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# CHAPTER SEVEN



## **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE GLOBAL PUBLIC SPHERE: QUESTIONING THE ORDER OF OTHERNESS**

**Sharon Adetutu Omotoso**

**How can a Black be “accepted” or “respected” by whites when he has rejected himself? The fact of the matter is that no one can call Blacks “inferior” without their consent. (Ajittey, 1992:31)**

### **Introduction**

Black consciousness represents a cognizant and continuous struggle between the self and the other with self being dominant over the other. Questioning the idea of otherness, the works of Satre (1956), Fanon (1967), and Beauvoir (2010) among others explicates how the black race is defined based on colonialists' and post-colonial experiences. Their definitions are laden with oppressive, suppressive and exploitative concepts. As Birt (1997:206) asserts, “all oppression begets alienation, and total oppression begets total alienation . . . the oppression of black people from the time of slavery to the current era has been total oppression”. Consequently several movements for self-expression and emancipation had sprung up. These include Pan-Negroism, Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, Negritude among others. The idea of black consciousness embodies the definition of African personality. Beyond the ontological dimension to black consciousness is a communication dimension which has not enjoyed sufficiently robust scholarly attention. This paper sets out to establish that otherness is closely connected with communication. It seeks to examine how otherness is communicated for mindset development. It inquires into the determinants of one's self-description either as a self or as an other. Here, I argue that the notion of otherness is neither innate nor self developed but disseminated through several avenues such as gestures, culture transfer, international relations and international cooperation among others; all of which ride on the wings of communication.

The idea of public sphere presupposes a cultural space between the state and the civil society where individuals meet on an equal basis to discuss issues of general interest. It is a realm within social life in which public opinion, which is accessible to all can be fashioned in an atmosphere that is disinterested in class positions. Players in the public sphere are connected through a shared motivation to participate in the discussion of issues of general interest. In the 18th century, newspapers, books, salons and debating societies characterized by openness to citizens, were the apparatuses of this sphere. However, in recent past, and in consideration of media roles regarding political, economic and social issues, the media; radio, television, newspapers, including the new media such as the Internet are intimately connected to the idea of public sphere, and deemed to constitute its contemporary apparatus.

Considering, especially the centre/periphery dichotomy in the global arena, the current global public sphere mirrors notions of otherness. It must be noted that the Habermasian (1962, 1992) public sphere itself reflects situations with a distinctive self and other if the primary objective is to create a platform for debates to discuss burning issues among citizens (one separate from authority of the church and the state). Such debates rouse attention to matters of identity. It has been argued that Habermas idealized the bourgeoisie public sphere, whilst neglecting the plebeian public sphere. Though made in reference to classification of citizens in the global public sphere this argument can be extended to the classification of states as first, second and third worlds, signifying supremacy, competition and followership respectively. Just as Omotoso & Layode (2013:188) assert that “the future of Africa can hardly be imagined without examining the extent to which the continent is relevant in the global power game”, an unprejudiced global public sphere will be difficult to achieve without the black race developing and upholding the notions of sameness, which will aid the communication and entrenchment of her values in the global market of ideas. From the fore goings, this paper is divided into five sections; section one, is the introduction, followed by a preliminary conceptual clarification. Section three discusses the Problematic and Critique of Euro-centrism in Understanding Afro-centrism, the next section, which is the fourth, questions the order of otherness in the global public sphere and the last section is the summary and conclusion.

### **Preliminary Conceptual Definition**

Conceptualization becomes necessary so that key ideas are clarified and a tone is set for the discourse. I begin with the idea of Black Consciousness, a concept, idea and movement which evolved historically within a particular cultural, socio-economic and political milieu and reflects the experiences of blacks around the world (Etieyibo 2012:19). Without ignoring the fact that scholars define black consciousness from several perspectives, it is noteworthy that in the past (particularly in Southern Africa), Black consciousness was seen as a part of African Nationalism, yet, it was argued to be distinct from Pan-Africanism, although careful consideration of both shows that they operate on similar grounds. Pan-Africanism seeks to regenerate and unify Africa and promote a feeling of oneness among the people of the African world (Esebede

1994:4). He (Esebede) defines Pan-Africanism as a political and cultural phenomenon that regards Africa, Africans, and African descendants abroad as a unit, calling attention to their common experiences. It inculcates pride in African values and glorifies the African past. For Omotoso & Layode (2013:189),

Pan-Africanism is a socio-cultural movement for Black consciousness. It is a philosophy that represents the aggregation of the historical, cultural, artistic, scientific, and ethical legacies of Africans from the past to the present with the aims of unifying Africans and protecting them as a people of collective identity struggling to evolve a more positive image of themselves.

This is against the bastardization and degradation such as slavery and colonialism experienced in their history. The foregoing suggests that Pan-Africanism is both an idea and a movement. According to Esebede (1994:4) any adequate definition of Pan-Africanism must include its political and cultural aspects. Following this, Odamtten in his classification of Pan-Africanism (2013:173), identifies three major forms: intellectual Pan-Africanism, cultural-religious Pan-Africanism, and political Pan-Africanism.

Intellectual Pan-Africanism is reflected in the academic or systematic study of African and African Diaspora societies and cultures, their dynamic past, and their contemporary conditions with a view to ameliorating such conditions and promoting unity among people of African descent. Cultural-religious Pan-Africanism argues for the legitimacy and integrity of religious and cultural practices of the Pan-African world that have been demonized by Christian, Islamic, or colonizing and enslaving agents. Political Pan-Africanism is political activism and nationalism in forms including civil protest marches, demonstrations, legislative challenges, and political agitation and organizations which aim at challenging and changing the racial status and socioeconomic conditions of Black people globally.

Black Consciousness Movement was given impetus by African nationalism, the desire for self-determination, but was further moulded by African thinkers of the 1950's and 1960's who fashioned it into Pan-Africanism (Mgwebi, 2008:61) There is a claim, that it was the Black Consciousness of the mid-sixties and the seventies that put more emphasis on reclaiming the word "Blackness" (Mgwebi, 2008:55) Blackness had been synonymous with being oppressed and according to movements like the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), Blackness did not connote the pigmentation of one's skin; it was an attitude, a state of mind which makes anybody who identifies himself with the Black man's struggle black. This argument is closely linked with the Cartesian cogito ergo sum, meaning 'I think, therefore I am'. By implication this labels as black, anyone who is supportive or committed to the 'black cause'. The term 'black' has since metamorphosed from being a synonym of oppression to being symbolic of a proud resistance to classism, racism and sexism among others.

This chapter embraces a contextual framework wherein we argue that Black Consciousness is a state of gaining awareness to particular issues, while sharing feelings and beliefs among the Black race with the aim of setting people in motion to take actions. By this, we describe black consciousness as the foundation of all Pan-Africanist projects; it is the Black person's awareness of their environment, predicament and the need to flourish that gave rise to all the idea and movements for Black emancipation. This idea of black emancipation remained relevant even after various African states attained their sovereignty and more so in the light of global issues that evolved. A brief look at the philosophical understanding of consciousness as construed by Brentano and Husserl maintain that there is no consciousness without intentionality. For Brentano, intentionality means 'directedness towards an object, it holds that the mind's capacity to 'refer' or be 'directed' to objects is the most crucial part of intentionality. Similarly, Husserl's view of intentionality of consciousness is that consciousness is the directedness of the mind at something, consciousness is consciousness about something and that there is always an intentional object. According to Husserl, the intentional operation of consciousness, constitutes the world. In other words, things in the world exist because our consciousness can perceive them. So without consciousness, the world and its components will remain ambiguous. The intentionality of Black consciousness involves directing the Black race to issues surrounding her colonial legacies and neo-colonial intrusions resulting in various forms of Pan-Africanist movements. This argument that black consciousness is the origin of Pan-Africanism forms the basis for this work.

'Otherness' refers to the construction of a 'self' against an 'other.' Ridwana (2009:8) asserts that there is a process of 'othering', a way of labelling one's position and identity, approving this whilst disapproving an 'other'. In Kellner's words situating the other emerges from 'boundaries and borders of class, gender, race, sexuality, and the other constituents that differentiate individuals from each other and through which people construct their identities' (1997:12).

Otherness by nature could be circular in nature with possibilities of the self turning out to be the other and vice-versa. In the global public sphere the idea of the self and the other can be hierarchical, using the core/periphery structuring of the global sphere. Within this structural arrangement, the 'core' are the developed or advanced states like the United States. These by virtue of global prominence are classed as self. Their control of the channels of communication especially through their dominance of trans-national media corporations allows for ready circulation of perspectives, standards and values of the self. The 'periphery' being developing and underdeveloped states, often characterized by those in Africa and Asia, are classed as other held up against the established norms. There is a multiplicity within this core-periphery global structure; for instance, there is the core of the core and the core of the periphery. So the United States which has great influence in world economy and politics may be regarded as more core than and an other core like South Korea. Though respected for its economic prowess South Korea is yet to hold as much power

or wield as much influence as the United States. Cores in the periphery are regional powers that are believed to have improved beyond other states in their regions. Examples include African states among which are Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa; then Brazil, and Argentina in South America\*\*. These possess certain factors which distinguishes them from those otherwise within their peripheral classification.

The above shows that there is a self-other dichotomy between the core of the core - the world super powers, and other core which are at lower rung of global power hierarchy. Similarly, such dichotomy exists between the core of the periphery (regional powers) and the periphery itself (other members of the region). Some scholars have argued that consciousness requires self awareness, which cannot be achieved without a prior awareness of the other/others. If this argument is sustained, then, the idea of otherness must be subjected to the interpretations of either or both the self and the other. Otherness in this work is discussed from a Western standpoint, though it seeks to question these conceptions wherein Africa is made the Other.

### **The Problematique and Critique of Euro-centrism in Understanding Afro-centrism**

Amin (1984: 72-96) elucidates the meaning of Eurocentrism. Aspirations for rationality and universalism, through political-economic and cultural systems of capitalism compels Europe to progressively impose itself and its values on a worldwide scale. Tracing the origins of Eurocentrism to the renaissance, Amin (1984) explains that Europeans became conscious of the prospects of their conquering the world through the use of their civilization. It is understood that this mindset helped them develop a sense of absolute superiority, even prior to the actual submission of other people. Amin adds that, the crystallization of capitalism in European society into the fundamental rules and practices of an economic system and the increasingly rationalized character of decision making in social organization and state policies are two definitive motivations of Eurocentrism.

Described as an idea or mindset which privileges Western ideologies, and prescribes them as the model to adopt, Eurocentrism encourages groups from other regions of the world to emulate Western ideals. Consequently, the focus on Western values and institutions occurs in a way that is often disdainful and dismissive of others. Regarding Africa in particular, Chukwuokolo (2009:29) notes that Eurocentrism was a means of foisting European systems upon African societies with an intention to utterly plunder Africa's philosophical base such that African identities are denied, and Western thoughts and cultural realities instituted. It consists of a transfer of European economic and technological prowess to Africa. Yet in terms of its real impact as a development path, Chukwuokolo explains that Eurocentrism became the platform for describing and measuring levels of development among states. He asserts that; "development was conceived basically in this construal such that capitalist West was seen as a model. This view led the third world into conceiving development in terms of replication or imitation of Europe" (2009:26). Consequently, Eurocentrism promotes

Western consciousness which erroneously got equated with global consciousness. In Africa, Eurocentrism manifests in several ways including the social, economic and political which will now be discussed. The social manifestation is significantly reflected in language and culture. On this, Achebe (1975:57) asks a rather radical question; "Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling". From similar standpoint, Ngugi (1981:26), in his work on *Decolonizing the Mind*, asks "What is the difference between a politician who says Africa cannot do without imperialism and the writer who says Africa cannot do without European languages?" He affirms that;

African countries, as colonies and even today as neo-colonies, came to be defined and define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe: English-speaking, French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African countries. (Ngugi, 1981:5)

**Like Ngugi, Siamundele also notes that;**

The dependency upon colonizer's language creates a permanent presence of the colonizers among Africans. This symbolic permanence and presence of the colonizers is a sign that the notion or meaning of independence has somehow been hijacked. (2010:306)

The situation grows worse by the day, with Western consciousness thriving as global consciousness while researchers keep rolling out reports on how African languages stand the risk of extinction in the nearest future. Loss of language has great and debilitating implications, such that Madhubuti states that; With the killing of language, the transfiguration of Africa was complete and lasting...few things are as important as language and for most, the quieting of the tongue, more than anything else, sealed their faiths in the new world, for without language, one cannot express the indigenous self and therefore, one has nothing to express other than the selves of others in their language. (1984:122)

In similar vein, Marshall (2010), writing about 'talking Cheddo', describes it as a way to both usher learners into the presence of their own priceless selfhood, and restore to them a language of undiluted dignity. In Marshall's words; Experience has taught that panAfrikanists in Ethiopia, the Sudan, Nigeria and all across the Diaspora that deep-seated and widespread conversional faiths often divide pan-Kushistic communities and keep Africans who need each other's support, apart. (2010:171)

Thus, once a community loses its language, it ultimately loses its self consciousness, which rubs off on its politics and economy.

On the economic manifestation of Eurocentrism, the manner in which Africa is reduced to consumers, rather than producers of wealth is alarming. This situation made Rodney (1972) to posit first, that, the pre-colonial operation of imperialist system drained Africa's wealth and secondly, that, the post-colonial human and

organizational structures in place have retarded economic growth and development in Africa. In the same vein, Ake avers that;  
...while propagating the idea of development, the (European) countries offer themselves as the guarantors of the possibility of development and proclaim a 'partnership in development'. Assistance is given to make the partnership look plausible but as it is worked out, the African countries get poorer and the technological gap widens. (1978:20-21)

This economic reflection of Eurocentric relationship informs Nwoke's assertion that;  
. . . the relationship between Europe and Africa is a power, not partnership, relationship. It is a relationship between a group of highly industrialized countries and a group of world's poorest nations. It is a relationship between donors and their debtors; between benefactors and consistent recipients; between former colonial empires and their former colonies. (2013:73)

If the above rightly describes the relationship between Africa and the West, the implication is that (Africa as) the 'other', also variously described as the "world's poorest nations"; "the debtors"; "the recipients" and "former colonies" are forced to a life that strives to be like the West; replicating what their masters represent, thus promoting Western consciousness as global consciousness.

The political manifestation of Eurocentrism comes to bear when we examine the nature of leadership and governance in Africa. There is so much reverence for Western systems of governance as African leaders have failed to consider the appropriateness and plausibility of borrowed political ideologies for their societies. Falaiye examines externalist and internalist arguments as two viewpoints from which the problems of Eurocentrism in African politics can be explained. While scholars like Walter Rodney, Ali Mazrui and Basil Davidson are among the externalists, George Ayittey and Muyiwa Falaiye belong to the group of internalists who argue that the external factors have become irrelevant in the discourse of Africa's underdevelopment. Externalists hold that economic and political instability, social injustice, violence, stagnation, censorship, extra-judicial killings, poverty, illegal detention, abuse of human rights, in one word 'underdevelopment' is the legacy left by the Europeans. However, internalists opine that Africa's numerous problems can be traced to nowhere else but Africa (Falaiye, 2012: 20 - 22).

It may be argued that sticking to either paradigm is like a bird wanting to fly with one wing. To hold that external factors have become irrelevant is to feign the death of neo-colonialism, yet simply maintaining an internalist's view can be likened to a drive towards isolationism since it ignores evident impact of hegemonic forces on activities of African states. A moderate stance will therefore be better suited to discussions of Africa's underdevelopment. In its attempt to tackle the problem of underdevelopment, this chapter will consider both internalist and externalist arguments. This is consistent with the position of Afolayan (2009) who notes that



apart from the internal dimension of leadership problems on the continent, there are critical external dimensions. These discussions show that continued proliferation of Eurocentrism is a major cancer eating deep into the promotion of Afrocentrism, an ideology to which we now direct our attention.

Asante (1998) presents the Afrocentric paradigm as a revolutionary shift in thinking proposed as a constructural adjustment to black disorientation, decenteredness, and lack of agency. Asante describes Afrocentricity as that which asserts the central role of the African subject within the context of African history, thereby removing Europe from the center of the African reality. In this way, Afrocentricity becomes a revolutionary idea because it studies ideas, concepts, events, personalities, and political and economic processes from a standpoint of black people as subjects and not as objects, basing all knowledge on the authentic interrogation of location (Asante, 1998).

This argument stressed the point that a person becomes Afrocentric when they succeed in changing their consciousness, gaining liberation even if only in their mind, or to the point that they seek actual liberty from systems that hitherto had them in shackles. Indeed, placing considerations for Africa at the center of issues, events, and prospects concerning the continent is the core of Afrocentricism (Asante, 1980:52). This had meant the recognition of a compelling need to push particular knowledges devoted to the best interests of Africans and people of African descent (Asante, 1990). In like manner, there continues to be a similar need to re-package the voices and visions of Africa in the global public sphere. These ought to be wholly committed to the interests of Africans and people of African descent. The sole objective of such voices would be to present Africa from African perspectives, devoid of the bias of apartness, backwardness and repression. Such voices are exemplified in media processes which ensure that perspectives in the constructions in news and entertainment content are robust enough to cater for receivers from all sides. On this ground, Afrocentrism is itself black consciousness; an option which Africa must choose as she determines the path to tread towards development.

### **Questioning the order of Otherness in the Global Public Sphere**

The term 'global public sphere' is a clear indication of the changing face of Habermasian public sphere from its origins as a limited local, even national sphere of interaction. The public sphere has now emerged as a sphere involving a wide range of actors across the globe who though separated by cultural and geographical boundaries are able to bring similar issues to the table via the media – both conventional and new. The internet, among other technological innovations has promoted the development of this global public sphere. It has eased coverage and reportage of happenings around the world. Other innovations to communications technology which have fostered access and participation ensure that debates about such events can be generated from any part of the world with minimal hindrances. However, the subtle restriction involved must not be ignored; the global public sphere is powered by

technology, owned or controlled by certain privileged global actors. The operations of Trans National Media Corporations (TNMCs) for example CNN and BBC are such that their unseen hands continue to define actions of local media organizations. The construction and reception of mediated realities in the global public sphere offer indications of how the global north entrenches Eurocentrism. Western values are positioned and communicated as the standard against which others are measured. In terms of Identity the West is self, and western media operate in a manner that perpetually affixes some label of otherness on other races, particularly those states in the global south.

It is well worth considering the implications that this self-other dichotomy has on the global public sphere. This should form the basis of more rigorous inquiry, however a simple answer to this question can be proposed. It is that despite the ideals of Habermas' public sphere, any reflection of a self-other dichotomy no matter how subtle constrains the actualization of such potentials. As argued above, such compromises keep recurring in a wide range of global communications to the end that a certain consciousness dominates others. The global public sphere has been queried for privileging Eurocentric values to the detriment of others. Omotoso (2013:60) asserts that: fashioning an African philosophy of communication “helps to shift discussion from the idea that communication is primarily Western simply because the West dominates development in communication infrastructures.” This is also exemplified in the struggle for New World Information and Communication Order (2001).

Ridwana (2009:4) observes that:

the colonizers generated a Eurocentric ideology by creating simple but deep-rooted distinctions like self versus other, master versus slave, civilized versus savage, white versus black, good versus evil, strong versus weak, Occident versus Orient, elite versus subaltern and so forth in terms of knowledge, culture and in the daily life of colonized societies.

The global media is a strong perpetrator of deep-rooted distinctions, of the self from the other. For instance, Adodo (2015:1) corroborates this by averring that; “For centuries, Africans were a people spoken about, spoken for and spoken against by foreigners. We read about who we are from what others said and wrote about us” Complexities of global media operations prevent the other from speaking for themselves.

Otherness in the global public sphere may be construed on three basis - language, technology and ideology. The West has been and continues to dominate communication and information dissemination in the world on all three. In the first instance four out of the six languages adopted by the United Nations namely Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, are European languages. Similarly, global media promotes two major languages (English & French) in their reportage and

information dissemination. With this pattern, Africans along with others are short-changed in the global public sphere. Since language is the conduit for culture, the absence of their languages undermines the exposure and potential validation of their cultures. It could be argued that Africa's so-called short-change may be inevitable or not easily resolved, in the absence of a unifying (indigenous) language as obtains in some other continents. The balkanization of the continent had created another layer of identity for Africans being Francophone, Anglophone or Lusophone. In the final analysis, these splintering of identities on account of language does Africa disservice in the global public sphere. If Africa, like the West, could just come up with some set of unified languages, the continent could stand a better chance of being promoted in the global communications arena.

The second limiting factor is that there is a technological hegemony in the public sphere. Technology is a strong bane of otherness as the developing states still lag behind in the creation and maintenance of communication and information infrastructure. This technological hegemony of utter reliance on the West for supply and support is a strong indication of the self-other problem. Control of technology equals power, reflecting a close connection with the critical ideological hegemony. Suffice to say that Africa is not devoid of inventiveness outright; this is evident in the technological ideas that Africans have gone on to develop in Western nations, thanks to brain drain.

The last and most important of the limiting factors is ideological hegemony. The self-other issue has gained so much prominence because of ideological hegemony. It is on this note that Nakayama (1994:162) asserts that "otherness is neither simplistic nor monolithic; rather, it is coalitional and requires us to bring cultural codes, norms and contexts into question as we analyse intercultural interactions". A clear inference that can be drawn from Nakayama's assertion is that the validation of otherness is consensual. A group must agree that another group is better than itself before superiority or inferiority (as the case may be) can be established.

Thus, questioning the order of otherness would be considered similar with questioning Africa's ideological stance (s). The dogma of inferiority that pervades the Continent and makes her people revere Western-oriented ideas, products and service among others, above her own is a third culture which must be squarely dealt with. Having observed that communication that overcomes the positioning of self and other is uncommon (Rentner & Lengel, 2011:141), it must be noted that such communications must be consciously created, since it takes an admittance of the position of otherness before such can be conferred. These are concerns worthy of further empirical investigations.

## **Conclusion**

The fore going argument suggests that there has been no equitable platform for relations even among sovereign states, as is often the case with individuals. Africa's

prolonged reliance on Western structures and attendant controls have skewed the playing field for Africinity. It stands to reason that the labelling practice which suppresses the indigenous as 'unconventional' and 'uncivilized', in the process subtly paves way for an imposition of that which is the validated within the dominant Western culture. To avoid being outside established boundaries of acceptance is to be Western or unAfrican; this idea, which is widespread in the West and, even regrettably on the shores of Africa appears to be the way to gain global acceptance. On the creation of a level playing field in the global public sphere, the whole essence of black consciousness is to revolt against the hegemonic platforms which have thus far promoted otherness. This includes greater emphasis on the need to domesticate information and to give a local flavor to information before applying same. A high premium should also be placed on details regarding identity – the mix of actors, image, characters, and relationships occurring within communication processes. (Omotoso, 2013:62). Outlaw (2006) has argued that human beings do not enter the world pre-programmed with beliefs, understandings, action-guiding strategies and forms of knowledge that will ensure survival and well-being. That being the case, there should be careful attention to communication processes by which such knowledge is acquired. He argues that:

The production, validation and justification, legitimation, refinement and maintenance, distribution and mediation, and utilization of various forms of certified “knowledge” are endeavours (hereafter referred to collectively as “knowledge production”) that must be undertaken, more or less successfully, by authorized persons of every generation in every society that wishes to survive, reproduce, and live well across successive generations. (2006:155)

Since it is imperative for the Black race to move away from the status of otherness, the shackles of hegemony in all its forms must be broken. Only then, will the prospects of being a self be enhanced. It is also worthy to note that such task of becoming the self is not so herculean; as some third-world states are gaining grounds over the three hegemonic forces (language, technology and ideology). Mention must be made of efforts from African media to fight back. For instance, “Through African eyes” is a popular catchphrase used by a budding Nigerian television news service which reflects the aspiration of self assertion, in order to be distanced from the position of the other. There is evidence of a dynamism in the emerging media from the global south, the periphery and domain of the Other. Books, movies, musicals, fashion, culture and so on are emanating from countries like Brazil, China, Egypt, South Africa, among others, and yearning to be promoted within the mainstream media. These are all indications that the so-called 'other' can assert 'itself' within reasonable timeframe, if the task is pursued with focus and single-mindedness. Empirical evidence of these efforts will be most desirable.

## Notes

\*\*The classification given above is authors' viewpoint and therefore may not exactly connect with traditional classification of core and peripheral states

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