

Africological Historiography: Primary Considerations

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Abstract

Africological Historiography is scholarship dedicated to the preservation of African cosmology in the telling of African history. Such an historiography also serves as a means to tease out the agency of African people in any circumstance of marginality, misinterpretation, suppression, and omission of said historical agency. For the purposes of developing Africological Historiography, Africologists may take on various interests in other fields in order to garner the data necessary for their inquiries. However, it is important to make sure that the data garnered from other disciplines are approached using Afrocentric methodology or they will be no good for Africological research. In this article, I explore the benefits and dangers of other fields of interests, the dangers of Eurocentric theoretical models, afrophobic historiographies, and the inherent praxis of the discipline in its use for producing Africological Historiography. These are primary considerations for Africologists in the presentation of African history.

Introduction

The discipline of Africology has long yearned for its own unique historiographical disposition. Molefi Kete Asante (2007) dedicates a whole chapter to the idea of an “Afrocentric Historiography” in his text, *An Afrocentric Manifesto*. Since Africologists utilize the Afrocentric paradigm, which “places African ideas at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior,” (Asante, 1998, p. 2), Africological Historiography is scholarship dedicated to the preservation of African cosmology in the telling of African history. Also, in places where the people and their history remain marginal, such a historiography serves to “tease out the agency” of African people (Asante, 2007, p. 65).

In Victor Okafor’s (1997) article, *Toward an Africological Pedagogical Approach to African History*, he refers to African history as “a matrix” under which are embedded the various histories of the African world. Both Okafor and Asante acknowledge the utility of Cheikh Anta Diop’s historiography, or *Diopian Historiography* (Asante, 2007, 118), in presenting a non-chronophobic history of African people. Asante (2007) describes *Diopian Historiography* as a corrective view of African history that relocates the ancient Nile Valley as an African cultural center.

Africology exists as an errant agent within the western academy. It is not of the western academy; instead, for the sake of combating hegemonic eurocentric paradigms imposed upon African people, it forced its way into a seat at the academic table. As such, if it wishes to maintain any notion of autonomy, it is not possible for it to hold an interdisciplinary disposition. It is a solely disciplinary field with a guiding paradigm that is foundational to no other field. Unlike every other field in the western academy, Africology is primarily predicated upon the assumption of agency for African people. As such, what I primarily deal with in this article is how Africans in America, or “African Americans”, should engage African history. However, the methodologies described within are just as applicable for scholars on the African continent and throughout the African world. In this article, I explore the benefits and dangers of other fields of interests, the dangers of eurocentric theoretical models, afrophobic historiographies, and the inherent praxis of the discipline in

its use for producing Africological Historiography. These are primary considerations for Africologists in the writing of African history.

World Cultural Projects

Throughout the ages the writing of a people's history has proven to be an inherently political project. It can not be argued that the utility of history for the purposes of distinguishing a group, justifying engagement in war, and/or the continuation of cultural, religious, and political homogeneity has been the primary aims of many an annal. In *The World and Africa*, W.E.B. DuBois (1947/2007) expresses an Afrocentric position as he proclaims, "...here is a history of the world written from the African point of view; or better, a history of the Negro as part of the world which now lies about us in ruins" (p. xxxi). Of course, the "African" whose point of view Du Bois relies on is his own, as well as that of the many colleagues of African descent he mentions and relies on heavily throughout the text.

Another influential figure in the development of African American historiography within the African context is Carter G. Woodson, known affectionately by African Americans as, "The Father of Black History". In Woodson's (1933/1990) most well-known text, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he expresses his frustration at "Negro Colleges" (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) for centering their courses on the history and philosophy of "European colonists" and yet "direct no attention to the philosophy of the African" (p. 137). Both Du Bois and Woodson seemed to clearly understand the implications of not centering African people within their own paradigms of cultural history and philosophy. This is particularly important when considering the dominant contemporary documentation of African history has largely been part of alien cultural projects that have bastardized and demonized African historical reality.

Therefore, in presenting this historiographic assessment, I must begin politically by positing that this endeavor aligns with the cultural project of African people. As such, it sits on the world stage between two other cultural projects. To be clear, I assume the existence of three paradigmatic world cultural projects, of which I describe as, (1) the African World Cultural Project (AWCP), (2) the European Cultural-Imperialist Project (ECIP), and (3) the Asiatic Intercultural Project (AIP). The use of the concepts of the ECIP and AIP in Africological scholarship is largely an assessment of their effects on the African world, and not simply a study of the cultural factions themselves. This article principally deals with the relationships between the AWCP and ECIP, and has not been equipped with the necessary arguments needed to engage the interplay of all three. However, subsequent articles shall cover the matter in time.

The development of such a methodology was necessary in order to deal with the theoretical themes presented within this article. It is clear that other minority cultural identities exist that may exclude themselves from within the fold of these cultural descriptions. However, as it is generally accepted that the dominant primary cultures in the world are of African, Asian, and European disposition, the purpose of such a methodology provides clarity on intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships between these primary cultural factions.

The African World Cultural Project (AWCP) seeks the restoration of African autonomy and sovereignty in world affairs. It is Pan-African in scope, and is dependent upon the continuation of cultural, social, political, and economic relations across the African world. Africological assessments of social behaviors and histories of African world societies, both positive and negative, are analyzed for cultural advancement.

The European Cultural-Imperialist Project (ECIP) is described as such for that it is both the historical and contemporary temperament of Europe towards the rest of the non-European world. This is evidenced by the forceful spread of westernization/globalization and the global pervasiveness of white supremacist ideology. The ECIP is evaluated as being dedicated to the continuation of European world hegemony through whatever political means necessary.

The characterization of the Asiatic Intercultural Project (AIP) is largely a description of Asian relationships and social behavior towards each other through shared cultural and/or political ties. It also considers adverse behaviors, such as that of dominant nations like China exploiting weaker nations such as Sri Lanka (Sultana, 2016) and how the history of European imperialism may have influenced such endeavors. Naturally, ancient

Asiatic involvement in Africa (Hyksos, Hebrew, Arab, Indian, etc.) considered. However, this assessment is further evolving as we now have the beginnings of quasi-Chinese neo-colonialism developing in Africa, with well over a million Chinese now dotted throughout the continent (French, 2014).

Fields of Interest

The discipline of Africology has interests in other humanities, social, and even natural sciences, but largely only in what can be gained from the findings—though even some of the procedures used in order to make their findings have been found useful. Africologists are not, however, concerned with the use of the intellectual paradigms of the various fields, or methodologies in which they create and utilize, as they are eurocentric in nature and are inconsistent with an Afrocentric analysis.

On the subject of history, Africologists begin with quite a different conception of history than western Historians. *Historians* see history as strictly written and a concept they call *pre-history* as events occurring prior to the written record. Such a suggestion negates the emphasis various African societies place on tradition and undermines scientific attempts at understanding the past through oral tradition. Africologists understand such a historiographical method to be an Agency Reduction Formation (ARF) (Tillotson, 2011, p. 60), and not constructive for interpreting past African realities.

To further clarify, Africologists regard *history* as an account of past and present events, written or oral, that is non-linear, but cyclical. History for Africologists isn't seen as a universally accepted concept, and Africologists acknowledge that the perception of history in the various regions of the world are totally dependent upon the cultural centers of those who record and present history. For African people, history exists in the present, and the "present" has already been known to occur, as in the Akan proverb, "*Tete are ne nne*", or "*ancient things are today*" (Daaku, 1971, p. 117). In this way, the past and present can occur both simultaneously and asynchronously along a cultural perception of constant renewal. Events that may have occurred ages ago are constantly renewed in cultural memory and cultural praxis, however are, yet and still, dynamic in that the present is also a constant extension of the past. The notion of a "pre-history" is lost upon such a cosmology as a record of the past is not predicated upon written accounts. This is not to say that written record serves no or little importance in African cosmology. On the contrary, within African paradigms, juxtaposed to its authoritarian status in the West, written record is complementary to orature.

Africans view history as cyclical, dynamic events, rather than as a simple linear progression. This does not mean that African people had no philosophy of planning ahead. In fact, the civilization of Kemet (Pre-Ptolemaic Egypt) produced the world's oldest calendar to be used for such. However, this calendar was based off of regularity in their natural setting, such as the heliacal rising of Sirius, or the character of the Nile that allowed them to know the periods of inundation, planting, and harvest (Asante, 2019, p. 50). The African philosopher John Mbiti (1969) stipulates that for African people:

Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real... Since the future has not been experienced, it does not make sense; it cannot, therefore, constitute part of time, and people do not know how to think about it—unless, of course, it is something which falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena (p.17).

One such common "rhythm of natural phenomena" is that of the seasons of river inundation followed by that of planting and harvest observed and measured by stellar and/or lunar cycles. This, according to Mbiti, involves a two-dimensional philosophy of time that makes room only for immediately occurring events to be placed "in the category of inevitable or *potential time*. . . . The most significant consequence of this is that, according to traditional concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually no *future* (16)."

Mbiti developed much of his theory from linguistic examinations, finding no words for "future" in the Bantu languages of the Kamba and Kikuyu people of Kenya. He makes it known that time is something that African people relate to events and phenomena, not for the sole purpose of mathematical certainty as valued in the west. There have been a number of favorable opinions and critiques of Mbiti's African philosophy of

time (Gyekye, 1987; Kalumba, 2005; English, 2006), however, what is being highlighted here is the quality of African temporal reality, particularly in regards to how temporal reality is utilized in the general maintenance of African cosmology. This is poignant due to the fact that even as Africologists we still utilize the calendar year numbering and notation systems, (i.e., B.C., A.D., B.C.E, C.E., etc.), as developed by Europe. Such consideration should remain extant throughout any Africological inquiry into the African past. I even go so far as to suggest the eventual creation or revival of a calendar and temporal notation system based on African paradigms.

The scholarship being produced by social science fields such as Anthropology and Archaeology are considered by Africologists, for much has been discovered through their inquiries. However, much like the field of History, Anthropology has caused much of African historical phenomena to be misconstrued and denigrated due to their history of racist and ethnocentric analyses. Nevertheless, archaeo-anthropological procedures such as excavation, stratigraphy, and seriation of material culture are useful to Africological inquiry about the African past.

Within the use of a method such as excavation, Africologists should also position *restoration* as an equal objective, as Africologists are not only concerned with digging up the African past, but also with restoring the dignity of African heritage and continuing the tradition of linking the past with the present. Anything that can be found within the material culture of the African past should be considered for restoration and/or preservation in a manner that is, to the best of our understanding, respectful to the ancestors by and for whom it was created. Further, if an Africologist disturbs the gravesite of African ancestors, whether in ruins or well preserved, it is their mission to restore the site to ensure proper veneration of those ancestors. Another primary objective in such investigation is to ensure Africologists have control over primary sources. It must be well understood that control over primary sources has far reaching implications in terms of access, interpretation, and even in the politics of citation.

A superb example of excavation and restoration that employs Africological tact is the work being done by the Asa G. Hilliard South Asasif Restoration Project (ASA Restoration Project). The project was founded by Anthony T. Browder and named in honor of the late Asa G. Hilliard who was an Afrocentric educator and authority on Kemet. The mission project has opened the door for numerous people of African descent (primarily African-Americans) to have access to primary sources of Kemetic history as they assist with the excavation and restoration of the tombs of Karakhamun and Karabasken, first priest of Amun and mayor of Waset (Pre-Ptolemaic Thebes), respectively (Browder, 2011, p. 15). As the name implies, the team has excavated, and are now in the process of restoring the tombs in order to preserve Kemetic and Kushite heritage. In *Finding Karakhamun*, Browder (2011) highlights the significance of their work:

The excavation and restoration of the tomb of Karakhamun affords us an opportunity to analyze primary evidence which links Kushite history and culture with that of Kemet. We have their words and their images to guide us. Just as Karakhamun and his contemporaries reached into the distant past to define themselves and preserve their names for future generations, we are in a unique position to do the same. (p. 74)

The efforts of the ASA Restoration Project provide a clear example of the possibilities for Africological inquiry utilizing the recovery methods of archaeology. Though the mission was not a venture developed and implemented by trained Africologists, it operates on Afrocentric principles, which has yielded valuable primary source information.

Other social science fields such as ethnography and sociology are likewise useful in terms of the data that has been collected but, much like their counterparts, the methodologies and analyses utilized by these fields are also quite problematic. The study of linguistics is a primary example of a field where an abundance of useful data is present but the manner in which the field applies the data is largely eurocentric. In relation to African languages, there often exists a bifurcation of culture and language. The construction of language is often depoliticized, and largely so in supposed efforts to link languages by their antecedents in order to find common origins. The study of the antecedents and the quest to find their origin are not problematic ventures, however the methods and nomenclatures used in order to do so are often exercises in agency reduction. For

example, the use of the term *Afroasiatic* to refer to languages such as Mdw Ntr, Amharic, and Hausa further polarizes African people and culture in a rather Hegelian fashion as north-African languages become alienated from the so-called sub-Saharan.

To be sure, Afroasiatic implies an African parent language to both African and Asiatic languages under its language tree. However, the grouping of the language together has no practical use for Africologists as the languages become depoliticized or neutral in their application, if not simply erroneously classified and interpreted. In fact, historian and linguist Théophile Obenga has long argued that this language grouping is based on prejudice. In chapter one of Kwasi Wiredu's (2004) edited volume, *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Obenga states:

The so-called "Afro-Asiatic family," or "Chamito-Semitic family," which has gained wide circulation, has no scientific foundation at all. There is no proof of an "Afro-Asiatic historical grammar." One may recall here what Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) called "the prejudice of the prestige of the multitude," that is to say, the supposition that what everyone says must be true. In the human sciences "scientific" circles often make claims not based on any objectively verifiable grounds but rather just on this kind of prejudice. (Obenga, 2004, p. 32)

This is especially salient considering the fact that descent languages among contemporary African ethnic groups have allowed for the reconstruction of languages as old as the Mdw Ntr (Obenga, 2004). These factors are important considerations in Africological inquiry that the field of linguistics lacks the methodology to inform.

In regards to the *natural sciences*, the models in which data is collected in those fields can be argued to not necessarily be eurocentric. However, it is important to note the absence of ethereal domain from *scientific* inquiry. Africologists find African people's positioning of spirituality and science as non-dichotomous but symbiotic in relationship is important in the understanding and reconstruction of African historical reality. Atheistic attitudes, which are prevalent in the scientific community, do not take such an orientation seriously and, thus, often aid in the distortion of African cosmological reconstructions.

Antecedent Methodology

The use of Cheikh Anta Diop's historiographic frameworking, or *Diopian Historiography*, is done so primarily to place African culture as foundation in any analysis of African history. Diop understood well that the unifying factors of African cosmology were more fundamental than the externally imposed notions of what makes African people different (Diop, 1989, x). He did not deny ethnic diversity, or even dynamism, but insisted on foundational and unifying aspects of African culture based on ancient antecedents. The complementary notions of the domains of matriarchy and patriarchy, denied for various erroneous reasons by the western academy, was Diop's attempt in reconstructing an Afrocentric social history. Thus, Diop's Two-Cradle Theory (Wobogo, 1976) arose as a social theory in which to use as a guiding methodology. Whether one finds the entirety of his Two-Cradle Theory to be practical or not, the use of the African background in formulating his theories are wholly relevant to the reconstruction of African history and historical cosmology. Although, when utilized, I propose that less focus should be placed upon the conflicting nature of the supposed two cradles, and more focus placed on Diop's notions of cultural continuity and unity among the southern cradle of African people.

It is clear from Diop's work that although the study of our historical culture may be foundational to the struggle for restoration, scholars should lend equal importance to contemporary political and social conditions. Such should express the dynamism and vast variety of African reality along with the overlapping social, political, economic, and spiritual circumstances transgenerationally and transcontinentally. In approaching this, the question of how African variation is understood becomes central. In respect to this regard, I have developed a methodology based on the antecedent hypothesis presented by Diop. Being pan-African in scope, I have utilized three African terms in order to develop a methodology in which to use in order to further understand, as Okafor put it, the *matrix* of African culture.

The first aspect or method of approach is *Kanna* (sameness). This approach is developed from the Yoruba phrase, “ti kanna r”, or “of the same matter”. It involves the gathering of data garnered from the field of Africology, and the various other aforementioned fields of interest, and synthesizing it using Afrocentric methodology in order to show clear antecedental sameness between various African ethnic groups and cultures. Examples could include the use of oral tradition and oral history in order to reconstruct antecedental properties between regional groups, Afrocentric analysis of written accounts of various ethnic groups, or Afrocentric analysis of the material culture of various African societies (especially if they help to formulate social histories or examples of past lifeways).

The more nuanced concept of *Fánna* (similarity) derives from the Xhosa/Zulu term “Kuyafana”, or “in the same way; it is just the same”. This method assists with the notions of cultural continuity stemming from ancient precedents argued to be exemplified within the whole of the continental border, as well as within the African diaspora. *Fánna* may somewhat overlap with the *Kanna* method as investigations into cultural phenomena such as water rites, circumcision, libation, domains of matriarchy, and a variety of other cosmological similarities become central. However, *Fánna* recognizes that similar African phenomena may not present ready antecedents. It is simply a bridge in assisting in the possible discovery of antecedents or the acknowledgement of African phenomena that appears inherent throughout multiple groups despite any clear origin.

The concept of *Naan* (uniqueness) derives from the Igbo phrase, “naan ebe”, or “only place/source”. The use of the Naani method involves the distinguishing of cultural phenomena which shows no clear antecedents or similarity with other groups. This would involve first the identification and investigation of the unique phenomena before also investigating other groups in proximity, and/or regional and diaspora groups, in order to determine if either *Kanna* or *Fánna* is indeed not present. The utility in such also secures the agency and intellectual autonomy of individual African societies.

In employing this methodology, Africologists may use terms that are specific to the language of the group being investigated. In fact, I encourage such because it only enriches lexical refinement as well as cosmological understanding between groups, while also limiting the possibility of hegemonic ideals across cultures. For African Americans, this method is especially salient as it provides frameworking for reconstructing the past lifeways of enslaved ancestors. Doing so would assist in further reconstructing the cosmological rational and utility of various aspects of African vestige among African Americans, enriching the collective comprehension of our own *Africanity*.¹¹ Often defined as the state or quality of being African, as Africologists, we emphasize that the traditions, customs, and values of African people are the core of the meaning of Africanity.

Hegemonic “Modernity”

A problem to consider is that modern writers of African descent have engaged themselves with western theoretical frameworks. Africologists, however, understand that frameworks such as modernity and postmodernity are no good for African people.¹¹ Perhaps should more accurately be described as western modernity or “westernity”. In fact, Africologists avoid engaging in such frameworks, only doing so in cases where Afrocentric theory is in need of defense or repair from hegemonic malignity. Modernity is to be understood as a paradigmatically eurocentric framework and a byproduct of the European Imperialist Cultural Project (EICP). Scholars such as Karl Marx, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Blaut, Molefi Asante, and Toyin Falola, have made it clear that “modernism” or “modernity” came about due to the imperialist expansion of European countries such as Britain, Spain, Portugal, France, and Belgium (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014, 40).

While modernity may be responsible for the expansion of technological and scientific advancements that have somewhat facilitated human social progress, the very same cultural project was involved in the kidnapping and enslavement of human lives, ruthless and murderous colonization antics, and developing erroneous racial theories that, to this day, have horrifying repercussions for African people. Further, the African people’s involvement with so-called “modern technologies”, such as the automobile, cellular phone, and television, is not a conscious involvement with modernism. To be absolutely clear, the western academy’s application of “modernism”, despite its broad implications, should not be viewed as some universal human endeavor but

merely a eurocentric concept of social reality.

Modernism was developed out of Europe's imperialist quest for power. It was able to be maintained due to the oppression and ontological and cosmological reduction of African people. The simple engagement with the modernist system (e.g., the creation of rockets for a European space program, the development of more efficient traffic signals for American cities, and the creation of music using "modern" technologies), does not make an African person a modernist. To be more clear, such involvement does not automatically make an African person an adherent or inheritor of the western intellectual heritage that is modernity. It is clear from the historical record that African people lived different realities and relied on intentions both unfamiliar and inconsequential to European ethos.

As with most bi-products of the EICP, modernism has had a significant role in psychological terror towards African people. It is through modernism that we have come to adopt such negative ideas as "Third World Countries", "tribe", "pygmy", "bushman", "native Indian", and "negro". These terms represent extant eurocentric ideological negations about oppressed people and cultures. Within modernism, there exists no plurality of ideas unless there is a hierarchy that establishes eurocentric ethos as standard or, more insidiously, universal, while all other cultural ideas are marginalized to the fringes of societal thought.

Afrophobic Historiographies

Afrophobic historiographies are those in which decenter African people from African perception of realities past and present. When people of African descent write such historiographies, they take on similar natures as *lynched* or *decapitated* texts (Asante, 1992).¹¹ According to Asante (1992), "*Decapitated text* s exists without cultural presence in the historical experiences of the creator; a *Lynched text* is one that has been strung up with the tropes and figures of the dominating culture. African American authors who have tried to "shed their race" have been known to produce both types of texts." There are two primary assertions under this notion, being Chronophobic and Ethnophobic narratives (Adé, T., & Samuels, T., 2019). Chronophobic narratives are any resistance to the presentation of African cultural history that is transgenerational (e.g., capable of beginning with the ancient civilizations of the Nile Valley and before) and transcontinental. Perhaps a safe way to avoid being a chronophobe of African history is to utilize the aforementioned Diopian Historiography.

Ethnophobic narratives can somewhat overlap with chronophobic notions of the history of African people. Within this overlap, any interpretation that presents African people as something other than culturally African can, depending on the circumstance, have both chronophobic and ethnophobic implications. However, ethnophobic narratives can also more specifically be any flagrant or fallacious misrepresentation of African people, written particularly by African people themselves. Given this particularity, ethnophobes are writers of African heritage who exemplify a *phobia* (irrational fear) of their own ethnicity. Ethnicity is utilized here broadly to indicate that ethnophobes have little or no faith in African paradigms and intellectual heritage due to their bondage to eurocentric intellectual plantations. Ethnophobes tend to make certain erroneous assumptions about what Africologists consider "African history" or "African people", often relegating such (and similar) terms to mere essentialism.²² Western and especially modernist scholars often use the term Essentialist as a caricature of what it is to be an Afrocentrist or Africologist. It is often used as a way to enhance their strawman arguments against those who use the Afrocentric Paradigm as their guiding theoretical methodology. It is a erroneous and ridiculous notion as no Africologists argues a historical or contemporary ethnic monolithism, but rather that within the cultural ethos of African people lies the historical basis for cultural, political, and economic unity and solidarity amongst the various ethnicities of the African world.

Lexical Refinement

While the western humanities and social sciences have over the years largely done away with pejorative terms such as *savage*, *negro*, and *colored* in their description of African people and phenomena, there still remains much work to be done in terms of refining the general lexicon regarding African phenomena. Asante gives the example of an African house being called a "hut" as a misrepresentation of African reality (Asante, 2007, p. 43). He articulates that there are clear differences between the eurocentric conception of "house" and what an African may consider a home (p. 43-44). Erroneous, ethnocentric descriptions of African phenomena remain

pervasive. Africologists are concerned with refining such language for, as aforementioned, we are primarily concerned with keeping our own lexicon centered in African cosmological reality.

Thus, terms such as *enslaved African* and *Maafa* replaces terms such as “slave” and “slave trade” respectively. The tropes and subjectivities presented within *lynched* and *decapitated* texts adds a further, and possibly more problematic, obstacle to the challenge of lexical refinement. The fact that these texts are written by writers of African descent lends credence to eurocentric lexicons, while also simultaneously allowing the inherent eurocentric nature of such terms to masquerade as universal ideas. Both in the West and on the African continent, eurocentric masquerades are extant throughout lynched and decapitated texts.

To be clear, there also exists within the historical cultural milieu of the AIP Asiatic ethnocentric interpretations of African history and culture. They all present Africological concerns that must be addressed. However, it is clear that the use of eurocentric theoretical frameworks in order to intellectually engage with African phenomena has been the primary contemporary crux of the issue at hand. The job of the Africologist is to identify and correct such distortions of African realities. Perhaps the most useful resources that we have for developing a proper lexicon are oral traditions and oral histories laden with terms only understood within an African cosmological context. Africologists have positioned terms such as *nommo*, *maat*, and *maafa* to better enhance our burgeoning lexicon. Investigating oral tradition and oral history will further assist Africologists in basing their writings on the historical realities of their African subjects; and doing so will ensure the development of a clear and proper lexicon based on African cosmological principles.

Oral Traditions as History

Oral tradition is one of the primary traditions of African culture. We find orature as tradition among the Yoruba (Ogunyemi, 2010) of West Africa, the Bakuba (Vansina, 1960) of central Africa, the Baganda (Kizza, 2010) of East-central Africa, and the Masai (Daaku, 1971) and Kikuyu (Kenyatta, 1965, p. 115) of East Africa, just to name a few. Much of these societies pass down their oral tradition during elaborate festivals and ceremonies that initiate age-sets and generation groups (Daaku, 1971, p. 115). Oral tradition in the African context goes beyond mere orality, as they utilize many aesthetic devices in order to produce a holistic cosmological experience for the next generation. In Ghana, the Akan are known for festivals that are used to pass down oral tradition to future generations. Ghanaian scholar Kwame Yeboa Daaku (1971) presents an example from the Akan:

Among the several devices adopted to preserve their history and tradition may be mentioned the pouring of libations, the music of the drums and horns, the creation of special linguist staffs, oaths, songs, proverbs, and funeral dirges. To a people who settle most disputes by having recourse to history it is of supreme importance that members of the various families and clans tell their stories to their young for, as they aptly put it, “Tete ka asom ene Kakyere,” that is, ancient things remain in the ears, which means traditions survive only by telling them. Again their respect for history is made explicit in the frequent assertion that “Tete are ne nne,” i.e., the very same ancient things are today, or history repeats itself (p. 117).

Jomo Kenyatta, father of modern Kenya and scholar of Kenyan history, provides another example from the East-African Kikuyu people. Kenyatta, in his text *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938/1965), provides his readers with the legendary history of his great people who live east of Lake Victoria, the largest headwater of the Nile River. Kenyatta states that the legend is from the “beginning of things, when mankind started to populate the earth” (p. 3). Within the legend of Kenyatta’s native Kikuyu we find that their original family group was named Mbari ya Moobi out of respect for the founding matriarch of the clan who was named Moobi. The founding patriarch of the clan was named Kikuyu.

Moobi and Kikuyu had nine daughters, of which they found nine young men for the daughters to marry. After the death of Moobi and Kikuyu, the daughters formulated nine clans under the collective name of Rorere rwa Mbari ya Moombi, namely, children or people of Moombi. Each new generation of Kikuyu are introduced to this narrative. Naturally, the narrative may not be told exactly the same from one generation to the next, but that doesn’t seem to matter to the Kikuyu. This tradition serves a cosmological importance that the Kikuyu value above whatever possible lost detail that may lend more accuracy to the events as they

were. Oral tradition for the Kikuyu is passed down during rites of passage ceremonies involving circumcision, or *irua* as it is known to the Kikuyu. Dances and songs that make up the rituals and “divine services” are known as *mambura*. Kenyatta describes the meaning of these traditions for Kikuyu people:

Without this custom a tribe which had no written records would not have been able to keep a record of important events and happenings in the life of the Kikuyu nation. Any Kikuyu child who is not corrupted by detribalisation is able to record in his mind the whole history and origin of the Kikuyu people through the medium of such names as Agu, Ndemi and Mathathi, etc., who were initiated hundreds of years ago. (p. 135)

Throughout Africa oral tradition is a primary vehicle for the recording and telling of history, and the maintenance of cosmology. In fact, it can be argued that little can be gained from any inquiry into the transgenerational social histories of African people unless it is gained through an engagement with oral tradition. The Africanist scholar Jan Vansina wrote extensively on oral tradition and its use as history. However, Vansina often fails to understand the African cosmological factors that shape oral tradition. Vansina (1985) argues that, “Historians who work with the written sources of the last few centuries in any of the major areas of literacy should not expect that reconstructions using oral materials will yield as full, detailed, and precise a reconstruction, barring only the very recent past” (p. 199). Vansina doesn’t necessarily denigrate oral tradition, however, he still elevates writing as more useful juxtaposed to being a complementary reconstructive tool. However, both writing and orature are still largely based on the interpretation, perspective, and recognition of those who record and pass along information. In terms of reconstructing historical reality, there is much that can be lost in the dullness of written record that can only be gained through the experience of orature. As Jacob Curruthers (1995) places it, “living oral tradition... is a modern extension of the wisdom of ancient African thought” (pg. 6).

Africologists must also consider the concept of *nommo* when dealing with African orature. Adapted from Dogon cosmology for Afrocentric discourse, *nommo* is “the generative and productive power of the spoken word” (Asante, 1998, p. 22). As aforementioned, when Africans pass on oral tradition it is not simply the telling of stories from one generation to the next. The elaborate festivals, initiations, and ceremonies that accompany them provide a holistic experience. Therefore, cosmology is secured within an unbroken, organic link of tradition. As Asante (1998) posits, “... creative production is ‘an experience’ or a happening occurring within and outside the speaker’s soul” (p. 90). Therefore, Africologists tasked with the writing of African history must embody this principle. In the telling of African history there must be a sense of plurality without hierarchy, a conceptual device which facilitates the telling of one cultural experience shared by many ethnic interpreters. Asante further clarifies, stating, “... the African seeks the totality of an experience, concept, or system. Traditional African society looked for unity of the whole rather than specifics of the whole... considerations of the whole were more productive than considerations in detail” (p. 90).

Further, in consideration of the “unity of the whole” in terms of Afrocentric scholarship and knowledge production, Africologists must never be so irresponsible as to intentionally allow any research to subvert contemporary African cosmologies in efforts to simply gain further context that may or may not be useful to praxis. An example of such unethical behavior would be the attempt to use material culture to “disprove” oral tradition. One may document their findings, conflicting or not, but do not attempt to force the particular African ethnic group to accept the data. Another example would be to document cultural phenomena that is shared by African people with the implication that it should be kept secret. Not all cultural-historical information valuable to African people is meant for publication, for publicizing can be harmful to traditions that have a necessity of secrecy in order to remain effective.

Praxis

The discipline of Africology has a rather unique praxis. In fact, our praxis is at the core of what makes our discipline so unique from any other. The praxis serves as a constant source of motivation for Africologists and is inherent in any legitimate Africological inquiry. In the introductory chapter of *The Afrocentric Paradigm*, perhaps the most seminal text in our field, Ama Mazama (2002) imparts that, “From an Afrocentric per-

spective, where knowledge can never be produced for the sake of it but always for the sake of our liberation, a paradigm must activate our consciousness to be of any use to us” (p. 8). The production of knowledge for the sake of liberation is what separates this discipline from any other in the western academy. As aforementioned, Africology operates strictly on the Afrocentric paradigm, and as the African world is in disarray, the paradigm dictates to the discipline of Africology that it must be holistically involved in the restoration and upkeep of the African world. Therefore, Africological historiography exhibits an inherent praxis to restore African ontology, and subsequently African cosmology and agency. Africologists are committed to aiding the Africana Cultural Project in order to bring about such reality. In the words of Mazama, “*The ultimate test will be our praxis*” (p. 8).

Conclusion

Africologists may take on various interests in other fields in order to garner the data necessary for their inquiries. Interests in resources and methods from other fields in the western academy may be necessary to conduct Africological research. However, it is important to make sure that those resources and methods are approached using Afrocentric methodology or they will be no good for Africological research. It is the job of Africologists to ensure the formation and maintenance of Africological historiography is not corrupted by alien cosmology. All Africological inquiry has an inherent praxis, being the use of scholarship in order to advance the Africana World Cultural Project (AWCP), restoring the agency and sovereignty of African people worldwide. The writing of African history is also an exercise in such praxis. The implications of an Africological Historiography are wide ranging and will ensure better control over source material, discourse, and perceptions concerning African phenomena. It will also better assist in the restorative efforts of the AWCP. However, Africological Historiography will never become the dominant voice among African scholarship if it continues its arrest in the western academy. More Africologists and schools of Africology are needed throughout the African diaspora and, perhaps more importantly, on the African continent, in order to ensure our goals come to fruition.

ENDNOTES

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