to reclaim and sustain indigenous knowledge through which the African mind can be decolonized and future stability of the continent assured. Indigenous education therefore dwells on maintaining a conducive environment and understanding of relationships that exist between humanity, creation, and cosmos as an inextricably interconnected web where reciprocity is a natural

important aspect of this holistic design.

Along this lane, it is the task of indigenous education to promote this interconnectedness and make people know that “whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.” (Jeffers, 1991:20). This means that Indigenous education as a means of decolonizing African mind stand to promote reciprocity in African environment. In this direction, it stands to offer the understanding that reciprocity with the land is necessary for human survival (Darko, 2014). This reciprocity involves continual “celebration of renewal and understanding of relationships and responsibilities” to ensure individual, community, and societal health (Cajete, 1999:80). Indigenous education is therefore a participatory education peculiar and unique to Africans. It is an education that stands to enhance unity and harmony among the physical and spiritual realms of reality in the African world and among the various African aspects of reality such as the environment, man, animal, ecology, etc (Nwigwe, 2005).

The process of indigenous education thus covers different levels of existence as well as the African identity questions of Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? What are my responsibilities? Here, the community of Africans, inclusive of all living things, is part of this indigenous educational process and is actively involved in the process. In its place, indigenous education represents a collective understanding of African world; its protection that is equated with its survival as well as its thriving amongst continents.

From every indication, indigenous education will enable massive inculcation of cultural products in the consciousness of Africans. Decolonizing the African mind through indigenous education will therefore save multitude of Africans from losing their cultural heritage and values. As such, Africans will no longer be viewed as “cultureless or culturally disoriented people” (Ugwueye, 2007:109). This heritage is largely the African identity hence decolonization of African mind through indigenous education poses to save Africans from identity crisis. In this way the future of the identity of African generations yet unborn will be secure.

It goes without saying that the overlapping similarities in African cultures imply overlapping similarities in African indigenous education. This will mean that the indigenous education stand to offer indigenous functional and progressive socio-political ideology that will cut across the political belief of diverse African ethnic groups, satisfy the indigenous political understanding/beliefs of diverse African tribes and minimize instability in the continent (Isife, 2020a). Moreover, indigenous education will put a check on cultural dependency on foreign materials for it will redirect the African mind towards what is largely African. It will in this direction enhance local production and appreciation of locally made products.

Essence and Contents of Indigenous Education

Contextually, indigenous education is a kind of African thought evolving from African culture and values, modified through indigenous scrutiny and propagated based on cultural standard. African indigenous education therefore stands as a body of knowledge that arises from the long-term African occupancy of their environment over time. It cuts across external and psychological African cultural tenets, communal ethics, moral

predicts, unity of realities and their metaphysical and tangible implications in the world of man. Among these are the ethical reciprocal relations among the people as well as the epistemological and ontological systems in African environment. Indigenous education revolves on “traditional norms and social values (alongside) mental constructs that guide, organize, and regulate the people's way of living and making sense of their world” (Dei, Hall and Goldin, 2000: 6). This education arises from the collective experiences and understandings of Africans as a people.

Apart from these, indigenous education is a conscientious process revolving on solutions to past and current African plights and addressing issues that will propel the African mind along its authentic existence. This notwithstanding, indigenous African education is largely in oral narratives. Its contents are visible during the rites of passages, in folklores, riddles, stories, drama, histories, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, family and human socializations and other expressions which are frequently employed to educate people on ideal forms of behaviour, morality and ways of empowerment in African societies (Smith, 1940).

However, part of indigenous knowledge that forms indigenous education is the African indigenous cultural patterns, science, technology, arts, productions and services. Others are Afro-communitarian understanding of person, traditional institutions and their roles in African communities. Indigenous educational contents also harbours African rich history, feats and contribution to human resource and societal development. Its contents also consist of practices and theories that explain the African world. This education comprises of rules, regulations, social sanctions, rewards, social incentives, punishments, crafts, practical skills, social etiquettes of the community and clan as well as agricultural methods into which people are inducted. These ensured the smooth running of traditional African societies especially prior to colonialism (Kenyatta, 1965).

Conclusion

Obviously, colonialism is now part of African history, yet its siege on the African mind have endured till contemporary time. The negative effects of this grip have however been a point of concern among Africans. To this end, many Africans thought that freedom of the African mind will come through mere political independence, organized structures of government, economic and other institutions. The failure of all these factors has however proven the capacity of indigenous education in decolonizing the African mind and redirecting it to its authentic track. This potency is glaring in unique psychological, metaphysical, epistemological and cognitive ways of knowing and relating to nature, realities and issues domiciled in indigenous African education.

Indigenous African education therefore has contents necessary for massive liberation of the African mind from the psychic complexes and patterns planted in it by the colonial situation. Indigenous African education is however devoid of western ideas but not hesitant in incorporating useful ideas that addresses African predicaments and global problems. Hence, it is an education that is dynamic in borrowing ideas from other cultures of the world and adapting them to serve African interest. Along this lane, the dynamism of African indigenous education also extends to addressing the present African mind-set and portraying the way forward.

For effective results, indigenous education must be driven by indigenous languages to ensure better understanding of nature, better determination of human character, accurate evolving of true African indigenous theories, ideologies and solutions that will be capable of solving African predicaments. Worth noting at this point is that massive indigenous education towards decolonization of the African mind does not need western standards or approval but African leadership, elites' and intellectuals' supports. Decolonization of the African mind is therefore a journey of self-discovery and self-actualization. Importance attached to this journey will definitely enable it to re-awaken a larger African population towards mental freedom from western and other foreign imposed values and beliefs that are detrimental to African stability, community empowerment and sustainable existence.

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