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A Critical Analysis of African-Centered Psychology: From Ism to Praxis

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The purpose of this article is to critically evaluate what is perceived as shortcomings in the scholarly field of African-centered psychology and mode of transcendence, specifically in terms of the existence of an African identity. A great number of scholars advocate a total embrace of a universal African identity that unites Africans in the diaspora and those on the continent and that can be used as a remedy to a Eurocentric domination of psychology at the detriment of Black communities' specific needs. Another group of scholars argue for a relative African identity, emphasizing diversity and differences among African people both on the continent and in the diaspora. Considering that the earlier works in the field focused on laying its ideological foundation, this paper suggests that African-centered psychology and mode of transcendence should: (a) move beyond discussions on ideologies and identities, (b) concentrate on developing practical applications of its guiding principles, and (c) reclaim the relevance of an African history, memory, and past. In other words, having reclaimed African history, memory, and past, African-centered psychology can move away from ism and advance toward more praxis..

Keywords: *African-centered psychology, African studies, Afrocentrism, Négritude, Pan-Africanism*

In their overview of transpersonal psychology's growth trajectory, Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007) reflected that "the growing transpersonal community could benefit greatly from transpersonal associations throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America—not so Westerners might come as missionaries and teach the transpersonal, but because the Western community needs the participation of these communities" (p. 17). In addition, they argued that "if transpersonal psychology aspires to be a fully integrative human psychology, a psychology that is not only East-West but also North-South, it will need to invite voices from the rest of the world" (p. 17). Towards the purpose of redressing this imbalance, this article presents an overview of the field of African-centered psychology/studies and mode of transcendence. The focus here is not to describe specific African-centered transpersonal phenomena, but to critically evaluate the field and offer suggestions for a more practical direction.

This article aims not only to engage scholars within the field of African-centered psychology, but also to inform psychologists of non-African-centered descent of the literature and praxis in the said field, and argue for more professional attention within the field of psychology to the needs of Black communities and the ways to address those needs. Embedded in this discussion is the premise that one cannot argue for the relevance of an African-centered psychology without an a priori recognition of the existence of an African history, memory, and past. The following section attempts to define key concepts that are relevant to understand the history of and the discussion within the scholarly field of African-centered psychology.

The Question of an African Identity

There are opposing views about the existence of an African identity and the nature of an African-centered psychology. Africa is a continent of 54 countries, and each country has its own tribes and cultures; it is then not possible to describe an African-centered psychology that represents all Africans. However, in order to understand the conversation around the idea of an African-centered psychology, it is necessary to define related concepts. A quick search of the term "African-centered" redirects one to the notions of "Afrocentrism," "Afrocentricity," or "Africology," which is the study of Black, African, African American, Africana and/or Afro-American.

Afrocentrism or Afrocentricity

The term *Afrocentrism* is believed to have originated in 1962 (Moses, 1998) and *Afrocentricity* in the 1970s (Thairu & Wahinya, 1975). Both terms are used essentially as a cultural ideology or worldview by mostly African Americans and Africans of the diaspora. Even though Afrocentric ideas may date back at least to the 1890s (Conyers, 2004), the concept was revived in the 1960s and 1970s. African American intellectuals, inspired by African-centered scholars' groundbreaking works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (i.e., Du Bois, 1903, 1915, 1933, 1939; Fanon, 1952, 1961; Guthrie, 1976; Jones, 1972; Nobles, 1974), and motivated by the Civil Rights movement and the development of African American Studies programs in universities in the United States, sought self-determination through the rehabilitation of their African cultural heritage.

The term Afrocentric has been traced by Derrick Alridge to W. E. B. Du Bois who used it in the 1960s, but it was Asante who appropriated the term and popularized it in *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1980) and later in *The Afrocentric Idea* (1998). Asante (2000) stated that the Afrocentric idea as a cultural configuration was distinguished by five characteristics:

1. An intense interest in psychological location as determined by symbols, motifs, rituals, and signs
2. A commitment to finding the subject-place of Africans in any social, political, economic, or religious phenomenon with implications for questions of sex, gender, and class
3. A defense of African cultural elements as historically valid in the context of art, music, and literature
4. A celebration of centeredness and agency and a commitment to lexical refinement that eliminates pejoratives about Africans or other people
5. A powerful imperative from historical sources to revise the collective text of African people.

Akbar (1991) argued that Afrocentricity involves the identification of the continuous ancient voice in its call to a realization of an authentic African people. His aim was to develop an African agency that does not derive from the negative aspects of being "Black" people on the continent or anywhere in the diaspora. He emphasized the positive features of basic African philosophy that dictate the values, customs, attitudes, and behaviors of Africans in Africa and in the New World (Nobles, 1980), and the reclamation, re-ascension, and revitalization of an African psychology (Noble, 1986).

The end of slavery in the United States in the 1860s and the decline of colonialism in Africa in the 1960s were major social changes that created conditions for the rise of Black consciousness around the world. But it was in the United States that such changes received transformational impetus. African American intellectuals, who constantly lived under Euro-American organized racism and repression, needed to develop a counter-narrative where they could self-determine. Afrocentrism became a counter-narrative that seeks to highlight the contributions of African people worldwide (Asante, 1980, 1998, 2000).

Critique of Afrocentrism

Afrocentrism is generally defined as the study of African peoples using an Africa-centered lens. The problem with this definition is the placement of Africa at the center of any analysis of African history and culture, including the African American experience (Oyebade, 1990). Conflating the African and African American experience could present some methodological challenge. For example, in the early 1960s, Africa-centered historiography scholars consciously grounded their research in African methodology; but, Oyebade (1990) argued, "the theoretical conceptualization of an Africa-centered approach is the handiwork of Afrocentric scholars such as Molefi Kete Asante, Tsheloane Keto, Mualana Karenga, and a host of others based in the United States" (p. 233). Shifting the focus from methodology to theory may open the field to different kinds of ideological interpretations. Yet, what the field needs today is to move away from ideological ism and focus more on methodological praxis.

Critics argued that Afrocentrism, as an ideology, offers little more than "a psychological and therapeutic feel-good-together philosophy" (Adeleke, 2009, p. 180) or a new reconstruction of world history full of historical myths and legends (Shavit, 2001). Cain Hope Felder (1994) warned Afrocentrists not to demonize categorically all white people, vilify European heritage to the point that Europe epitomizes all the evil in the world, and that gross over-generalizations and using factually or incorrect material is bad history and bad scholarship. Despite the critics' opinion, Afrocentrism

is an important aspect of a Pan-African conversation about the identity and the relevance of the knowledge of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora.

Pan-Africanism and the Diaspora

Pan-Africanism is an ideology and movement that encourages the solidarity of Africans worldwide. It is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political progress and aims to "unify and uplift" people of African descent. In psychology, Pan-Africanism could be understood as the common lived experience, felt emotion, and shared memory of African people on the continent and in the diaspora. In his definition of diaspora, Safran (1991) said that its constituent elements include:

> Dispersal from a homeland, often by violent forces, the making of a memory, and a vision of that homeland, marginalization in the new location, a commitment to the maintenance/restoration of the homeland, and desire for return and a continuing relationship and identity with the homeland that shapes the consciousness and solidarity of the group. (pp. 83-84)

This definition illustrates the motivating sentiment behind the Pan-African movement of the early twentieth century. Pan-African ideas could be traced back to the first resistance on the slave ships—rebellions and suicides—through the constant plantation and colonial uprising and the "Back to Africa" movements of the nineteenth century (PADEAP, 2011), and emerged as a distinct political movement initially formed and led by people from the diaspora who focused on the struggles of the African people against enslavement and colonization.

The use of diaspora emerges directly out of the growing scholarly interest in the Pan-African movement in particular, and in Black Internationalism in general, that began to develop in the 1950s. The need for the reunification of diasporic and continental Africans was expressed decades earlier (Du Bois, 1933). This movement was born out of the necessity to confront or heal the slavery legacy through racial organization: through ideologies of a real or symbolic return to Africa (Edwards, 2001). In this way, Africans of the diaspora imagined a unified identity that was dependent on a common relationship to Africa.

In 1900, Henry Sylvester Williams from Trinidad called a conference that took place in London, UK, to protest the stealing of the lands in the colonies, racial discrimination, and other relevant issues of interest to Blacks (PADEAP, 2011). In 1919, an African American, W. E. B. Du Bois, convened the first Pan-African congress in Paris, France, demanding the independence of African nations. Further congresses—essentially extended meetings of like-minded Africans searching for a way forward—were held in 1921 in London, Brussels, Paris, in 1923 in London and Lisbon, and in 1927 in New York (PADEAP, 2011). Arguably, the most important Pan-African congress was held in 1945 in Manchester where a large number of African representatives from the continent attended for the first time, which resulted in a gained momentum that contributed to the independence movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

Throughout the twentieth century, cultural Pan-Africanism weaved through the political narrative—the Harlem Renaissance, Francophone philosophies of Négritude, Afrocentrism, Rastafarianism and Hip Hop (PADEAP, 2011)—advocating self-determination of Blacks. In 1974 the 6th Pan-African Congress took place in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, fueled by the radical Black movements that swept the diaspora, espousing militant Black pride, fighting White domination with Black separatist organization, and advocating the global unity of Black people struggling for liberation. The 7th Congress in Kampala, Uganda, in 1994 set up a permanent organizational structure to carry forward decisions taken at the Congress meetings. There were and still are inherent divisions and debates within the Pan-African movement, according to PADEAP (2011): is Pan-Africanism a movement of the people or has it now been taken over by governments, are Black Africans of Sub-Saharan origin the only true Africans? Pan-Africanism may not be different from any other broad-based and passionate political movement, namely the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA.

Critique of (Pan) African Identity

At the heart of the Pan-African debate is the question of an African identity. Scholars argue that the very idea of an African identity is a conflation; it is the main fallacy upon which the concept of an African diaspora largely depends on for its validation (Hartman, 2007; Mengestus, 2007). African identities, such as African languages, are inventions, mutually constitutive existential and epistemic constructions: "Invention implies a history, a social process; it denaturalizes cultural artifacts and practices, stripping them of primordial authenticity and essentialism" (Zeleza, 2006, p. 14). The idea of Africa is complex

and any attempt to define it may swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency.

The essentialist pole comes from a critique of racial purity in Euro-America and posits that Africa arises from similarly complex crossings across race and ethnicity. With this stance, some scholars may argue, Du Bois (1915, 1939) may be taking interethnic crossing to be as identity-constituting and identity-fracturing as interracial crossing. The flip side of that argument, they might say, is the view that imposes a model of racial homogeneity onto ethno-diversity, flattening important differences among various African people, and underscoring the question of who is the only true African. However, this position may be shortsighted especially when looked at it through the lens of postmodern essentialism. When Du Bois (1903) discussed the notion of double consciousness he was suggesting that Blacks were simultaneously inside and outside the West and developed two senses of self: one from within their respective communities and the other from a larger Eurocentric dominant culture. This double consciousness may not only apply to the perceptions and representations related to interracial and interethnic crossings but could be applied to interracial marriages as well. The general point Du Bois was making with his color-line theory was to reflect on the role of race and racism in history and society, calling the world's attention to an eventual response of the oppressed, who happened to be people of color to the oppressors, who happened to be Whites or people of European descent. Such an argument did not necessarily contradict Du Bois' Pan-African ideas and demand for the liberation of African nations and Black (color) people everywhere, on the contrary, it confirmed it.

On the other hand, the contingency pole comes from a critique of racial homogeneity in Africa and posits that DNA research may show that Africans are more diverse than homogeneous and cannot be used to support the Pan-African ideas of an African identity and/or common lived experience. Keguro (2008) argued that the promise of DNA testing for many diasporic people is that it might reveal where their ancestors may once have lived and loved, traveled and married. Such research, this view maintains, tells one more about movement and travel. It tells a contingent story: at this moment, in this year, this individual was in this place—and in telling such a story it opens up narrative possibilities. How did this person come to be in this place at this particular time? What kind of life situation allowed this person to travel to, live in, love in, or be captured in this place? Instead of focusing on place and the mobility of people, DNA research should give insight into the practices of community formation and re-formation: siblings who traveled together and apart to form unique and related family groups; ethno-groupings that are occasional, disrupted, and disruptive (Keguro, 2008). Therefore, one might discover that Africans are more continental, more multi-ethnic, and less rooted and homogeneous than they imagine. In such a scenario, Keguro concluded, diasporic African researches into and complications of identity have much to teach some Africans about their own forms of diversity, about the historically situated aspect of how they have come to be specific, and the stories of how they have always been more diverse than they imagine or claim.

The point Keguro made could be used to debunk the essentialist argument of imposing racial homogeneity onto ethnic diversity by showing that Pan-Africanism is more heterogeneous than homogeneous. However, what Keguro is not addressing is that the problem of an African identity is not necessarily one of diversity but is one of validity and self-determination. DNA focus on place is one aspect, contingent practices of community formation and re-formation is another. DNA findings and research in community practices may lead to the development of praxis that would contribute to the rehabilitation of an African history and memory, the legitimation of an African knowledge, and the validation of an African science, regardless of how heterogeneous or homogeneous African people are. Such praxis "cannot be something imposed from above, but must be found in the authentic lives of the people as they maintain their own sense of dignity" (Asante, 2009, p. 3).

Diasporic and continental African relationships are nuanced and finding a historical, political, and cultural unity can be challenging. On the one hand, Du Bois and Safran assumed that there is a nationalistic tie that binds all "Negro peoples" together by virtue of some inherently shared relationship to Africa. On the other hand, Hartman and Mengestus critiqued this link that supposedly ties the diaspora together. For example, Hartman (2007) argued that the simplistic reduction involved in defining a diasporic community with an identifiable kinship to "an African continental family" (p. 6) is one that exists in a constructed realm dependent

on the concept of race which was "developed in the modern period and in the context of the slave trade" (p. 5). Mengestus (2007) presented a more nuanced view that neither agrees nor disagrees with this imagined racial connection and instead takes a middle ground position and acknowledges the complexly different trajectories of the continent's many languages and cultures. Nevertheless, the question of race and kinship between diasporic and continental Africans becomes obsolete once one recognizes that there was an Africa before slavery and colonization, which had a history and memory. The wisdom and knowledge contained in the many languages and cultures of the continent could then lay the foundation for Africa's ability for knowledge production in service of humanity:

> Contrary to popular perceptions, Black psychology, as being developed in the United States, is neither narrowly race-specific nor limited ethnically or geographically. It is the self-conscious "centering" of psychological analyses and applications in African realities, cultures, and epistemologies. (Nobles, 2013, pp. 292-299)

Although the subject of African identities is vast and complex as the continent itself, it could become a distraction. For methodological purposes, one could select an area of research and develop appropriate praxis. For example, there are religious, ecological, linguistic, and even ethnic taxonomies. There is also Africa as biology/racial, image/representational, space/geographical, and memory/historical (Zeleza, 2006). Africa as memory is relevant for this article as it represents a racial, representational, and geographical link between diasporic and continental Africans, who share similar experiences and related cultural and historical worldviews. Diasporic or African Americans have experienced slavery, involuntary relocation, social and racial discrimination and alienation in the new land. Continental Africans have experienced slavery, colonization, and alienation in their own land. Both are experiencing a global despise and/or rejection of their very existence, arguably, and maybe solely, based on how they look, behave, and possibly their skin color. This commonly lived experience could explain their strong emotional attachment to their shared memory expressed in Pan-Africanism or today's Black Lives Matter movement and other related emancipatory movements and could not just be mere inventions.

Eurocentric Critique of African-Centered Studies

African-centered studies or African studies focus on studying African cultures and communities and also work for the knowledge and emancipation of the African people. The field includes essentially the study of history: pre-colonial (before the 19th century), colonial (between 19th and 20th centuries), and post-colonial (after WWII, in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond); demography: ethnic and tribal groups; religion: Christianity, Islam, traditional religions; culture, politics, economy, and languages. The main approach is critical, questioning epistemological paradigms, theories, and methods used in traditional/mainstream disciplines and how they relate to African ways of knowing and/or references. In general, African-centered studies are interdisciplinary, comprehensive, and appropriately designed to tackle the complexity of issues related to African-centeredness.

Considering the background and context of the concepts previously defined, it seems more appropriate to talk about African-centered studies in a much broader sense than to talk about African-centered psychology more specifically. The diversity of the African people around the world warrants a complex approach to study their reality. Such approach was hinted at in the definition of Afrocentrism and Pan-Africanism. These concepts revealed intersections between history, psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and even political science.

One may not be able to fully describe African-centered studies without a priori acknowledging the existence of an African history and memory, recognizing the validity of African knowledge, and denouncing the negative effect of colonialism and to some extent slavery on the African people and their knowledge. Such efforts were attempted in Pan-African and Afrocentric movements. However, one of the main critiques of Afrocentric scholars was their alleged falsification of African/Black history and their "bad scholarship." This critique, as fair as it may sound, forces one to reflect on its possible implicit assumption. Africans have been made to believe that they do not possess the tools and knowledge to write their own history:

> The Negro…exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that

> we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character. (Hegel, 1956, p. 93, as cited in Nobles & Cooper, 2013, p. 347)

This point of view has been used, like a Pavlov reflex, to condition African people to think they are an inferior race. Hegel (1956) went further to say, "at this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit" (p. 99) and he concluded, "what we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History" (p. 99). Hegel strongly believed that one cannot read anything an African writes without seeing "anathema" all over it. Interestingly, Hegel's argument was also echoed by prominent African scholars. Senghor (1964), a highly respected African intellectual, stated, *"L'émotion est Nègre, comme la raison est Héllène"* (emotion is Negro, as reason is Hellenic; p. 288). Senghor, like Hegel, believed that a Black person could not use his or her neocortex or rational mind because s/he was still stuck in his/her reptilian brain and that anything rational must come from Helena, the symbol of Greece's beauty and the cradle of Western rationalism and civilization. Frantz Fanon, and later Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, in a different context but similar idea, called such phenomenon "lactification," a process whereby any indigenous (Black/Brown person) must obtain the approval of a White person in order to validate his or her knowledge (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 4; Fanon, 1952, p. 47).

This way of thinking goes to show that the non-recognition of the existence of an African history and memory is similar to the non-recognition of the existence of African knowledge and by extension African-centered studies. This could also be called "bad scholarship," especially when it is known that people have lived in Africa for more than three million years and, therefore, should possess a rich and varied history as illustrated by the Egyptian pyramids and hieroglyphics, the ancient kingdoms of Zimbabwe, Ghana, Mali, Congo, and others. Furthermore, Nobles and Cooper gave the proper answer to Hegel's distortion:

> In spite of our Westernization, the antibody of our common core ancestral cultural legacy has kept, to a great extent, an African mind here and an African mind there from being completely torn asunder. Though extremely destructive, Hegel's lie was and is nothing more than a phantom (a bodiless energy without real existence) that on closer examination dissolves, yet tends to leave a lingering doubt about its veracity, implanting its insinuation in a brake to collective action. (Nobles & Cooper, 2013, p. 347)

One could make a cogent argument that because African communities favor oral transmission of knowledge, and that orally transmitted knowledge may be altered or lost from generation to generation, it is challenging to recognize and/or document their history. The counter argument could also be that with research in genetics, archeology, linguistics, and artifacts, one could reconstruct or reclaim an African history, memory, and knowledge. The question is who has the authority to do that work and/or validate that knowledge. Africans have been made to believe that it is not them. Senghor, for example, believed that without France, Africa was lost and in a speech said that Africans do not want to leave the French compound, they have grown up in it and it was good for them to be alive in it (Nugent, 2004). He then became the first African to be elected in *l'Académie Française*. Later in his life, in a conscious awakening, probably because of his disillusionment in France, he realized the strong dominance of French culture in Africa, and the perception that Africa did not have culture developed enough to stand alongside that of Europe. With Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas, Senghor created the concept of *Négritude*, an important intellectual movement that sought to assert and to valorize what they believe to be distinctive African characteristics, values, and aesthetics.

Négritude

Martiniquean poet Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, a future President of Senegal, and Léon Damas of French Guiana, and others, created Négritude as a literary and ideological philosophy in the 1930s when the general mood among Blacks was about the affirmation of Blackness and the fight for the decolonization of African nations. These African-centered scholars were dissatisfied and disgusted by French colonialism and argued that the best strategy to reject it was to encourage a common racial identity for Black Africans worldwide, a Pan-African identity of some sort. They intentionally chose the term Négritude

and meant to be provocative by appropriating it, because it came from Latin *niger* and was used exclusively in a racist context within France when referring to Black people. They maintained that Blacks did have a history and a worthy culture, and that it was capable of standing alongside the cultures of other countries as equals while, at the same time, denouncing Europe's alleged lack of humanity, and the rejection of Western domination and ideas.

Négritude became immediately controversial. In 1948, Jean-Paul Sartre analyzed the Négritude philosophy in an essay called "*Orphée Noir*" (Black Orpheus) and characterized it as the opposite of colonial racism in a Hegelian dialectic, a description of the relationship between the master and the slave, and with it, he helped to introduce Négritude issues to French intellectuals as a valid academic contribution to his existential theory. Sartre believed that Négritude was a "*racisme antiraciste"* (anti-racist racism), a strategy with a final goal of racial unity (p. xiv). Even some Black scholars critiqued Négritude philosophy. The Nigerian icon and 1986 Nobel Peace Prize, Wole Soyinka, believed that by deliberately and outspokenly being proud of their ethnicity, Black people were automatically on the defensive and said, "*Un tigre ne proclame pas sa tigritude, il saute sur sa proie et la dévore*" (a tiger does not proclaim its tigritude (tigerness); it jumps on its prey and devours it; as cited by Madinin-Art, 2006, para. 19). The implication of Soyinka's point is that one should be proud of an achievement, being Black is not an achievement, but it is a natural, essential, and existential fact. Following the same logic, the South African Keorapetse Kgositsile argued that the term was based too much on Blackness according to a Caucasian aesthetic, and was unable to define a new kind of perception of Africanness that would free Black art from Caucasian conceptualizations altogether (Kgositsile, 1968).

Related Concepts

It is important to note that an archaic use of the term Négritude was identified much earlier in America in the context of race. American physician, Benjamin Rush, a signer of the United States Declaration of Independence, used the term Négritude to imagine a rhetorical "disease" which he said was a mild form of leprosy whose only cure was to become White (Jackson, 2002). This early use of the term may not have been known to Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Leopold Sedar Senghor when they developed the Négritude philosophy, but it only confirms the racial characteristic of said term that the aforementioned scholars wanted to expose.

It is also worth noting that the Négritude philosophy developed alongside a few likeminded movements, namely the Harlem Renaissance and Noirisme. The Harlem Renaissance was the name given to the cultural, social, and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s. During that period, Harlem was a cultural center, drawing Black writers, artists, musicians, photographers, poets, scholars, and authors (such as Claude McKay and Langston Hughes), who laid groundwork for Black expression, which helped to inspire Senghor, Damas and Césaire when they developed Négritude. On the other hand, Noirisme could be understood as radical, psychological, cultural, ethnological and political ideology, which argued for Black supremacy in Haitian politics. Although some saw Noirisme as the Haitian version of Négritude, most writers of the Négritude philosophy were quick to distance themselves from Noirisme when they realized the extent of its radicalism.

In an effort to respond to critics, the founders of Négritude argued that their philosophy was by no means an anti-White racism, but rather emphasized the importance of dialogue and exchange among different cultures, a point that was obviously rejected by Jean-Paul Sartre. Nevertheless, Cheikh Anta Diop (1974), a giant of African intellectualism, sounded the alarm a long time ago, denouncing the double standard when critiquing African scholars:

> Have foreign intellectuals, who challenge our intentions and accuse us of all kinds of hidden motives or ridiculous ideas, proceeded any differently? When they explain their own historical past or study their languages, that seems normal. Yet, when an African does likewise to help reconstruct the national personality of his people, distorted by colonialism, that is considered backward or alarming. (p. xiii)

Consequently, and based on the complexity of the topic, African-centered studies or African-centered psychology presents many challenges created by a stubborn denial of a well-established African history and the existence of an African memory and past. Morrison (1984) also made the case that some of Africans' beliefs and practices were "discredited knowledge," discredited

only because Black people were discredited therefore what they *knew* was "discredited" (p. 62).

The discredit of African knowledge is based on criteria from other paradigms. Those criteria are mostly predetermined frameworks of analysis developed from predefined parameters by ways of Western categories rather than the ones that emerge from Africans' lived experiences. This often results in a constant compare-and-contrast analysis rather that an analysis in and of itself. Defining African knowledge and concepts parallel to Western concepts actually proceeds from and reinforces an understanding of the dominant position of the Euro-American culture and risks constructing an African identity by its relationship to Western template. This, in turn, might imply advocating the acceptance of African worldview or ways of knowing in a Western world. African wisdom and science represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology to Western exclusive way of knowing. The goal should not be to have to base the existence or integrity of African knowledge on an oppositional relationship, but to find a language that is accessible to African and non-African audiences. In order for this to happen, African-centered scholars should be able to develop methods and praxis capable of assessing and explaining the steps involved in traditional healing sessions, describing mental processes and behavior patterns as suggested in legends, fables, folklore, folktale, movement, and symbols.

African-Centered Psychology and the Transpersonal Dimension

Given the difficulty to define an African identity as shown in Afrocentrism and Pan-Africanism, the complexity of the relationship between Africans of the diaspora and those on the continent, and the need for an African-centered psychology, scholars from the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) have attempted to develop a few theories and methods to facilitate the conversation.

Theoretical Orientation

There is agreement among African-centered scholars about the goal of an African-centered psychology, which is the liberation of the African mind, empowerment of the African character, and enlivenment and illumination of the African spirit. However, the theories and methods about how to achieve that goal are different. Karenga (1992) has identified essentially three main theoretical orientations: the traditional, the reformist, and the radical. According to Jamison (2008) and Karenga (1992), the traditional theoretical orientation is characterized by scholars who are not necessarily interested in the existence and/or development of African/Black psychology, but continue to support "traditional" Eurocentric psychological models with minor changes. Those scholars believe in changing White attitudes by being critical of the models they subscribe to without suggesting new approaches to solve the problems.

The reformists have a more ideological orientation. Like the traditional theoretical orientation, the reformists also believe in changing White attitudes, but focus on confronting public policies that maintain and support institutional racism (Karenga, 1992). The reformist theoretical orientation "tend[s] to emphasize the American slavery legacies of the continuing oppression of Blacks in America" (Kambon, 1998, p. 231). On the other hand, the radical theoretical orientation is not concerned with changing White attitudes. Members of this orientation, Nobles (1974), Akbar (1994), Kambon (1998), and others, believe that an African worldview analysis is essential to understanding the psychology of people of African descent, because an African-centered psychology cannot be developed in a Euro-American organization; therefore they need to return to African values, philosophy, and psychology in order to develop tools and instruments necessary to meet the needs of Black people everywhere, thus marking a shift from ideological ism to more cultural and methodological praxis.

Methodological Perspective

The methods that deal with Black issues are as complex as the issues themselves. Banks (1982) identified those critical approaches or methods as deconstructive, reconstructive, and constructive. The deconstructionists denounce and expose the biases and weaknesses in the scientific literature about Black people, but they stop there. The reconstructionists take it a step further by correcting those biases and by attempting to modify and reconstruct existing models into more culturally relevant models for Blacks (Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1986). The reconstructionist approach has been taken by scholars such as White (1980), Hayes (1991), Savage and Adair (1977), and Boykin (1979).

The constructionists have a more critical approach to so-called empirical methods as they question the argument that empiricism is the only valid way of

knowing (Harrell, 1999; Kambon, 1992, 1998). They are not very much interested in exposing or correcting biases in the literature about Black people as much as they are interested in researching and creating "new paradigms and methodologies that stem from an organic, authentically African epistemological and ontological base" (Harrell, 1999, p. 45). Constructionists are represented by such scholars as Akbar (1981), Nobles (1973, 1986), Kambon (1992) and Wilson (1978, 1991), Pasteur and Toldson (1982), Azibo (1996) and Myers (1988).

From Ideological Ism to Praxis

African-centered psychology should move beyond ideologies and away from the claim that people have different ways of expressing themselves because of their cultural and social experience, which is already known extensively across disciplines. Instead, African-centered scholars should focus more on praxis. In other words, they should build upon the ideological "ism" and adopt practical approaches to research, reflecting on how they can articulate what they do in ways that are practical, relevant, and that meet the needs and expectations of the people concerned.

Such a move is perceptible in the radical theoretical orientation and constructionist's practical inclination. For example, Akbar's (1994) and Nobles' (2013) ideas of redefining psychology as *Sakhu Sheti* and *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer*, respectively, as a penetrating search and understanding of phenomena both visible and invisible. Nobles (2013), being one of the finest theoreticians in the field, advocates the construction of an African version of the Western Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DMS) that can describe the nosology and nosography of African illnesses that are both visible and invisible: "The development of an African-centered classification of disease, that is, nosology, should at a minimum (a) use African languages and logic and (b) explore the application and relevance of these ideas and notions in illuminating….'the suffering of the spirit'" (p. 239). Through ABPsi, African-centered psychologists and counselors have used African philosophical concepts such as Ubuntu and different community healing mechanisms to provide counsel to Black communities suffering from police brutality and other forms of social, political, economic oppression, and natural disasters in America and elsewhere, for example, the Michael Brown case in Ferguson or the victims of Haiti earthquake. Though Nobles' and others' practical works are still in progress, they are moving in the right direction.

Another move from ism to praxis is Kambon's (1992) African Self-Consciousness (ASC), African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO), and Cultural Misorientation (CM) measures that have been used in studies to show that African American college students with an African worldview orientation do well in academic self-concept than those with a Eurocentric worldview orientation (Iyanu, 2013). Scholars are now using this model to explain healing modalities based on African cultures and traditional practices.

The Transpersonal Dimension

Early in this article, the concepts of Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, and Négritude were discussed. The common theme in these concepts was the idea of "Africa" in African-centeredness. The question that emerges is whether or not Africans both in the diaspora and on the continent share the same psychological experience. After all, most African-descents in the diaspora were born and raised in the ambient culture, how do they then connect with those on the continent? In addition to Nobles and Cooper's (2013) answer to Hegel mentioned earlier, Asante (1984) had also suggested an answer to that question in the following quote:

> The African American is to a degree a most Westernized African, yet has retained the Sudic Ideal of harmony, achieved by rhythm, and passed on to other cultures. There is a unique experience of transcendence among Africans in the West, whether they are Cubans, Brazilians, Haitians, Jamaicans, Ecuadorians, or citizens of the United States; they share forms of the same experience in Samba the Brazilian dance, Sango the Cuban folk religion, Umbanda the Brazilian folk religion, Voodoo the Haitian folk religion, or Myal a Jamaican religion. At the center of all of these forms of human expression is the same source of energy, the rhythm of polyrhythms that drive the spirit towards transcendence. (p. 168)

A sense of community living, attachment to cultural and ancestral values, and rhythm should be the bridge that links Africans in the diaspora with those on the continent and ought to be the basis upon which research is done both in African-centered psychology and transpersonal psychology. The conversation around Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, and Négritude was an example of the quest for connectedness and harmony among Africans and African-descents around the world.

Though their respective psychological experiences may vary, they mostly rely on the following guiding principles in the study of their lived experience:

1. Spirit permeates everything
2. Everything in the universe is interconnected
3. Collective/community living is the most salient element of existence
4. Communal self-knowledge is the key to mental health (Nobles, 2013, pp. 292-293).

According to Myers (1988), an optimal African worldview consists of: (a) viewing the spiritual and material as one, (b) knowing the self through symbolic imagery and rhythm, (c) valuing positive interpersonal relationships among people, (d) emphasizing the union of opposites, (e) processing the interrelatedness of human and spiritual networks, (f) identifying the extended self and the multidimensionality of self, (g) assuming self-worth is intrinsic in being, (h) valuing spiritualism, oneness with nature and communalism, (i) being positively consistent despite appearances due to relationship with the source, and (j) having a life space that is infinite and unlimited (pp. 11-12).

Moreover, it is Diop's Two Cradle Theory that summarizes best the main principles of the African worldview upon which is based the quest for harmony, connectedness, and transcendence: ancestor/spirit veneration, social collectivity, and spiritual basis of existence (Wobogo, 1976). In other words, a more appropriate approach to African-centered psychology and mode of transcendence includes "introspection and inclusion of constructs related to the soul and spirit and the centrality of such cultural constructs as interdependence, connection to nature, social collectivity in defining human functioning, and the consubstantial nature of things in the world" (Grills, 2002, p. 22).

Comparatively, transpersonal psychology might provide a platform that is outside of the ideological divisions within African-centered psychology and be more conducive to this area of study than mainstream psychology or religious study. The scholarly field of transpersonal psychology embraces the spectrum of human affairs: spirituality, consciousness, culture, language, gender (Puhakka, 2008). It also attempts to integrate timeless wisdom with Western modern psychology and translate spiritual principles into scientifically grounded, contemporary language (Caplan, 2009). Within such a framework, African-centered scholars can scientifically ground the study of African core principles such as ancestor/spirit veneration, social collectivity, and the spiritual basis of existence.

Practical Application and Relevance of Africa's Past

Building on transpersonal psychology's framework and platform, African-centered scholars should be motivated by the aforementioned African core principles and reclaim Africa's past. Africa's past is based on the Kemetic notion of what it means to be a human. The Kemetic or ancient Egyptian knowledge presents three essential modalities within every human being, which are *ka, ba*, and *sad* (Mayi, 2010). *Ka* is a person viewed as a specific modality of an individualized cosmic being, which is universal and eternal. In other words, ka represents the psycho-affective and psycho-cognitive aspects of human beings, which are immortal and eternal. *Ba* is viewed as a person in terms of his or her moving capability, which means that *ba* is the entity that can move in and out of the body independently. From a purely biological perspective, *ba* is also viewed as blood and to some extent race, family, character, and so forth. *Sad* is the living body, which decomposes after death.

It should be noted that each modality comprises an element of mortality and immortality. This represents the Kemetic principle of duality, which allows for multiple readings of the patient's condition while considering the fact that a person is destined to eternal life and is mortal, therefore susceptible to corruption (Mayi, 2010). According to Mayi, duality is not conflictual, *ka*, *ba*, and *sad* co-exist and their co-existence creates a vital energy that affects both the psyche and the body. When the therapist understands this duality, he or she will be able to assess a patient who presents with psychosomatic illness. This duality can also be observed in Freud's concepts of libido, Eros, and Thanatos co-existing within the individual, except that for Freud, the duality is conflictual. African-centered scholars can use the Kemetic principle of duality, as described above, to develop practical approaches to mental health and move beyond ideologies.

Conclusion

History, memory, and past are essential parts of an African-centered psychology and mode of transcendence. Denying the existence of an African history is a crime against memory. It is a discreet crime because of its subtle nature. Yet, such a crime paves

the way for cultural hegemony where one cultural bloc dominates the other and creates conditions for cultural blocs, risking total annihilation of the dominated culture. There can be no African psychology without an African history, memory, and past. To speak, then, of an African psychology, it is important, even imperative, to excavate its past, exhume its memory, and rehabilitate its history.

However, the challenge in the establishment of a viable and relevant African-centered psychology is to retrain and reeducate psychologists, not necessarily to unlearn their Euro-American psychology, but to consider African traditional thought, spirituality, and knowledge as valid scientific enterprise. In so doing, African-centered scholars can then move beyond ideological ism and develop more appropriate praxis to serve the communities concerned.

Ultimately, African-centered scholars still need to address their differences in thought processes, geographic experiences, cultural philosophies, beliefs, and worldviews in order to present evidence of the relevance of their scholarly contributions. This implies developing appropriate research methods that reflect the diversity and complexity of their thoughts, introducing new concepts and themes that articulate their experience and research findings, and finally describe and implement a clear nosology and nosography of their mental health related diagnoses.

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