

NKRUMAH'S PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIENCISM AS FRAMEWORK FOR AN EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

We argue that an educational revolution is required to address some of the multidimensional problems that the African continent faces. This suggests that there is a lack of credible human resources as a result of the patterns of education, socialisation and indoctrination brought about by the European colonisation. The educational poverty of the African region, south of the Sahara is the underlying factor behind most of the socio-cultural, political, religious and economic problems witnessed in Africa today. We make recourse to Kwame Nkrumah's social philosophy of *Consciencism* as a framework to bring about a mindset that is properly African in morality, originality and creativity; and yet modern by adapting critical and innovative attributes in order to bring about the educational revolution. Such a mind that is morally upright, creative, critical and innovative reflects originality, and a blend of them would inevitably result in development that Africa needs. We agree with Nkrumah and other scholars that colonialism contributed to the problems that Africa faces today, but however, contend that beneath the economic, cultural, religious, leadership/political and moral problems of Africa lies the fundamental problem, which is educational poverty. Employing the method of analysis and description, we shall use Nkrumah's *Consciencism* as a framework to propose a type of education that is rooted in African ethical values, yet critical and innovative, to bring about an educational revolution.

Introduction

Several decades after the end of juridical-administrative colonial domination, the African educational system is yet to surmount the impact of colonialism. Scholars are of the view that the remote cause of developmental backwardness in most African countries is the pattern of education adopted and imposed on Africans by the colonialists, whereby, there was no room for inputs from the African recipients, thereby, leading to a sort of cognitive depravity. This is evident in a widespread unenlightened and uninformed political and economic decision-making, policy formulation and implementations on the part of leaders, administrators, managers, workers, service-providers and the citizenry. So, by educational poverty, this research refers to a situation where our African education reflects the European thinking, and not the African worldview or material content. This can as well be seen as a lack of enlightenment. Enlightenment enables people to see the future consequences of today's actions and inactions, the wider implications they have on the society, and thus provides them with the basis and moral courage to make informed decisions.

The desire to change the narrative of colonial mental domination midwived by their pattern of education, socialisation and indoctrination, propelled respective African leaders at independence to formulate economic and political theories that could assert the complete independence of Africa from the colonialists and outline a new direction for Africa. They formulated different socialist theories which they claimed are uniquely African and properly conveyed the African perspective. Socialist ideologies such as Negritude, Consciencism Ujamaa, African Humanism were articulated by Aime Cesaire (1958) and Leopold S. Senghor (1956, 1962, 1975), Kwame Nkrumah (1964), Julius K. Nyerere (1969, 1973), Kenneth Kaunda (1966), respectively, to provide ideological frameworks for the 'new' Africa.

Notwithstanding, we consider Nkrumah's philosophy of Consciencism more appropriate because it is dynamic, reinventing, self-critical and progressive, unlike the other socialist ideologies that are anachronistic, romanticising, and as such inappropriate for a modern, changing and dynamic world. Also, our choice of Consciencism as a model ideology is because of its seamless applicability owing to the fact that Nkrumah identifies a single solution that can be applied to address several of Africa's problems, namely, 'mental emancipation', which for him, is a precondition for a social revolution to take place. However, while Nkrumah seems to suggest that 'crisis of identity' lies at the centre of Africa's problems, we argue that it is educational poverty which inhibits the possibility of critical, creative, innovative capacities and an enlightened mindset, which are necessary assets of the human resources. Thus, using Nkrumah's Consciencism as framework, we propose educational revolution as a single factor that can jump-start holistic social (cultural and religious), political and economic development in Africa.

Colonialism and its Effect on the Education of Africans

It has been argued by different scholars that the African social, political, economic and educational problems/backwardness can be attributed to the activities of colonialism in Africa. These are due to the unwholesome dimension employed. Scholars like Rodney (2009) and Alexander (2021) are of the view that the African colonial experience was particularly cruel, dehumanising and exploitative with primarily an economic intent. In the words of Rodney (2009), "Colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the so-called 'mother country'" (p. 177). This

goes to show that it was with an economic agenda that Europe decided to invade Africa in order to control the raw materials and labour on the continent, while the form of control which was direct colonial rule was racist in approach. The colonialists had the mindset that Africans sub-humans and deserved no ethical consideration in handling them (Odhiambo, 1995).

It is noteworthy that colonialism was not peculiar to Africa. Britain and German were colonised by the Romans, and the Romans even described the Germans as barbarians (Gilley, 2007; Tacitus p. 47). Likewise, some Asian countries as well as the Middle East, South America and North America were colonised by the Europeans. However, most of these countries has outlived their colonial experiences and moved on to become rated as advanced, while most African countries still struggle with the trauma of colonial experience and have remained largely underdeveloped.

While anti-colonial scholars such as Cesaire (1956), wa Thiong'o (1986), Wiredu (1966), Wilson (2014), Fanon (1963), Hira (2016), Shih-tsung (2008), Eze (2010, 2018) and a host of others have argued that the underdevelopment of Africa is a direct effect of colonialism, pro-colonialists include S. Chesterman (2004) and Bruce Gilley (2007) have eulogised it as a right action. Gilley, for instance, argues in his controversial article, "The Case for Colonialism" that "The notion that colonialism is always and everywhere, a bad thing needs to be rethought in the light of the grave human toll of a century of anti-colonial regimes and policies" (p. 7). For Gilley, there is nothing wrong with colonialism, and proposes that it should be reintroduced in the twenty-first century. He plays the victim for colonialism in his assertion that "For the last 100 years, Western colonialism has had a bad name" even when it has laudable benefits. He sees the condemnation of Western colonialism as unfair – not just to the Western colonisers but as an attitude that deprives Third World countries the chance to advance. But Hira (2016), in a rejoinder, "A decolonial critique of the racist case for colonialism", sees Gilley's article, the author himself and the decision to publish it as a sterling reflection of racism that characterised colonialism in the first place. He argues that ethical judgement and intellectual objectivity assessment of Gilley's opening statement in his article would be justified if placed as a corollary of "For the last 80 years, Hitler and Nazism have had a bad name" with "The Case for Hitler and Nazism" (p. 1). Hira's submission therefore, is that colonialism was wrong on ethical basis because of its cruelty. Hence, justifying it would mean justifying theft, rape and murder.

Like Hira, Cesaire (1956) condemns colonialism and describes it as an act that actually "decivilize" the coloniser and turns him into a barbarian. Eze (2018) substantiates this that "the very act of colonial practices degrades the colonialist who remains a residual subject of his own action" (p. 680). Fanon (1963), in the same tone decries the Algerian experience when French colonialism prohibited the Arab language – an attempt to completely annihilate the cultural identity of the people. wa Thiong'o (1986) supports this with the assertion that language is a powerful ingredient of the identity of a people, and as such, to replace a people's language with another is to distort their identity. Shih-tsung is in agreement with Cook that through conquest, coercion and occupation or settlement in the African territory, Europe successfully seized Africa's power to decide her fate (2008). Rodney sees this loss of power by Africans to the colonialists as the very root of underdevelopment in Africa (2009).

Alexander (2021) corroborates Rodney that the inability of Africans to be in control of their socio-cultural, socio-religious, political, economic and pedagogical/educational

affairs is itself an indication of underdevelopment; for, it is when there is self-determination in these areas that everything else can work in cohesion to ensure progress. We maintain that among the indices of development mentioned above, poverty of education is central. Where there is proper education, the people concerned would be enlightened sufficiently to determine their future on the basis of the quality and effectiveness of the principles that guide their social, political and economic affairs. When these are properly taken care of, holistic development would be sustainable. But development is farfetched in Africa because of the defective system of education that seems entrenched.

The education curriculum introduced in Africa by the colonialists and their forebears was fashioned to perpetuate the European hegemonic agenda. In the long run, the reality is that the African is miseducated, and their intellect is Western-fashioned. Wilson (2014) argues on this ground that “if our education is not about gaining real power, we are being miseducated and misled and we will die “educated” and misled” (p. 4). The African intellectual structure, thus, inevitably becomes dislocated and European configured. The African intellect, to an extent, therefore, is a European construction – constructed with the tool of colonialism (Alexander, 2021).

Hence, the colonial system of education and the intellectual appurtenances therefrom, is inauthentic. An educational system that is authentically African cannot be developed under the structure of colonial system of education, and as such, cannot guarantee real development. This is why Rodney (2009) avers that “education is crucial in any type of society for the preservation of the lives of its members and the maintenance of the social structure” (p. 272). But with the eroding of the African-type informal and formal education, there is hardly a foundation upon which to build an authentically African educational system that has not already been conditioned by the Western educational structure. In the same way that the African is a social construction of Europe, the African educational output is more or less a manifestation of Western intellectual conditioning (Wilson, 2009; Alexander, 2021).

In a nutshell, we agree with Alexander (2021) that colonial education which is the undoing of the indigenous African system of education is designed only for the colonies. It is not the same as foreign education. The goal of colonial education is (1) to remove the African from his reality, so that he sees, understands and interprets reality through the Western lenses. (2) To equip the natives to aid in their scheme of exploiting them (the natives). In this case, the colonialist impresses it on the African that he is inferior and that the European is superior. (3) To suppress the initiative of the African to be sheepishly obedient; to be calm-headed and even-minded to oppression, and not to be rebellious or challenge the authority of colonial power. (p. 92)

What the above quote implies is that the colonial system of education designed specially for Africa was meant for Africans to accept in totality Western-established facts and not to think on their own innovatively. All these designs will make Africans intellectual dwarf so that they do not think for themselves but depend on the knowledge of others.

The foregoing is not an attempt to completely lay blames on the colonialists for Africa’s woes. Neither is it an exoneration of indigenes of Africa from the cruel activities of the colonialists. As a matter of fact, it was through the complicity of their African

collaborators that the slave traders and the colonialists had the leeway to carry out their programmes with minimal resistance or opposition in most cases. This is not also to say that there are no gains of colonialism at all. But given that the underlying motive of the colonialists was economic and its concomitant dehumanisation of the people, what appears as favour to the colonised is only a training of manpower to make the Euro-colonial hegemonic scheme effective. On a comparative scale, one can rightly argue that demerits of colonialism far outweigh the merits. The most negative legacy of colonialism in Africa, therefore, is the distorting of the African knowledge base – knowledge about the self (identity); knowledge about the world (worldview); knowledge of the consequences of action and inaction (enlightenment); hence, educational poverty.

A pertinent question one may ask, should Africans continue to patronise a knowledge system that has perpetuated widespread educational poverty unchallenged? Although, Africans seem deeply immersed in the tradition of the colonial system of education, a conscious effort at overhauling the incongruous system, as conceptualised in Nkrumah's philosophy of Consciencism would be a rewarding effort.

Basic Tenets of Consciencism

This section focuses on the principles of Nkrumah's Consciencism as it applies to educational revolution and the emancipation of the African continent. A vivid picture of the educational problem of Africa is painted in Nkrumah's introduction to *Consciencism – The Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution*. He gives a synopsis of the background of the crisis of the African personality. He gives a synopsis of the defective intellectual materials with which the knowledge of hand-picked colonial students overseas was built. With the Western philosophical ideas to which they were introduced early in life, they lost contact with their traditional African background. This made it inevitable for them to be inclined to giving a philosophical account of the universe with a Western *weltanschauung* (bird eye-view) provided it was expressed in what Nkrumah (1964) describes as “vague, mellifluous terms” (8). This results in a personality split whereby, the worldview that one expresses is extraneous to one's background ontology. In the long run, such people became what Nkrumah describes in *Towards Colonial Freedom*, and what Tempels (1959), Chuku (2007), Fanon (2000) and Odimegwu (2008) variously describe as the real enemies of Africa who are African by birth but Western in mind-set; who exploit and suppress developments in their respective countries. In order to have a blend of one's knowledge and one's being, therefore, Nkrumah (1964) maintains that a new education in philosophy for the African must draw its sources from African roots by critically applying any element that is ‘unaffrican’ without which it would amount to practicing without thought and thinking without practicing. In his words, “practice without thought is blind; thought without practice is empty” (p. 78).

Harmonising thought and practice would entail creatively producing a praxis that arises from a critical evaluation of Islamic, Euro-Christian and African elements which all exist in the contemporary African society (Okadigbo, 1985). According to Nkrumah, the African society is characterised by three segments: the traditional, the western and the Islamic. These segments exist uneasily, because the principles underlying them conflict with one another. Of these elements, the Western and Islam are alien; but it may be impossible to completely ignore them since post-colonial Africa was no longer the old society of authentic African values, but rather a society enlarged by these Islamic and Euro-Christian influences.

As such, a new harmony becomes imperative. This harmony, for Nkrumah, should be an ideology that solidifies in a philosophical statement, and it should at the same time uphold the original humanised principles of Africa. Hence, he proposes such a philosophical statement to be called philosophical Consciencism;

For it will give the theoretical basis for an ideology where the aim shall be to contain the African experience of the Islamic and western contents into the African society and, by gestation employ them for the harmonious growth and development of the society (Nkrumah, 1964, p. 82)

By this statement, Consciencism attempts to harmonise the three segments so that they fit into the African personality submerged during colonisation in order to foster growth and development (Omoregbe, 2010). Secondly, Nkrumah (1964) views the social-political practice of Consciencism as thwarting the “emergence or the solidifying of classes” as conceived by Marxism (p. 98).

To achieve the above, Nkrumah (1964) admonishes that alien elements (Western and Islam) should be seen and rightly so as nothing more than experiences of the African society; as failure to treat them this way will lead to the society being racked by what he calls “the most malignant schizophrenia” (p. 79). Nkrumah maintains that the attitude of Africans towards Western and Islamic experiences or elements must be useful. And one way to do this is to be guided by thought without which practice is blind. This deliberate thought and practice will lead to a social revolution. How can this happen? Nkrumah says that a mental or intellectual revolution must be the basis for a social revolution to take place. The revolution is one in which the thinking and philosophy of actors are purposively directed towards the redemption of the African society. The content of this philosophy, which is the driving force of this revolution, Nkrumah says, must be the environment and living conditions of the African people. The intellectual content of this philosophy must be created therefrom.

This philosophy will form the basis for the liberation of the African. The liberation of Africa is not only the emancipation of the African continent but the emancipation of humanity in general. This emancipation, he says, requires two aims: “First, the restitution of egalitarianism of human society, and second, the logistic mobilization of all our resources towards the attainment of that restitution” (p. 78). In the long run, a social revolution is orchestrated. The bulwark that guides this social revolution is what Nkrumah (1964) refers to as philosophical Consciencism. Nkrumah defines Consciencism as

the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the western and the Islamic and Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. (p. 79)

What Nkrumah means is that foreign elements should not be swallowed hook, line and sinker but should be sieved, scrutinised, adapted and incorporated into the African personality in such a way that marks of their original forms would be insignificant if not obliterated.

In the same vein, Alexander (2021) conceptualises Nkrumah’s Consciencism as a dynamic, stimulating and evolutionary philosophy that is embedded with the tools of criticality and creativity for the purpose of emancipating the African towards the holistic development of the African continent. This understanding by Alexander is succinct and

properly situates Consciencism as a framework for an educational revolution which is our aim in this paper.

Consciencism and the Educational Transformation of the African Continent

One unique feature of Consciencism which makes it stand out from other socialist ideologies articulated by Africans is that it is dynamic, combative, creative, self-critical and progressive. The dynamism of Consciencism lies in its applicability in any given context, epoch or geography. As a combative philosophy, Consciencism is in the same ideological classification with Marxism which is itself, socialist – opposed to classism and advocating egalitarianism. The creative character of Consciencism is in its emphasis on forging a new ideological pathway from the fusion of different background ontologies. Also, although, Consciencism is heavily influenced by an alien ideology (Marxism), its very nature makes it possible for it to reflect on itself and regenerate its thesis to be authentically African elements, yet modern and progressive. Then, as a progressive ideology, Consciencism discourages anachronism and romanticising of the African past, while radically pushing for positive changes in the society. Central in the features of Consciencism are the cognitive tools of criticality and creativity.

With the tools of criticality and creativity which Consciencism advocates, it will not just rid and liberate the African from the enslaving content of colonial education, it will fashion new and better patterns of education that will equip the African with the intellectual capacity to solve Africa's multifaceted problems. In this way, the educational poverty of the African shall have been effectively tackled.

Addressing educational poverty in the way indicated by Consciencism translates to an educational revolution. It is worth mentioning again that the form of educational transformation advocated in this paper is that which puts into question the content of the Eurocentric curriculum that is operative in the contemporary African system of education, and by so doing, fashion out what is originally African in knowledge production. This concern has constituted a relatively recent topical discourse on decolonisation and Africanisation of the education curriculum in institutions in Africa (Etieyebo 2016a, 2016b; Chemhuru, 2016; Sesanti, 2016; Mweshi, 2016; Chimakonam, 2016; Chimakonam and Nweke, 2016). This implies that there is a fundamental problem with the system of education practiced in Africa today. Chimakonam (2016) corroborates this in his argument that the intellectual sink of the African is due “partly to the philosophy curriculum that undergirds his education whether in the sciences, the humanities or the social sciences” (p. 85).

This colonial education curriculum in Africa, according to Chimakonam has two problems: First, since it is colonial, it stifles the creative originality of a child. Secondly, it is fitted with alien background logic which he says, estranges and condemns its victims to a lifetime of imitation (2019). This is a brilliant design to keep Africans perpetually under the hegemonic scheme of Europe. The European colonial education is not meant to train the African to think. Its curriculum only prescribes facts and demands that such facts be learnt the way they are. Using a predominantly or exclusively Western curriculum by institutions to train Africans alienates them from their roots and incapacitates them mentally (Chimakonam and Nweke, 2018). The inevitable outcome is that the African intellect is conditioned, and a conditioned intellect is apparently a distorted intellect. Hardly can such an intellect be objectively critical, creative or innovative. The kind of intellect that an entirely Western-

structured educational curriculum produces is bereft of originality, creativity/innovativeness and objective criticality. It takes only a radical and self-liberated mind to break free from such mental shackles. To this end, Chimakonam proposes a curriculum transformation and the construction of one that is based on African logic (2019). This background African logic is in line with the transformation agenda of this research, and as a matter of fact, undergirds any transformation course that must be truly African.

In a nutshell, the educational revolution advocated here, is not necessarily the rejection of the classroom knowledge dictated by the rather miseducating Eurocentric curriculum (Nweke 2019) at all levels of schooling in Africa. It is rather a call to have a deeper reflection on the content of the Western-structured African system of education so as to critically pick and choose what is really relevant to the African world, and entrench as much as possible what enhances the African intellectual advancement and its concomitant outputs for the emancipation of the African mind and the development of Africa. Undertaking an educational revolution, therefore, will broaden the scope of the mental horizon of the African, liberate his mind to think freely, and encourage him to create novel and diverse ideas (Chimakonam & Nweke, 2018).

Conclusion

Education is much more than certification. It entails character formation, criticality and creativity, which are essential elements for an enduring development to take place. Hence, the focus of this article has been that an educational revolution is needed to properly address some of the problems that the African continent, south of the Sahara is faced with. We have identified educational poverty as a single factor that underlies some of the problems of African nations which include social (cultural and religious) problems, political crises and economic quagmire. We submit that Africans do not only have the task to change the continent but the moral obligation to reposition the continent through an educational revolution.

Using Nkrumah's dynamic philosophy of Consciencism as a framework, we have argued that a critical attitude towards whatever is alien to the African world is a conscious act that would ensure that contents of education in Africa are carefully selected so as to blend elements of modernity and what is originally African in order to forge progress. With the rational qualities of criticality, authenticity, originality, creativity and enlightenment, Africa, south of the Sahara may develop exponentially.

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