

## Hermeneutical Colonialism: An Afrocentric Critique and a Textual Remedy

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### Abstract

This study investigates the phenomenon of hermeneutical colonialism in African contexts and highlights the potential of Afro centric approaches in challenging dominant Eurocentric interpretive frameworks. Drawing on case studies and scholarly insights, the research evaluates the effectiveness of African-centered perspectives, engagement with multiple viewpoints, and critical reflexivity in promoting more inclusive and culturally sensitive readings of African texts. The findings demonstrate the efficacy of these strategies in decolonizing textual interpretation and fostering a deeper understanding of African experiences. To further advance this process, the study recommends promoting structural changes in educational systems, fostering interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches, and investing in transnational research networks. Overall, the research emphasizes the importance of ongoing commitment to challenging hermeneutical colonialism and embracing diverse epistemologies in the interpretation of African literature.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutical colonialism, Afro centric approaches, textual interpretation, decolonization, African contexts.

### Introduction:

The discourse surrounding interpretation, particularly within the realm of cultural texts and traditions, has long been fraught with complexities shaped by historical power dynamics and colonial legacies. Hermeneutical colonialism, a concept emerging from postcolonial and critical theory, reflects the imposition of dominant cultural interpretations onto texts and traditions of colonized peoples, often marginalizing or erasing indigenous perspectives and meanings (Young, 2001). From an Afro centric viewpoint, hermeneutical colonialism constitutes a significant challenge to the preservation and understanding of African cultural heritage, perpetuating narratives that reinforce colonial ideologies and undermine the richness and diversity of African voices (Asante, 1990).

Central to the Afro centric critique of hermeneutical colonialism is the recognition of the profound impact of Western-centric interpretations on African texts and traditions. Throughout history, European colonizers and missionaries imposed their own interpretations onto African cultural artifacts, literature, and oral traditions, often through processes of translation and dissemination that distorted or erased indigenous meanings (Gikandi, 1996). This legacy continues to shape contemporary understandings of African cultures, contributing to the marginalization of African voices within the global discourse on knowledge production and interpretation.

Critiques of hermeneutical colonialism from Afro centric perspectives emphasize the need to center African voices and perspectives in the interpretation of African texts and traditions (Wiredu, 1996). Afro centric scholars argue for the reclaiming of indigenous interpretations and epistemologies, challenging the hegemony of Western knowledge systems and methodologies (Mudimbe, 1988). By foregrounding African cosmologies, ontologies, and modes of knowing, Afro centric approaches seek to disrupt the power dynamics inherent in hermeneutical colonialism and foster a more equitable and inclusive understanding of African cultural heritage.

This paper aims to explore the phenomenon of hermeneutical colonialism through an Afro centric lens, examining its implications for African texts and traditions.

Drawing on a range of interdisciplinary scholarship from fields such as postcolonial studies, African studies, and cultural anthropology, this paper will analyze the manifestations of hermeneutical colonialism and propose strategies for decolonizing interpretations through a textual remedy. By interrogating the dynamics of power, knowledge, and representation inherent in interpretive practices, this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing efforts to decolonize knowledge production and foster a more inclusive and equitable understanding of African cultures.

In the following sections, this paper will review the relevant literature on hermeneutical colonialism and Afro centric perspectives on interpretation, provide an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of hermeneutical colonialism, explore Afro centric approaches to decolonization, propose textual remedies for addressing hermeneutical colonialism, present case studies illustrating these concepts in practice, discuss challenges and future directions, and conclude with reflections on the significance of decolonizing interpretations for the preservation and valorization of African cultural heritage.

### Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach using secondary data analysis. Secondary data refers to information that has been previously collected, analyzed, and published by other researchers, organizations, or institutions.

1. **Data Collection:** Secondary data will be gathered from a variety of sources, including but not limited to scholarly articles, books, reports, and online databases. The focus will be on literature that discusses hermeneutical colonialism, Afro centricism, and postcolonial theory, as well as texts that explore alternative hermeneutic strategies and decolonizing methodologies.
2. **Selection Criteria:** To ensure the quality and relevance of the sources, the following criteria will be considered:
  - **Relevance:** Sources must address the research topic or related themes, such as

- hermeneutics, colonialism, African epistemologies, and textual interpretation.
  - **Credibility:** Sources must be published by reputable authors, peer-reviewed journals, academic publishers, or recognized organizations in the field.
  - **Timeliness:** Priority will be given to sources published within the last ten years to capture current debates and developments in the field. However, seminal works that provide essential background and context may also be included.
3. **Data Analysis:** A thematic analysis will be conducted to identify key themes, patterns, and debates within the collected literature. This involves:
- Categorizing sources based on their primary focus, such as hermeneutical colonialism, Afro centrism, or decolonizing methodologies.
  - Identifying and comparing different perspectives, arguments, and findings in the literature.
  - Synthesizing the information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic and identify gaps in the literature.
  - Evaluating existing hermeneutic strategies and their effectiveness in addressing hermeneutical colonialism.
  - Developing an Afro centric hermeneutic framework based on the identified gaps and the centrality of African experiences and worldviews.

The use of secondary data analysis allows for a broad exploration of the research topic, drawing on a range of perspectives and contexts to provide a comprehensive understanding of hermeneutical colonialism and potential remedies from an Afro centric perspective.

#### Review of related Literature

##### Understanding Hermeneutical Colonialism: An Afro centric Perspective

Hermeneutical colonialism, as an extension of epistemic colonialism, has long impacted the way knowledge is interpreted and understood, especially within the context of Africa (Ngugi, 1986; Mudimbe, 1988). This form of colonialism refers to the dominance of Western interpretations of texts, which often marginalizes alternative readings and perspectives rooted in African experiences and epistemologies (Mignolo, 2011; Smith, 2012).

In the African context, hermeneutical colonialism has manifested in various ways. One such manifestation is the privileging of Western theories and methodologies in academic and literary discourse (Ngugi, 1986). This has led to the systematic marginalization of African knowledge systems and interpretive frameworks (Mudimbe, 1988; Mignolo, 2011). Consequently, African perspectives and interpretations have been rendered inferior or invisible in mainstream academic and literary spaces (Mignolo, 2009).

Furthermore, hermeneutical colonialism has reinforced the idea that Western knowledge is universal and objective, while African epistemologies are considered particular and subjective (Mignolo, 2011). This has resulted in the perpetuation of Eurocentric biases in the interpretation of African cultural productions and experiences (Mudimbe, 1988). Consequently, African authors and scholars have been pressured to conform to Western interpretive models to gain recognition and legitimacy in the global intellectual arena (Ngugi, 1986).

In response to the challenges posed by hermeneutical colonialism, several scholars have advocated for the decolonization of knowledge production and interpretation (Smith, 2012; Mignolo, 2009). This involves the recognition and validation of African epistemologies as well as the promotion of interpretive frameworks grounded in African worldviews and experiences (Mignolo, 2011; Mudimbe, 1988).

The concept of Afro centrism emerges as a crucial framework to challenge hermeneutical colonialism (Asante, 1987). Afro centrism emphasizes the centrality of African experiences and perspectives in the production and interpretation of knowledge (Asante, 1998). By centering African epistemologies, Afro centric approaches seek to disrupt the dominance of Western interpretive frameworks and promote more inclusive and diverse understandings of the world (Asante, 2003).

Within the realm of literary criticism, Afro centrism has been instrumental in highlighting the importance of African literary traditions and cultural contexts (Irele, 1990). Afrocentric literary criticism seeks to foreground African-centered perspectives and challenge Eurocentric interpretations of African literature (Irele, 1990; Asante, 1987). This approach has provided a valuable counterpoint to the hegemonic Western interpretive models that have long dominated African literary studies (Irele, 1990).

Hermeneutical colonialism represents a significant challenge for African epistemologies and interpretive frameworks. It perpetuates the marginalization of African perspectives and reinforces the dominance of Western interpretive models. Afro centrism, as a decolonizing framework, offers a valuable tool to challenge hermeneutical colonialism and promote the recognition of African knowledge systems and experiences. By centering African epistemologies, Afro centric approaches can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the world.

##### Afro centric Approaches to Decolonization

Afro centricity, as a conceptual framework and critical lens, offers a unique approach to decolonization. Developed by Molefi Kete Asante in the 1980s, Afro centricity aims to challenge Eurocentric biases in knowledge production and interpretation by centering African perspectives, experiences, and values (Asante, 1987). This approach provides a significant departure from the hegemonic Western-centric frameworks that have traditionally dominated academic and cultural discourse (Mazama, 2001).

Afrocentrism offers several key principles to guide the process of decolonization. One such principle is the notion of "centeredness," which emphasizes the importance of

locating Africans and African experiences at the center of intellectual inquiry (Asante, 1987). By foregrounding African perspectives, Afro centrality seeks to dismantle Eurocentric biases that marginalize African epistemologies and worldviews (Mazama, 2001). This helps to promote a more inclusive understanding of the world and fosters a sense of agency among African people.

Another key principle of Afro centrality is the importance of cultural context in the production of knowledge (Asante, 1998). This approach recognizes that knowledge is culturally situated and argues that understanding African realities requires engaging with the cultural contexts in which they are embedded (Mazama, 2001). In doing so, Afro centrality challenges the assumption of universality in Western epistemologies and promotes a more nuanced understanding of African experiences.

Furthermore, Afro centrality emphasizes the value of African agency and self-determination (Asante, 2003). This involves recognizing the capacity of African people to shape their destinies and contribute to the development of knowledge and culture on their own terms (Asante, 1998). By affirming African agency, Afro centrality aims to counter the legacy of colonialism and foster greater empowerment and resilience among African communities.

Afrocentric approaches to decolonization have found significant resonance in various disciplines and fields. In education, Afro centrality has been advocated as a means to challenge Eurocentric curricula and pedagogical practices (Asante, 1991). By centering African experiences and values in educational settings, Afro centrality seeks to foster greater educational equity and promote more culturally responsive learning environments (Mazama, 2001).

Within the field of psychology, Afro centrality has been applied to challenge Eurocentric assumptions about human behavior and promote a more culturally sensitive understanding of African experiences (Akbar, 2003). This involves recognizing the role of culture, history, and context in shaping African psychological realities and developing therapeutic approaches that are responsive to the specific needs and experiences of African people (Parham, 2002).

Afro centrality offers a valuable framework for advancing decolonization across various fields and domains. By centering African perspectives, affirming African agency, and recognizing the importance of cultural context, Afrocentric approaches challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies and promote greater inclusivity and diversity in knowledge production and interpretation. As a result, Afro centrality can contribute to the empowerment and well-being of African communities and promote greater social justice and equity.

#### **Textual Remedies for Hermeneutical Colonialism**

Hermeneutical colonialism has perpetuated Eurocentric biases in textual interpretation and marginalized alternative epistemologies. To address this issue, it is essential to explore textual remedies that promote a more inclusive and diverse understanding of texts, particularly those produced in African contexts. This paper discusses three potential remedies for hermeneutical colonialism, drawing on Afrocentric perspectives to challenge dominant Western interpretive models.

**Promoting African-centered Interpretations:** One remedy for hermeneutical colonialism is to foreground African-centered interpretations of texts. This involves centering African perspectives, values, and experiences in the interpretive process and challenging Eurocentric assumptions (Asante, 1987; Mudimbe, 1988). By emphasizing African epistemologies, textual interpretations can more accurately reflect the cultural contexts in which texts are produced and offer a richer understanding of African realities (Mazama, 2001). This approach helps to address the marginalization of African perspectives in textual analysis and fosters a more inclusive and diverse interpretation of texts.

**Engaging Multiple Perspectives:** Another remedy for hermeneutical colonialism is to engage multiple perspectives in textual interpretation (Irele, 1990). This involves recognizing the plurality of interpretive frameworks and the potential for multiple readings of a single text (Mazama, 2001). By considering various viewpoints, readers can develop a more nuanced understanding of texts and challenge the hegemony of Western interpretive models (Mignolo, 2011). Engaging multiple perspectives also fosters dialogue and exchange between diverse epistemologies, which can contribute to the decolonization of textual interpretation (Smith, 2012).

**Encouraging Critical Reflexivity:** A third remedy for hermeneutical colonialism is to encourage critical reflexivity in textual interpretation (Spivak, 1988). This entails reflecting on the power dynamics that shape interpretive practices and acknowledging the ways in which personal and cultural biases influence textual analysis (Mignolo, 2011). By adopting a self-reflexive stance, readers can become more aware of the potential for hermeneutical colonialism and work towards developing more inclusive and culturally sensitive interpretations (Irele, 1990). Critical reflexivity also fosters a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between texts, contexts, and interpretive frameworks.

Hermeneutical colonialism represents a significant challenge to the production and interpretation of texts in African contexts. By promoting African-centered interpretations, engaging multiple perspectives, and encouraging critical reflexivity, readers can work towards decolonizing textual analysis and fostering greater inclusivity and diversity in hermeneutics. These textual remedies contribute to a richer and more nuanced understanding of texts, while also challenging the dominance of Eurocentric interpretive frameworks.

#### **Case Studies: Decolonizing Textual Interpretation in African Contexts**

In this section, we will examine three case studies that demonstrate attempts at decolonizing textual interpretation in African contexts. Each case study highlights a specific approach to challenging hermeneutical colonialism and promoting more inclusive, Afrocentric readings of texts.

##### **Case Study 1: Ngugi waThiong'o's "Decolonising the Mind"**

Ngugi waThiong'o (1986) has been a prominent advocate for decolonizing textual interpretation in Africa, particularly through his call for linguistic decolonization. In his

influential essay "Decolonising the Mind," Ngugi emphasizes the importance of African languages in the production and interpretation of African literature. He argues that writing and reading in African languages not only challenges the dominance of colonial languages but also enables a more authentic engagement with African experiences and perspectives (Ngugi, 1986). By privileging African languages, Ngugi's approach promotes African-centered interpretations and fosters a deeper understanding of African cultural contexts.

#### **Case Study 2: Chinua Achebe's Critique of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"**

Chinua Achebe's (1977) critique of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" provides another example of challenging hermeneutical colonialism. In his essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" Achebe criticizes the novel for its stereotypical and dehumanizing portrayal of Africans. By offering a counter-reading of the text from an African perspective, Achebe exposes the Eurocentric biases that have long shaped interpretations of "Heart of Darkness" and advocates for a more nuanced understanding of the novel's racial politics (Achebe, 1977). This approach demonstrates the importance of engaging multiple perspectives in textual interpretation to challenge dominant Western readings.

#### **Case Study 3: Critical Reflexivity in Tsitsi Dangarembga's "Nervous Conditions"**

Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel "Nervous Conditions" (1988) illustrates the potential for critical reflexivity in challenging hermeneutical colonialism. The novel tells the story of a young girl's struggle to navigate the tensions between colonial and traditional value systems in 1960s Rhodesia. By presenting multiple perspectives and interrogating the power dynamics at play in colonial and postcolonial contexts, "Nervous Conditions" encourages readers to reflect on their own interpretive biases and consider the complexity of African experiences (Dangarembga, 1988). This approach demonstrates how engaging in critical reflexivity can lead to more nuanced and culturally sensitive readings of texts.

These case studies highlight various strategies for decolonizing textual interpretation in African contexts. Through the promotion of African languages, engagement with multiple perspectives, and the practice of critical reflexivity, these examples demonstrate the potential for more inclusive, Afrocentric readings of texts. By challenging hermeneutical colonialism, these approaches contribute to a more diverse understanding of African literature and experiences.

#### **Challenges and Future Directions: Towards a Decolonized Hermeneutics in African Contexts**

While the strategies discussed in the previous section offer promising pathways for decolonizing textual interpretation in African contexts, several challenges must be addressed to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of these approaches. This section examines some of the key challenges and proposes future directions for a more inclusive, Afrocentric hermeneutics.

##### **Challenges**

One significant challenge to decolonizing textual interpretation is the persistence of Western-centric educational systems and academic structures (Asante, 1991). Many African institutions continue to prioritize Eurocentric theories and methodologies, which can perpetuate the marginalization of African epistemologies (Mignolo, 2009). To effectively challenge hermeneutical colonialism, it is essential to address the root causes of epistemic injustice and work towards structural changes within educational and academic spaces.

Another challenge is the potential for essentialism in Afrocentric approaches (Appiah, 1992). While emphasizing African perspectives and experiences is crucial for decolonizing textual interpretation, it is equally important to avoid essentializing African identities and cultures (Mazama, 2001). To address this concern, Afrocentric hermeneutics must acknowledge the diversity and complexity of African experiences and be open to dialogue with other interpretive frameworks.

##### **Future Directions**

To address these challenges and advance the process of decolonizing textual interpretation, several future directions can be considered. First, promoting African-centered educational initiatives is essential for fostering a more inclusive hermeneutics (Asante, 1991). This involves integrating African epistemologies and perspectives into curricula, pedagogical practices, and research methodologies (Mazama, 2001). By centering African knowledge systems in educational settings, future generations of scholars and readers can be better equipped to challenge hermeneutical colonialism.

Second, prioritizing interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches can help to avoid essentialism in Afrocentric hermeneutics (Crenshaw, 1989). By engaging with diverse disciplines and considering the intersections of race, gender, class, and other social categories, interpreters can develop more nuanced understandings of African texts and experiences (Collins, 2000). This approach fosters a deeper appreciation of the complexity and diversity of African contexts, while also challenging reductive, monolithic representations.

Finally, investing in collaborative, transnational research networks can facilitate dialogue and exchange between African and other interpretive frameworks (Smith, 2012). By fostering connections between scholars and practitioners across borders, these networks can promote the sharing of resources, knowledge, and strategies for challenging hermeneutical colonialism (Mignolo, 2011). This approach contributes to a more inclusive and diverse global intellectual community, which is better equipped to address the challenges posed by the legacies of colonialism.

While the decolonization of textual interpretation in African contexts faces several challenges, there are promising future directions that can help to advance this process. By promoting African-centered education, prioritizing interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches, and investing in transnational research networks, scholars and practitioners can contribute to a more inclusive and diverse



hermeneutics that challenges the dominance of Eurocentric interpretive frameworks.

### **Findings and Analysis: The Impact of Afrocentric Approaches on Textual Interpretation in African Contexts**

This section presents the findings and analysis of research on the impact of Afro centric approaches to textual interpretation in African contexts. Drawing on the insights of scholars and practitioners, the analysis evaluates the effectiveness of Afro centric strategies in challenging hermeneutical colonialism and promoting more inclusive, culturally sensitive readings of African texts.

#### **Findings**

**Promoting African-centered Interpretations:** Research indicates that Afro centric approaches have been successful in fostering African-centered interpretations of texts (Asante, 1987; Mazama, 2001). By emphasizing African epistemologies and cultural contexts, these approaches have challenged the dominance of Eurocentric biases in textual analysis and contributed to a more nuanced understanding of African experiences and perspectives.

**Engaging Multiple Perspectives:** The engagement of multiple perspectives has proven effective in countering hermeneutical colonialism and fostering dialogue between diverse interpretive frameworks (Irele, 1990; Mignolo, 2011). By considering a range of viewpoints, readers can develop more complex understandings of African texts and challenge reductive, stereotypical representations.

**Encouraging Critical Reflexivity:** Encouraging critical reflexivity has facilitated more culturally sensitive readings of African texts (Spivak, 1988; Mudimbe, 1988). By reflecting on personal and cultural biases, interpreters have been better equipped to acknowledge the power dynamics that shape textual interpretation and engage more authentically with African experiences and worldviews.

#### **Analysis**

The findings indicate that Afro centric approaches have had a positive impact on textual interpretation in African contexts. By challenging Eurocentric biases and foregrounding African perspectives, these strategies have contributed to more inclusive and diverse understandings of African texts. Engaging multiple perspectives and promoting critical reflexivity have also proven valuable in fostering dialogue between different interpretive frameworks and addressing the legacies of hermeneutical colonialism.

However, it is essential to recognize that decolonizing textual interpretation is an ongoing process that requires continued commitment and reflection. While Afrocentric approaches have been effective in addressing some of the challenges posed by hermeneutical colonialism, there remains a need to address structural barriers within educational and academic spaces. Furthermore, the risk of essentialism in Afro centric hermeneutics highlights the importance of interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches that acknowledge the complexity and diversity of African experiences.

In conclusion, Afrocentric strategies have demonstrated significant potential in promoting more inclusive and culturally sensitive interpretations of African texts. By

centering African epistemologies, engaging multiple perspectives, and encouraging critical reflexivity, these approaches contribute to the ongoing process of decolonizing textual interpretation and challenging the dominance of Eurocentric interpretive frameworks.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study has explored the phenomenon of hermeneutical colonialism in African contexts and highlighted the potential of Afro centric approaches in challenging dominant Eurocentric interpretive frameworks. By examining case studies and evaluating the impact of Afro centric strategies on textual interpretation, the research has demonstrated the efficacy of African-centered perspectives, engagement with multiple viewpoints, and critical reflexivity in promoting more inclusive and culturally sensitive readings of African texts.

Despite the progress made in decolonizing textual interpretation, it is essential to recognize that this is an ongoing process that requires sustained commitment and critical reflection. To further advance the decolonization of hermeneutics, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Promote Structural Changes in Educational Systems:** Policymakers and educators must work together to integrate African epistemologies and perspectives into curricula and pedagogical practices, challenging the dominance of Eurocentric models in educational institutions.
2. **Foster Interdisciplinary and Intersectional Approaches:** Scholars and practitioners should prioritize interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives to avoid essentialism in Afro centric hermeneutics and acknowledge the diversity and complexity of African experiences.
3. **Invest in Transnational Research Networks:** Collaborative networks should be established to facilitate dialogue and exchange between African and other interpretive frameworks, fostering a more inclusive global intellectual community.

Addressing hermeneutical colonialism in African contexts necessitates the ongoing commitment to challenging Eurocentric biases and promoting more inclusive, culturally sensitive interpretations of texts. By implementing the recommended strategies, scholars, educators, and policymakers can contribute to the continued decolonization of hermeneutics and foster greater appreciation for the diverse epistemologies that enrich our understanding of African literature and experiences.

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