

# AFROGOGY, EPISTEMIC DECOLONISATION AND THE IMPERATIVE OF A HUMANITIES-BASED PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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## Abstract

*Education is typically lauded as a primary factor in developmental progress. However, despite its continuing emphasis on education, the African continent continues to struggle with its developmental progress. This paper avers that one of the reasons for this struggle is the sidelining of the Humanities in developmental efforts. It argues that the Humanities play a primary role in developmental efforts by producing well rounded graduates with critical assessment and interpretive skills, able to explore, expose and develop their identities. The crucial exploration, exposition and development of African identities is, however, best done through decolonised curricula and pedagogies. This paper therefore proffers Afrogy as a pedagogy designed to foster reflection and action in learners. It avers that Afrogy advocates for an education system that is not only inclusive of African histories and cultures, but also actively engages with them to foster critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility among learners. By prioritizing the lived experiences and indigenous knowledge systems of African peoples, Afrogy challenges the dominance of Western educational paradigms and promotes a more holistic and equitable approach to learning.*

**Keywords:** Afrogy, Epistemic decolonisation, Humanities, Interdisciplinarity.

## Introduction: A Dystopian system

Africa remains caught in the grip of underdevelopment, with many of its countries classified as under-developing states in the global index of development. This dystopic phenomenon is credited to multi-causal factors, with particular emphasis on the colonial and neo-colonial experiences of African states. The colonial experience has been criticised for its entrenchment of western hegemonies as experienced in its direct and indirect socio-economic and political control which displaced African endogenous institutions (Mamdani, 1996, p. 17). This displacement was further compounded by a 'desocialisation of African education' where civilisation and modernity were equated with western education, with a resultant effect of breeding young Africans eager to assimilate Eurocentric epistemes and languages (Mazrui, 1978). The colonial experience thus, birthed a generation of Africans whose criteria for modernity, success and development were drawn from Eurocentric standards. Divorced and alienated from their endogenous epistemes, Africans remained under colonial rule until internal and external factors led to struggles for political independence (Kifordu, 2013). Political

independence, or decolonisation as it was then known, came with its own challenges, including political turmoil, economic hardships and cultural displacements occasioned by agglomerating differing cultural and ethnic groups together to form administrative territories (Kifordu, 2013, p. 89). However, these challenges have been dwarfed by the recurring struggles of African countries to attain and maintain relevance in the global committee of nations.

Many African countries are thus, caught in a seemingly unending utopian struggle – for development, and ultimately, global relevance. A major question arising from this struggle is why do African countries continue to toe the developmental footsteps as laid by the colonisers? African countries are plagued by underdevelopment and critical examinations of these countries reveal diverse policies and strategies that have been unsuccessfully adopted and adapted, all geared towards developmental progress. In 2000, the United Nations weighed in by adopting the strategy of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); goals and targets intended to bring about development, and encourage closer relations between the developed Global North, and the underdeveloped Global South (Ogunrotifa, 2012). The MDGs programme ended in 2015 and, while some African countries met the targeted goals, such achievements proved irrelevant in global circles. The MDGs themselves have been criticised as a form of colonialism, with claims that the motive behind the goals was aimed at encouraging a neocolonial exploitation of resources in developing countries (Amin, 2006). Such views lead one to wonder therefore whether there is any correlation between the act of colonisation and underdevelopment.

As a form of response to the question as to whether there is any link between the act of colonisation and underdevelopment, many scholars have, echoing Amin's convictions, linked colonialism, and its new mode, neocolonialism, as crucial factors in Africa's underdevelopment (Nkrumah, 1966; Rodney, 1972; Serequeberhan, 1998). Of particular relevance to this work is the colonial/neocolonial phenomenon of 'cultural bomb' through which wa Thiong'o (1986, p. 3) contends that colonisers isolated and estranged Africans from their African roots. While wa Thiong'o submits that this isolation and estrangement is achieved using the imperialist tool of language subjugation, this work's cognitive orientation explicates how, using education as a tool of oppression and subjugation, Africa's educational institutions remain bastions of imperialism in their colonial Eurocentric worldviews and epistemological traditions.

**Epistemic Decolonisation:** The colonial experience, through its subjugation of local languages, culture and institutions resulted in epistemic violence, that is, the “deliberate, total and effective destruction, wiping out and annihilation of the intellectual heritage of Africans and the knowledge systems generated by Africans over many millennia” (Bewaji, 2015, p. 38). Spivak's (1994, p. 80) concept of epistemic violence aptly defines the current phenomenon in African educational systems where endogenous epistemes of former colonies remain subjugated and dominated by

Eurocentric and Western epistemes. As Mbembe (2016, p. 32) contends, till date, “(m)ost universities still follow the hegemonic 'Eurocentric epistemic canon' that 'attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production.' This phenomenon is viewed as a causal factor in the quest for development, given that the products of these educational systems remain alienated from their cultures, and their acquired knowledge (AK) is of little relevance to societal issues. Epistemic decolonisation is, therefore, the critical undoing of Eurocentric hegemonies in African universities and its replacement with new reconstructed curricula which take their bearing from African concerns (Akoleowo, 2021, p. 437). Tobi (2020, pp. 3-5) notes that this form of decolonisation is essential for the following reasons: to ensure epistemic independence for Africans through the provision of a horizontal field of research in which questions relating to African concerns are raised and answered; to restore the lost value of indigenous languages and cultures; and to recognise the validity and legitimacy of indigenous knowledge systems and the illegitimacy of Euroamerican hegemonies. Deriving from the above, epistemic decolonisation involves a critique of Eurocentric episteme(s) and recognition of the validity of 'subaltern' knowledge systems.

Approaches to epistemic decolonisation fall under two broad groups: Research and Academia. Under research, scholars including Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Achille Mbembe and Sophie Oluwole have theorised on the essential nature of decolonial research, research based on indigenous knowledge beliefs and practices. They argue that as presently constituted, African scholars conduct researches which are of little benefit to their immediate communities and which are targeted at a western audience, what Hountondji labels extraversive research. Decolonising the academia involves the recognition that the first step in decolonisation efforts lies in scholars' involvement in this exercise. As Hountondji (2009, p. 129) avers, scholars are saddled with the task of developing decolonial traditions of knowledge from which future scholarship derive their agendas and methodologies. This paper derives its framework from the latter approach to argue that 1) Afrology is a viable model for developing decolonial traditions of knowledge and 2) recognising the Humanities as best positioned to equip students with the critical, intellectual tools of enquiry through which fundamental questions and concerns can be raised which help to tackle Western hegemony, is critical to resolving the dystopia in African educational systems.

**Afrology:** Afrology is a little known term that refers to an educational philosophy and methodology that acknowledges, values and privileges the unique histories, traditions, and knowledge systems of people of African descent. It is a derivative of two terms: the prefix 'Afro' - denoting a connection to or emphasis on African roots or heritage, and 'pedagogy' - the theory and practice of teaching and learning, encompassing the methods, strategies, and techniques used to facilitate learning and promote student development (Oxford Dictionary; Cambridge Dictionary.) Afrology can, therefore, be defined as a philosophy of education rooted in African and African diasporic cultures, experiences, and perspectives. It is a relatively new teaching method which finds its

footing in criticisms leveled at Critical Pedagogy (CP), the teaching philosophy drawn on by educators, to argue that students are active participants in the teaching process. While pedagogy is conceived as the study of teaching and learning, critical pedagogy concerns itself with how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns. As a teaching approach, CP holds that the onus is on the teacher to expose the student to issues of social justice and equality while teaching (Muhammad & Uddin, 2019). Traditionally attributed to Freire's educational philosophy, it presents on the one hand as a liberating, transforming philosophy of education; one in which the colonised are liberated from their colonisers through the stimulation of their critical consciousness. On the other hand, it is a problem-posing educational philosophy which aims to create, together with the students, "the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*" (Freire, 2005, p. 81). Here, it is characterised by what Freire refers to as 'acts of cognition,' when the dichotomy between teacher and student is removed and replaced with the teacher-as-student and student-as-teacher approach where all are co-explorers of the epistemic universe

However, despite its wide acceptance, Agozino (2010, p. 38) argues that the CP does not fit in precisely with the reality of contemporary African higher education. Agozino justifies his argument on two grounds, through a critical analysis of the concepts and the students involved. In relation to the concepts involved, Agozino avers that the word 'pedagogy' implies a pediatric process. The use of this word in the term 'Critical Pedagogy' therefore seems to imply a process where students are behaviourally motivated, with awards of grades utilised as a form of social control. In terms of the student-beneficiaries of this philosophy of education, Agozino argues that, while CP was formulated for the 'de-humanised, illiterate peasants' of rural Brazil, contemporary students of Africa's higher institutions are neither de-humanised nor illiterate and as such cannot be held as appropriate targets of the CP.

In light of these inadequacies, Agozino argues that 'androgogy' and 'Afrogogy' best describes the teaching philosophies adopted by African scholars. Androgogy is the theory of adult learning that holds that adults learn best when involved in planning and evaluating their own learning. Based on the notion that children and adult learning can be distinguished by the different motivating factors, it advocates for learning activities that are relevant to contemporary realities and problem centered (Leasure et al., 2009). With androgogy, the teacher recognises that his/her students are not the oppressed, de-humanised illiterates of Freire's CP, but are in fact, fully human, privileged members of the society. As he avers, many of these students occupy more privileged positions in society than their teachers, as such, it is inconceivable to adopt an approach that conceptualises them as what they are not.

Afrogogy derives from Afrocentricity, the "epistemological and methodological foundations for an Afrocentric curriculum based on an African perspective but aiming at

global understanding” (Chawane, 2016, p. 78). As such, it cannot be properly understood without a requisite understanding of Afrocentricity itself. The next section shall provide such an understanding.

**Afrocentricity:** Afrocentricity is a philosophical and theoretical framework that centers African people and their experiences as the primary subjects of analysis. It emerged as a response to the marginalisation and distortion of African perspectives by Eurocentric viewpoints. In response, it argues for a paradigmatic shift in the study and understanding of African phenomena - from Eurocentric viewpoints to African-centered perspectives. As a theoretical framework, Afrocentricity emphasises the importance of African ideals and perspectives as the starting point for analyzing African phenomena. Proponents of this theory aver that main crisis in the African world is the decentering of African people from their own narrative and their unconscious adoption of Western worldviews and perspectives, leading them to exist on borrowed, European terms (Mazama, 2001; Asante, 2017). As a challenge to such unconscious adoption of traditional Eurocentric perspectives of Africa, Afrocentricity encourages Africans to view themselves as agents, actors, and participants in their own history (Chawane, 2016).

As a critical theory and method that recognizes the centrality of African ideals and ideas for the analysis and synthesis of African phenomena, Afrocentricity depicts the unique worldviews of African people and provides a tool for examining the intellectual history of African nationalism (Okur, 1993). It also refers to the intellectual work of African philosophers, historians, and sociologists including Molefi Kete Asante, Maulana Karenga, Carol D. Lee and Marianna Aniam among others, describing the cultural values of people of African descent and emphasising the elimination of their oppression and spiritual alienation (Asante, 1991 & 2017; Myers, 1993; Asante & Karenga, 2006; Dei & Arlo, 2023). It is a philosophy, life-style, worldview, perspective, movement, analytical approach, and cultural orientation, influenced by African culture and history that has gained traction as a significant Pan-African force; one that has been applied across various disciplines, to provide a culturally relevant framework for understanding and addressing issues faced by African people.

### **Afrology as a Philosophy of Education**

As noted earlier, Afrology, also referred to as Afrocentric pedagogy, Afrocentric education or Afropedagogy, is not a widely known or well-practiced approach compared to other educational theories such as pedagogy and andragogy. Given its developing nature, it is premised on the recognition that mainstream educational systems often neglect or marginalize the contributions and experiences of African and African diasporic communities. As pedagogy, it is an approach to teaching and learning that centers the experiences, knowledge systems, and cultural norms of African people. It seeks to empower students by providing them with a curriculum that reflects their heritage and identity, while also challenging them to engage critically with social issues affecting their communities. In doing this, it differs from traditional approaches in



several ways. First, it places greater emphasis on oral traditions and community-based learning than on written texts. By incorporating diverse aspects of African culture such as art, music, literature, and traditional practices, the curriculum aims to empower students with a positive sense of identity, pride, and connection to their heritage.

It also seeks to challenge Euro-centric perspectives on history, culture, and society by presenting alternative narratives that center African experiences (Israel, 1992; Schiele, 1996; Mwinzi, 2022). Its multidisciplinary approach enables the teaching of subjects within broader historical contexts to not only highlight Africa's contributions to various fields like science, philosophy, mathematics, and literature, but to also challenge demeaning stereotypes while showcasing Africa's rich intellectual traditions (Horsthemke, 2010; Waghid, 2020). Students are particularly encouraged to critically examine historical accounts to identify biases or omissions regarding Africa while developing analytical skills necessary for understanding complex social issues affecting people of African descent today. By advocating for interactive and participatory teaching methods that engage learners in the learning process, including dialogue, collaboration, and experiential learning, drawing from communal practices and collective problem-solving, Afrogy allows for prioritising cooperative over competitive learning environments. This encourages students to view themselves not simply as passive recipients of information but as active agents capable of making change in their communities.

Afrogy can be considered a philosophy of education because it is an approach to teaching and learning that reflects a particular worldview and set of values. As such, it offers a distinct perspective on what counts as knowledge, how it should be transmitted, and what the goals of education should be. As a philosophy of education, it seeks to empower students by validating their cultural identity while also challenging them to critically engage with social issues affecting their communities. By centering African experiences and perspectives in the educational process, it aims to promote greater equity and social justice within schools and beyond. It is a pedagogy that is rooted in African epistemologies and ontologies that emphasizes community-based knowledge production, orality, intergenerational transmission of wisdom, and the interconnectedness of all things, principles that are reflected in its approach to curriculum design, instructional strategies, assessment methods, and classroom management. By centering African experiences and perspectives, it aims to create educational systems that are not only relevant but also empowering, fostering a new generation of critical thinkers and active participants in their societies (Horsthemke, 2017).

Afrogy has been used in a variety of educational settings across Africa and the diaspora. While some critics have argued that it risks promoting essentialist or separatist views about race and culture, proponents argue that it provides an important counterbalance to dominant white-centered models of education (Appiah, 1993;

Horsthemke & Enslin, 2009). It is in this light that it is regarded as an educational pedagogy that seeks to decolonize education by challenging Eurocentric paradigms and methodologies that have historically dominated educational systems and consequently, promote the validation and incorporation of African knowledge systems, perspectives, and worldviews into mainstream education. It is one that advocates for “critical, activist, and Africa-centered scholarship,” one that can be adopted by anyone irrespective of identity, but which is devoid of the Eurocentric biases of Freire's Critical Pedagogy (Agozino, 2010, p. 38). Given the need to restructure the curriculum in ways that Africans begin to see themselves from the perspectives of their being Africans as well as gain relevant problem solving skills, this research adopts Afrology as a viable mode of attaining epistemic decolonisation in Africa. However, it recognises that such decolonisation is dependent on the equipping of students with critical and interpretative skills, a task for the field of disciplines under the 'Humanities' umbrella.

### **Afrology, the Humanities and STEM Disciplines**

The Humanities have evolved from their beginnings as liberal arts studied by Greek citizens, through to the Renaissance period where they transcended praxis to theory, to their contemporary conceptualisation as the fields of study which privilege qualitative over quantitative explanations of reality (Ezeigbo, 2009). As Prinsloo (2016) holds, the Humanities comprise of disciplines which play vital roles in epistemic decolonisation by virtue of the fact that they equip students with the ability to reflect on and attempt deeply intellectual issues. As such, the Humanities are best positioned in determinations of how to: 1) Conceptualise the educational system such that its goals of decolonisation are well formulated; 2) Conceptualise the current dystopia in the educational system as well as the general implications of such dystopia; and 3) Conceptualise the methodologies at arriving at the utopian future despite the dystopian present.

African universities began as colonial legacies. They were the vanguard institutions for the colonisers through which western epistemic hegemony bred not only epistemic, but also disciplinary violence; epistemic by way of devaluing indigenous knowledge systems, and disciplinary by pitting STEM and ICT disciplines against the Humanities and Social Sciences. The dystopian nature of Africa's educational systems is thus, directly traceable to the colonial phenomenon, one in which the scholarship culture is also dystopic; where students read merely to pass examinations rather than for creativity or critical reflection and where learning processes also remain rooted in the colonial structure of banking, where pieces of information are deposited in the minds of students without their critically considering and accepting or rejecting them. The role of the humanities in this regard in the bid to aid decolonisation is to raise fundamental questions and challenge prevailing ideologies. Thus far, the humanities have enabled understandings of effects of the colonial experience, including the epistemicide and epistemic violence hitherto identified, the perpetuation of the 'I' and 'Other' distinction between the West and Africa, and the alienation of Africans from their roots and endogenous ideologies (Nyamnjoh 2015; Afolayan et al., 2021).

The Humanities are also the primary tool for exposing and understanding the history

and culture of African societies. Such exposure and understanding is crucial to the task of Afrogogy, given its emphasis on African-centred curricula. Taking philosophy as an example of disciplines under the Humanities rubric, all of which are typically viewed as abstract, theoretical enterprises, Owoseni(2015) contends that these disciplines transcend beyond theory to practical relevance. Philosophy is intrinsically practical, as seen from its critical nature which is one of reflective concern on experiential concepts. Thus, philosophy, like other disciplines in the Humanities, is a theoretical enterprise directed at practical experiencing in time and space. From this basis, he asserts that the Humanities are relevant in the “promotion of the virtue of humanism, civility and culture that would enhance world order” (2015, p. 243). In Khumbah's opinion, the global wave of market liberalism is responsible for the emphasis on STEM disciplines as the determinants of development, particularly in terms of the utilisation of products of such disciplines (2018). The beneficial returns of such emphasis in Western and Asian countries are tagged as reasons for advocating a similar emphasis on STEM disciplines in Africa, with proponents asserting that Africa's developmental challenges arise from its educational emphasis on the humanities and social sciences.

However, this position has been criticised by Akinwale (2005), for whom Africa's current emphasis on the STEM disciplines has not yielded any viable result. Nigeria's philosophy of education, premised on an emphasis on STEM over humanities, relies on a reductionist notion of development. This reductionist notion defines development as predominantly technological and economic, with an emphasis on economic growth fuelled by technological advancements. Akinwale contends that development transcends economic growth, and implies an improvement in the quality of human existence, which is not always economic. Being human and fulfilling the desires and potentials of humanity involves the recognition of an appropriate philosophical anthropology through which the knowledge of what it means to be human is acquired. Given that philosophical anthropology teaches that being human transcends economic concerns, developmental concerns must transcend economic growth and technological advancements.

### **Heterotopia: Epistemic decolonisation and the Humanities**

Decolonising the educational system involves more than merely removing colonial symbols or increasing the number of black academics, including African originated texts in the curriculum. As waThiong'O asserts, it is about rejecting the centrality of the West in Africa's understanding of itself and its place in the world and about re-centering ourselves, intellectually and culturally, and by redefining what is central and that is Africa. The 21st century portends a dystopian challenge to the Humanities in African, one where developmental policies have de-prioritised and sidelined them. The Humanities are essential for their bequeathal of values and common heritage, through the teaching of critical and analytical skills, and are the only disciplines which can understand and respond to ethical questions arising from STEM and ICT research.



The 21st century is engulfed with contemporary challenges of war, environmental degradation, global pandemics and health challenges, all in the face of increasing technological advancement. Such advancements threaten human lives, hinting at the elevation of transhumanism by the relegation of human kind to the fringes of development. The Humanities are necessary to counter this. However, while necessary to counter this, they are not sufficient. This, therefore, leads us to the notion of heterogeneity, the incorporation of different epistemic perspectives in teaching and research, a fundamental underpinning of interdisciplinarity.

Wholistic development in Africa stands on the tripod of African-centred epistemes, a recognition of the essential nature of the Humanities in human-related concerns and the weaving together of all human inquiries in interdisciplinary interaction. It involves the acceptance of an educational methodology which critically engages learners to think out solutions to problems of everyday existence as well as the recognition of the multifaceted nature of reality. The multifaceted nature of reality demands an appreciation of all disciplines of human inquiry in an interdisciplinary mode of collaborating for progress. Since Jantsch (1970) coined the words Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity, the two terms in rapport with a third term, Multidisciplinarity, have come to mean “the integration of one or more academic disciplines”; “the integration of one or more academic disciplines with extra-academic perspectives on a common (and usually a real-world, as opposed to a merely academic) problem” and “a juxtaposition of two or more academic disciplines focused on a single problem” respectively (Hoffman et al., 2012).

The marriage of disciplines creates a family where interdisciplinarity flows through streams of knowledge collaboration in search of solutions to problems seen across the broad spectrum of disciplines (Popper, 1962; Zuo & Zhao, 2018). Epistemic decolonisation requires a plurality of epistemic approaches and perspectives in order to transcend its extant restriction to a disciplinary field of thematic concern, one typically limited to the Humanities (Chaka et al., 2018). Such interdisciplinary flow of knowledge creates additive, inclusive, holistic and interactive theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of reality, approaches that provide different perspectives to existential challenges. These differing approaches are brought together into a critical, synthetic whole capable of resolving complex real life problems through interdisciplinarity. Epistemic decolonisation not only requires interdisciplinary interaction between disciplines, it also demands confrontation with disciplines themselves (Bogues, 2007, p. 210). This demand is met in the Afrology framework, with Africa as the centre of the African knowledgeverse.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented Afrology and interdisciplinarity as essential necessities in the quest towards effective and sustainable decolonisation of African educational systems. It has argued that Afrology provides a viable mode of achieving African-centred

epistemes. It has also exposed the limitations inherent in a parochial approach to such decolonisation, thus, advocating for an interdisciplinary approach which analyses and synthesises differing methodological approaches into a viable whole.

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