

Afrocentricity

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Afrocentricity is a paradigm based on the idea that African people should re-assert a sense of agency in order to achieve sanity. During the 1960s a group of African American intellectuals in the newly-formed Black Studies departments at universities began to formulate novel ways of analyzing information. In some cases, these new ways were called looking at information from “a black perspective” as opposed to what had been considered the “white perspective” of most information in the American academy.

In the late 1970s Molefi Kete Asante began speaking of the need for an Afrocentric orientation to data. By 1980 he had published a book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, which launched the first full discussion of the concept. Although the word existed before Asante’s book and had been used by many people, including Asante in the 1970s, and Kwame Nkrumah in the 1960s, the intellectual idea did not have substance as a philosophical concept until 1980.

The Afrocentric paradigm is a revolutionary shift in thinking proposed as a structural adjustment to black disorientation, decenteredness, and lack of agency. The Afrocentrist asks the question, “What would African people do if there were no white people?” In other words, what natural responses would occur in the relationships, attitudes toward the environment, kinship patterns, preferences for colors, type of religion, and historical referent points for African people if there had not been any intervention of colonialism or enslavement? Afrocentricity answers this question by asserting the central role of the African subject within the context of African history, thereby removing Europe from the center of the African reality. In this way, Afrocentricity becomes a revolutionary idea because it studies ideas, concepts, events, personalities, and political and economic processes from a standpoint of black people

as subjects and not as objects, basing all knowledge on the authentic interrogation of location.

So that it becomes legitimate to ask, “Where is the sistah coming from?” or “Where is the brotha at?” “Are you down with overcoming oppression?” These are assessment and evaluative questions that allow the interrogator to accurately pinpoint the responder’s location, whether it be a cultural or psychological location. As a paradigm Afrocentricity enthrones the centrality of the African, that is, black ideals and values, as expressed in the highest forms of African culture, and activates consciousness as a functional aspect of any revolutionary approach to phenomena. The cognitive and structural aspects of a paradigm are incomplete without the functional aspect. There is something more than knowing in the Afrocentric sense; there is also doing. Afrocentricity holds that all definitions are autobiographical.

One of the key assumptions of the Afrocentrist is that all relationships are based on centers and margins and the distances from either the center or the margin. When black people view themselves as centered and central in their own history then they see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginals on the periphery of political or economic experience. Using this paradigm, human beings have discovered that all phenomena are expressed in the fundamental categories of space and time. Furthermore, it is then understood that relationships develop and knowledge increases to the extent we are able to appreciate the issues of space and time.

The Afrocentric scholar or practitioner knows that one way to express Afrocentricity is called marking. Whenever a person delineates a cultural boundary around a particular cultural space in human time, this is called marking. It might be done with the announcement of a certain symbol, the creation of a special bonding, or the citing of personal heroes of African history and culture. Beyond citing the revolutionary thinkers in our history, that is, beyond Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X and Nkrumah, we must be prepared to act upon our interpretation of what is

in the best interest of black people, that is, black people as an historically oppressed population. This is the fundamental necessity for advancing the political process.

Afrocentricity is the substance of our regeneration because it is in line with what contemporary philosophers Haki Madhubuti and Maulana Karenga, among others, have articulated as in the best image and interest of African people. What is any better than operating and acting out of our own collective interest? What is any greater than seeing the world through our eyes? What resonates more with people than understanding that we are central to our history, not someone else's? If we can, in the process of materializing our consciousness, claim space as agents of progressive change, then we can change our condition and change the world.

Afrocentricity maintains that one can claim this space only if one knows the general characteristics of Afrocentricity as well as the practical applications of the field.

There are five general characteristics of the Afrocentric Method

1. The Afrocentric method considers that no phenomena can be apprehended adequately without locating it first. Aphenom must be studied and analyzed in relationship to psychological time and space. It must always be located. This is the only way to investigate the complex interrelationships of science and art, design and execution, creation and maintenance, generation and tradition, and other areas bypassed by theory.
2. The Afrocentric method considers phenomena to be diverse, dynamic, and in motion and therefore it is necessary for a person to accurately note and record the location of phenomena even in the midst of fluctuations. This means that the investigator must know where he or she is standing in the process.
3. The Afrocentric method is a form of cultural criticism that examines etymological uses of words and terms in order to know the source of an author's location.

This allows us to intersect ideas with actions and actions with ideas on the basis of what is pejorative and ineffective and what is creative and transformative at the political and economic levels.

4. The Afrocentric method seeks to uncover the masks behind the rhetoric of power, privilege, and position in order to establish how principal myths create place. The method enthrones critical reflection that reveals the perception of monolithic power as nothing but the projection of a cadre of adventurers.

5. The Afrocentric method locates the imaginative structure of a system of economics, bureau of politics, policy of government, expression of cultural form in the attitude, direction, and language of the phenom, be it text, institution, personality, interaction, or event.

Analytic Afrocentricity

Analytic Afrocentricity is the application of the principles of the Afrocentric method to textual analysis. An Afrocentrist seeks to understand the principles of the Afrocentric method in order to use them as a guide in analysis and discourse. It goes without saying that the Afrocentrist cannot function properly as a scientist or humanist if he or she does not adequately locate the phenom in time and space. This means that chronology is as important in some situations as location. The two aspects of analysis are central to any proper understanding of society, history, or personality. Inasmuch as phenoms are active, dynamic, and diverse in our society, the Afrocentric method requires the scientists to focus on accurate notations and recording of space and time. In fact, the best way to apprehend location of a text is to determine where the researcher is located in time and space first. Once you know the location and time of the researcher or author it is fairly easy to establish the parameters for the phenom itself. The value of etymology, that is, the origin of terms and words is in the proper identification and location of concepts. The Afrocentrist seeks to demonstrate clarity by exposing dislocations, disorientations, and decenterness. One of the simplest ways of accessing textual clarity is through etymology. Myths tie all relationships together, whether personal or conceptual. It is the

Afrocentrist's task to determine to what extent the myths of society are represented as being central to or marginal to society. This means that any textual analysis must involve the concrete realities of lived experiences, thus making historical experiences a key element in analytical Afrocentricity. In examining attitude, direction, and language the Afrocentrist is seeking to uncover the imagination of the author. What one seeks to do is to create an opportunity for the writer to show where he or she stands in relationship to the subject. Is the writer centered or is the writer marginalized within his own story?

Afrocentric Philosophy

The philosophy of Afrocentricity as expounded by Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama, central figures of the Temple School, is a way of answering all cultural, economic, political, and social questions related to African people from a centered position. There are other Afrocentric ideas as well but these are the ones propounded in texts by Professors Asante, Mazama, and the late C. Tsehloane Keto. Indeed, Afrocentricity cannot be reconciled to any hegemonic or idealistic philosophy. It is opposed to radical individualism as expressed in the postmodern school. But it is also opposed to spookism, confusion, and superstition. As example of the differences between the methods of Afrocentricity and postmodernism, consider the following question, "Why have Africans been shut out of global development?" The postmodernist would begin by saying that there is no such thing as "Africans" because there are many different types of Africans and all Africans are not equal. The postmodernist would go on to say that if there were Africans and if the conditions were as described by the querist then the answer would be that Africans had not fully developed their own capacities in relationship to the global economy and therefore they are outside of the normal development patterns of the world economy. On the other hand, the Afrocentrist does not question the fact that there is a collective sense of Africanity revealed in the common experiences of the African world. The Afrocentrist would look to the questions of location, control of the hegemonic global economy, marginalization, and power positions as keys to understand the underdevelopment of African people.

Major Works:

Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Ama Mazama, ed., *The Afrocentric Paradigm*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003

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