THE AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM
Contours and Definitions

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It has been 20 years since Molefi Asante (1980) published *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*. This book, along with *The Afrocentric Idea* (Asante, 1987) and *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Asante, 1990), introduced fundamental referential changes in the African community. Today, Afrocentricity is widely discussed in the United States, of course, but also in Africa, Europe, South and Central America, and the Caribbean. In short, it has become a formidable Pan-African force that must be reckoned with. The reason for its appeal lies both in the disturbing conditions of African people and the remedy that Afrocentricity suggests.

Afrocentricity contends that our main problem as African people is our usually unconscious adoption of the Western worldview and perspective and their attendant conceptual frameworks. The list of those ideas and theories that have invaded our lives as normal, natural, or even worse, ideal is infinite. How many of us have really paused to seriously examine and challenge such ideas as development, planning, progress, the need for democracy, and the nation-state as the best form of political and social organization, to name only a few? Our failure to recognize the roots of such ideas in the European cultural ethos has led us, willingly or unwillingly, to agree to footnote status in the White man's book. We thus find ourselves relegated to the periphery, the margin, of the European experience, to use Molefi Asante's terms—spectators of a show that defines us from without. In other words, and to use Afrocentric terminology again, we do not exist on our own terms but on borrowed, European ones. We are dislocated, and having lost sight of our-

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selves in the midst of European decadence and madness, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to orient our lives in a positive and constructive manner.

The challenge is monumental: Our liberation and Afrocentricity contends and rests upon our ability to systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, and so forth and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience. The key idea here is epistemological centeredness: Afrocentricity, Asante (1991) tells us, establishes

> a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. . . . It centers on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world. This means that we examine every aspect of the dislocation of African people; culture, economics, psychology, health and religion. . . . As an intellectual theory, Afrocentricity is the study of the ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as the key players rather than victims. This theory becomes, by virtue of an authentic relationship to the centrality of our own reality, a fundamentally empirical project . . . it is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field. (p. 172)

To the extent that it places the African experience at the heart of African lives, it is only fair to state that Asante's main category of thought is culture, defined as "shared perceptions, attitudes, and pre-dispositions that allow people to organize experiences in certain ways" (Asante, 1990, p. 9).

The Afrocentric idea is a powerful one. Kwame Nantambu (1996) even suggests that it represents "the most potent challenge to the European power structure (European nationalism) in the past 100 years" (p. 47). The Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people. Its aim is to give us our African, victorious consciousness back. In the process, it also means viewing the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one.

There is still, however, considerable misunderstanding in the academic world and, as a result, in the community at large

about what exactly Afrocentricity entails. The definitions of Afrocentricity are multiple, with most scholars giving their own working and free version of the original one elaborated by Asante, often choosing to emphasize particular aspects of the paradigm to suit their own purposes.

Others seem to take for granted that the term *Afrocentric* is self-explanatory and, as a result, do not bother to define Afrocentricity. For instance, Kinfe Abraham's (1991) study of Black Nationalism comprises a section titled "Afro-centric and Pan-African Strategies," which unfortunately does not include a definition of Afrocentricity. Another case in point is Janice Hamlet's (1998) recently edited *Afrocentric Visions*, which quite curiously does not even contain an introduction let alone a definition of Afrocentricity by the editor.

Finally, there are also those who clearly misunderstand Afrocentricity altogether. Such is the case, for example, of Patricia Hill Collins (1991, p. 206), who argues that what makes one Afrocentric is the participation in "a core African value system" coupled with the experience of oppression. However, to be African is not to be necessarily Afrocentric, as shall be discussed below. In addition, Afrocentricity stresses the importance of cultivating a consciousness of victory as opposed to dwelling on oppression. Another striking example of total misunderstanding of Afrocentricity is provided by Russell Adams (1993). According to Adams, "the purest form of Afrocentrism places Africa at its center as the source of the world's people and its most fundamental ideas and inventions" (p. 34). Afrocentrism places Africa at the center of African people's world while stressing all people's entitlement to practice and celebrate their own culture as long as it does not interfere with the collective well-being: "All people have a perspective which stems from their centers. . . . While Eurocentrism imposes itself as universal, Afrocentrism demonstrates that it is only one way to view the world" (Asante, 1988, pp. 87-89). Furthermore, Adams (1993) suggests the following classification of Afrocentrists: the "Nile Valley" Afrocentrists (the "hard-liners" identified as espousing "pure Afrocentrism," and gathered around Molefi Asante); the Continental Afrocentrists, who do not pay any special

attention to Kemet; the Afrocentric Infusionists, primarily concerned with making the African cultural and social experience a part of the curriculum; and the Social Afrocentrists, for whom "Africa per se is more of a target of interest than of inspiration" (p. 35) and who, upon examination, seem to favor integration into White society. Such intellectual bric-a-brac, dumped under the label *Afrocentricity*, is bound to dilute the meaning and the power of the Afrocentric idea as well as to create a great deal of confusion.

Our contention is that there is confusion in large part because scholars have often failed to approach Afrocentricity in a systematic manner. As we seek to bring further clarification to what Afrocentricity entails from an academic standpoint, we would like to suggest, as a first step, that Afrocentricity, within the academic context, will best be understood as a paradigm.

The concept of paradigm is undoubtedly ambiguous. It has received multiple definitions since its very inception in 1962 (Kuhn, 1962). Margaret Masterman (1970, p. 61) reports no less than 21 definitions by Kuhn (1962) himself of a paradigm.

Kuhn (1962, 1970) borrowed the term *paradigm* from linguistics, the Western science of language, where a paradigm refers to a class of linguistic items, either lexical or grammatical, that are in complementary distribution. His intention, as a philosopher of science, was to show how a particular mode of scientific thought and practice becomes established as an accepted and/or dominant mode, thus being labeled "normal science," and may be subsequently displaced by a new mode competing for normalcy or disciplinary recognition. Although Kuhn's model was primarily intended for the natural sciences, it has been widely applied to the studies of human life as well. One of the chief accomplishments of the concept of paradigm as developed by Kuhn is to make explicit the existence of premises on which all intellectual inquiries are necessarily based, thus rendering the idea of scientific neutrality and universality untenable.

There are two central aspects to a paradigm as defined by Kuhn: the cognitive aspect and the structural aspect (Eckberg & Hill, 1980, pp. 117-118). As far as the cognitive aspect is concerned, Masterman (1970) suggests the existence of three different levels:

(a) metaphysical, that is, an organizing principle, a set of beliefs; (b) sociological, that is, a set of scientific habits, "a disciplinary matrix" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 182), "the shared commitments of any disciplinary community," (Eckberg & Hill, 1980, p. 118), be it in terms of methods, conceptual apparatus, techniques, and so forth; and (c) exemplars, "the concrete problem-solutions that students encounter from the start of their scientific education, whether in laboratories, or examinations, or at the ends of chapters in science texts" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 102). Concerning the structural arrangement of the three cognitive aspects of a paradigm, Eckberg and Hill (1980) suggest that they

> are embedded within one another. That is, the greater structure (the metaphysical paradigm) acts as an encapsulating unit, or framework, within which the more restricted, or higher-order, structures develop. A specific disciplinary matrix will not develop within just any arbitrary Weltanschauung. An exemplar will be even further restricted. (p. 121)

In the end, as the same authors explain,

> A paradigm locks its practitioners together within a fairly rigid, highly elaborated framework of beliefs. This is not a serendipitous overlapping of elements from various perspectives. It is made of the consensual beliefs of a self-contained community. No analysis which neglects the communal nature of a paradigm can capture the essence of the concept. (p. 122)

As far as the second central aspect is concerned, namely, the structural aspect, what Kuhn has in mind is the "community structure," that is, the community of scholars who practice the cognitive dimension of the paradigm. Shedding light on the importance of a scientific community, Eckbert and Hill (1980) tell us how

> a paradigm presupposes an integrated community of practitioners. Ongoing puzzle solving, in fact, occurs only when a group exists which shares a consistent body of beliefs such that a consensus emerges with regard to the phenomena one/ investigates, the methods one uses, and so forth. (pp. 121-122)

However, although Kuhn's (1962) treatment of a paradigm may appear rather comprehensive from a Eurocentric standpoint, it is lacking an important dimension as far as Afrocentricity is concerned. Indeed, we must add a third and critical aspect to the cognitive and structural aspects, namely, a functional aspect. From an Afrocentric perspective, 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. This requirement is reminiscent of the tradition that existed in Ancient Kemet when the priests opened the mouth of the statues of the gods to insufflate life and consciousness in them, thus allowing them to serve the people who served them. Just as how without that spiritual act the statues would have remained pieces of rock, without the right type of energy, any set of ideas and practices is unable to move us and, in any case, remains largely irrelevant to our lives. The ultimate test will be our praxis.

Furthermore, given some of the most fundamental assumptions that African culture makes about the nature of life, it is necessary to add to the cognitive category identified by Kuhn (1962) as central two additional categories, namely, the affective and conative ones.

Maulana Karenga (1988), in his article devoted to the critical issue of paradigmatic development for Black studies, does not recognize paradigmatic status to Afrocentricity. Although, with his usual insight and articulateness, Karenga correctly and cogently defined Afrocentricity as "essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people" (p. 404) and described it as a "fundamental building bloc in the conceptual edifice of the Black Studies Paradigm," he did not seem to believe that Afrocentricity was the "Black Studies Paradigm" he and others yearned for at the time of his writing. This may be attributed to Karenga's loose definition of a paradigm as a not so uncommon occurrence, as noted above. Instead, Karenga talks about Afrocentricity as a "category," although he does not specify what, in his view, a category is to a paradigm.

It is our contention, however, as we shall illustrate below, that Afrocentricity meets the definition of a paradigm, as outlined

above. As Karenga (1988) himself rightly remarked, the rise of Afrocentricity is intimately linked to African Studies: "Any serious discussion of Afrocentricity must begin by placing it in the context of Africana or Black Studies" (Karenga, 1988, p. 4). We would like to go even further by asserting that such discussion must also include the development of the Department of African American Studies at Temple University, under the leadership of Professor Asante, because it is within that particular structure that Afrocentricity has been able to evolve into a paradigm. (This also sheds light on the true nature and scope of the attacks launched against the philosophical orientation of that department.)

THE AFFECTIVE, COGNITIVE, AND CONATIVE ASPECTS OF THE AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM

METAPHYSICAL

The organizing principle that determines the perception of all reality is the centrality of the African experience for African people. This is the one principle that can never be questioned by any person claiming to be Afrocentric: "The Afrocentrist will not question the idea of the centrality of African ideals and values but will argue over what constitutes those ideals and values" (Asante, 1990, p. 6). The epistemological implications of Afrocentricity are far-reaching; its applications are endless: "Afrocentricity questions your approach to every conceivable human enterprise. It questions the approach you make to reading, writing, jogging, running, eating, keeping healthy, seeing, studying, loving, struggling, and working" (Asante, 1988, p. 45). In the end, it is, as Asante beautifully states, "the measure of our life."

Inasmuch as it places African values and ideas at the center of African life, Afrocentricity espouses the cosmology, aesthetics, axiology, and epistemology that characterize African culture. Karenga (n.d.) identifies as the core cultural African characteristics the following "shared orientations": (a) the centrality of the com-

munity, (b) respect for tradition, (c) a high level of spirituality and ethical concern, (d) harmony with nature, (e) the sociality of selfhood, (f) veneration of ancestors, and (g) the unity of being.

Thus, what defines Afrocentricity is the crucial role attributed to the African social and cultural experience as our ultimate reference. This is also what distinguishes it from any previous body of thought. It is not uncommon to hear or read that Afrocentricity predated the publication of Asante's first book on the topic. Everybody under the sun who had something constructive to say about African people is then casually labeled Afrocentric, from David Walker to Kwame Nkrumah. It is nonetheless fairly easy to understand why such a position (usually the result of professional jealousy) is mistaken once one has correctly identified the fundamental Afrocentric organizing principle. It is simply untrue that any thinker prior to Asante had elaborated and systematized an intellectual approach based on the centrality of the African experience, that is, Afrocentricity. Certainly, we find in previous scholars the assertion that the African experience is different from the European experience and must be seen as such—from Blyden's insistence on the infusion of the curriculum with information about African history and culture to Marcus Garvey's emphasis on the necessity to look at the world through "our own spectacles" (Blyden, 1967; Garvey, 1986; DuBois, 1990). Also, DuBois's call for a "Negro university" to interpret African and African American phenomena was along the same line. However, it is to Asante that we owe the making of African epistemological relevance into an operational scientific principle, much like we owe Cheikh Anta Diop (1991) the making of the Black- ness of the ancient Egyptians into an operational scientific principle.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF THE AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM

The sociological dimension of a paradigm deals with the establishment of a disciplinary matrix generated by a particular set of metaphysical principles (i.e., unquestioned presuppositions) and

characterized by a specific conceptual apparatus, methodology, and set of theories.

Afrocentricity, Karenga (1988) correctly reminded us above, cannot be understood outside of the context of African American studies. What, then, is Afrocentricity to this discipline called African American studies? I would like to suggest that Afrocentricity functions, or ought to function, as a meta-paradigm to African American studies.

Indeed, it is most important to remember the purpose and scope of African American studies from its inception. Karenga (1993) again, in his *Introduction to Black Studies*, defined it as "the systematic and critical study of the multidimensional aspects of Black thought and practice in their current and historical unfolding" (p. 21), stressing how African American Studies is "a discipline dedicated to an inclusive and holistic study of Black life" (p. 22). As a result, African American studies covers the social dynamics, the psychological dynamics, the languages, the literary and oratory expressions, the history, the artistic expressions, and so forth—the whole cultural and historical experience that defines us as a people.

However, although African American studies is devoted to studying all aspects of our lives, that task is performed for European lives by various departments and disciplines, which taken together form European studies. What binds those multiple European studies departments together, despite seemingly disconnected areas of inquiry, is their focus on the European experience from the European perspective.

It is therefore simply incorrect to compare, as it is often done, African American studies with any single European studies department, such as sociology or English or any other White department, and to claim that just as there exists competing theories and paradigms in sociology, for example, there are different perspectives on the Black experience. To do so is to remain blind to the Eurocentric assumptions, the meta-paradigm, shared by European scholars by virtue of being born into European culture, history, and biology.

What is true, however, is that much of what passes for African American studies is nothing but European studies of Africa. Such confusion and usurpation are made possible by the unquestioned

and unproblematized acceptance of the European perspective as universal. It also points to the fact that the perspective, more so than the focus of study, is the most important criterion to locate a particular study.

What ought to bind African American studies together, what can only make it what it claims to be and not something else despite different areas of interest, is our focus on the African experience from an African perspective, that is, Afrocentricity. Anything else, as Asante tells us, is not African American studies.

To avoid the clout of conceptual confusion that surrounds African American studies as well as to stress the crucial metaphysical connection between the study of African lives and African groundedness, orientation, and perspective, that is, Afrocentricity, Asante (1990) coined the term *Africology*, which he defined as the Afrocentric study of phenomena, events, ideas, and personalities related to Africa. "The mere study of phenomena of Africa," Asante continues, "is not Africalogy but some other intellectual enterprise. The scholar who generates research questions based on the centrality of Africa is engaged in a very different research inquiry than the one who imposes Western criteria on the phenomena" (p. 14).

In an essay titled "African American Studies: The Future of the Discipline," Asante (1997) discusses in detail the link that unites Afrocentricity and the discipline of African American studies. Although African American Studies departments and programs were established in the late 1960s, Asante contends that what can be called the discipline of African American studies itself is intimately linked to the development of Afrocentricity and the establishment of the Temple Doctoral Program, the first Ph.D. program in African American studies in the United States, in the late 1980s. Afrocentricity provided African American studies with the perspective, theories, and methods that define it as a discipline, Africology, whereas the Temple Ph.D. program allowed its development. Afrocentricity, Asante (1997) explains, is based on the idea of the centrality of the African experience. It focuses on the Africans as subjects rather than objects defined from outside by White supremacists. Within Africology, issues pertaining to African cosmology, epistemology, axiology, and aesthetic must be

raised. Furthermore, following Karenga (1988, 1993), Asante identifies the seven subject Africological fields: communicative, social, historical, cultural, political, economic, and psychological, while recognizing three possible approaches: functional, categorical, and etymological. It also goes without saying that Africology concerns itself with the whole African world, that is, is Pan-African in its scope. A concrete application of these precepts is found within the Temple M.A. and Ph.D. programs, where many Afrocentric faculty have committed "discipline suicide" (i.e., have renounced the European paradigm and theories on which the discipline in which they were trained is based), and students are given the choice between two fields of study, the cultural aesthetics field (involved in such studies as the study of ethics, history, motifs, etc.) and the social-behavioral field (e.g., dealing with relationships, race, class, gender, etc.).

It is therefore within the context of Africology that the sociological aspect of the Afrocentric paradigm must be apprehended. The metaphysical and sociological dimensions are profoundly embedded, as made explicit in the following statements: "As a discipline, Africology is sustained by a commitment to centering the study of African phenomena and events in the particular cultural voice of the composite African people" (Asante, 1990, p. 12); "centrism, the groundedness of observation and behavior in one's own historical experiences, shapes the concepts, paradigms, theories, and methods of Africology" (Asante, 1990, p. 12).

Conceptual apparatus. The following are the key concepts relied upon by Africologists: center/location/place, dislocation, and relocation.

The concept of center (also location, place) occupies, as it could have been expected, a critical place in the Afrocentric conceptual apparatus. It is fundamentally based on the belief that one's history, culture, and biology determine one's identity. That identity, in turn, determines our place in life, both material and spiritual. To practice one's culture and to apprehend oneself in a manner that is consistent with one's history, culture, and biology is to be centered or to proceed from one's center. On the other hand, dislocation occurs either when one lives on borrowed cultural terms and/or when one

apprehends reality through another group's center. Therefore, the concept of center encompasses both our African identity and our disposition toward that identity. The latter is largely determined by our ability (or inability) to assume agency, which itself is predicated upon our reverence (or lack of) for the ancestors (Modupe, 1999). Indeed, the ultimate question about dislocated Africans is whether they are embracing themselves as Africans and defining themselves on their own terms or whether they are accepting Europeans' definition of their reality, turning their back on the ancestors. For example, can it be said that those Ghanaian politicians who only recently banned the public pouring of libations in Ghana love and respect themselves as Africans, as we would expect located Africans to do, or that they believe, consciously or not, African culture to be inferior, thus exhibiting all signs of dislocation? That dislocation, one must admit, is the result of the acceptance of the European definition of the African reality, that is, in the end, the closing of one's heart to the ancestors. Thus, one must emphasize, once more, that Afrocentricity cannot be reduced to the practicing of African culture. (In that respect, one must take notice of the confusion that surrounds the term *African-centered*, especially as it is often used in free distribution with the term Afrocentric.) Indeed, Asante (1987) reminds us that central to the Afrocentric idea is self- consciousness, that is, the deliberate and systematic effort to assume fully one's place in the world.

Other terms, such as *worldview*, *cosmology*, *axiology*, *aesthetics*, and *epistemology* are frequently used by Africologists in our attempt to consciously and precisely delineate the metaphysical contours of the Afrocentric paradigm and the African worldview on which it is based.

Afrocentric epistemology, methodology, and methods. It is undeniable that methods and methodologies are derived from and informed by a particular paradigm. Afrocentric methodology and methods are no exception, as the main essays devoted to this question (Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1987; Harris, 1992; Kershaw, 1992; and Myers, 1987) reveal the following consensus:

- A people's worldview determines what constitutes a problem for them and how they solve problems. As a result, Afrocentric scholarship must reflect the ontology, cosmology, axiology, and aesthetics of African people: It must be centered in our experiences.
- The essence of life and therefore of human beings is spiritual. This is not to deny the material aspect of life; however, when all is done and said, what remains is not the appearance of things but the indivisible essence of life that permeates all that is, the spirit—the ultimate oneness with nature, the fundamental interconnectedness of all things. Therefore, Afrocentric methods as well as Afrocentrically generated knowledge must reflect the primacy of the spiritual, the relationship between the physical and the spiritual, as well as the interconnectedness of all things. The integration of spiritual and physical principles may very well constitute a major challenge in an environment dominated by rationalism and positivism. However, Africologists believe that self-knowledge and rhythm play a special role in determining the proper methodology and methods. Indeed, starting with self-knowledge, all Afrocentric inquiry must be conducted through an interaction between the examiner and the subject. Cultural and social immersion are imperative. In addition, all Afrocentric inquiry must be activated by what Asante (1987) calls "soul," which is ultimately linked to rhythm, the inner pulse of the cosmos. Norman Harris (1992) in particular reminds us that Afrocentric knowledge is validated through a combination of historical understanding and intuition; that is, knowing is both rational and suprarational. In an environment where knowing is narrowly defined as a purely cerebral affair, one must remember always that knowing with one's heart is superior to all and priceless.
- In addition, in keeping with the fact that Afrocentricity's ultimate aim is our liberation, the Afrocentric methodology must generate knowledge that will free us and empower us. This is what Kershaw (1992) had in mind when he insisted that Afrocentric scholars must produce "emancipatory knowledge" or, as I would say, knowledge that opens our heart.

To sum up, the Africological methodological principles are the following: The African experience must determine all inquiry, the spiritual is important and must be given its due place, immersion in the subject is necessary, holism is a must, intuition must be relied

on, not everything is measurable because not everything that is significant is material, and the knowledge generated by the Afrocentric methodology must be liberating. The methods used by Africologists vary depending on their particular topic of study. However, Africological methods devised by particular scholars must be informed by the principles outlined above.

Afrocentric theories. There exists a multiplicity of Afrocentric theories applied to a wide range of topics. This is not surprising because, as discussed earlier, African studies is devoted to all aspects of our lives. We shall review, as an illustration, theories developed about African women and men relationships and social problems in the African community.

Clenora Hudson-Weems (1998) and Nah Dove (1998) have made particularly useful contributions to the Afrocentric discourse on African women and men.

Hudson-Weems (1998) coined the term *Africana womanism* in 1987 out of the realization of the total inadequacy of feminism and like theories, (e.g., Black feminism, African womanism, or womanism) to grasp the reality of African women, let alone give us the means to change that reality. The problems with the adoption of feminism by African women are twofold. First, feminism is fundamentally a European phenomenon. As such, it is loaded with European metaphysical principles, such as the conflictual relationship between the genders in which men are seen as the primary enemies of women. Second, feminism as it developed in the 1880s was blatantly racist. For these reasons, Hudson-Weems argues, feminism does not and cannot reflect the beliefs or interests of African women. She points out, in particular, how African women do not apprehend African men as our enemies. Nor would it be in our best interest as a people to allow ourselves to be divided along gender lines while living in a highly racialized and racist society. In place of feminism, Hudson-Weems calls for Africana womanism, which "is grounded in African culture and, therefore, focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women" (p. 158). Hudson-Weems correctly asserts that the cooperation of African men and women against White supremacy is necessary for the survival and well-being of African people. The term

Africana womanism itself is the first step toward defining ourselves and setting goals that are consistent with our culture and history. In other words, it is the first step toward existing on our own terms.

Dove's (1998) concern for and approach to the lives of African women are very similar to those of Hudson-Weems. Indeed, in her article titled "Defining African Womanist Theory," Dove argues that the fate encountered by African women who live in Western societies can only be understood within the context of White supremacy and its cultural underpinning. Dove pays particular attention to Diop's (1991) "Two Cradle" analysis as it relates to the harsh and demeaning treatment of women in Western-culture–dominated societies. Indeed, Dove (1998) points out the links between such treatment and the strong patriarchal and xenophobic currents that have characterized Western culture since the very beginning. Dove rightly reminds us of the great contributions made by African women from antiquity to the present day, either as warriors or mothers, to the well-being of Africans. In African culture emphasis is placed on the necessary complementarity rather than the conflict that exists between African men and women. What makes a man is a woman; likewise, what makes a woman is a man. Appreciating and understanding this complementarity is at the root of any theory dealing with African women within the Afrocentric paradigm. Indeed, it is not only consistent with African culture, but it is also an act of resistance against the attempts made by White supremacists to further disintegrate and divide the African community.

Social problems are also considered within the Afrocentric paradigm by Jerome Schiele (1996). Although it is common for "people-with-problems," either drug abusers or young violent crime perpetrators, to be approached by social workers as lacking and deficient, Schiele suggests that, in reality, the culprit is the cultural environment in which people are made to live. Of particular concern to Schiele are spiritual alienation, that is, the fragmentation and desacralization of life and the subsequent disconnection of people, as well as racism and its attendant oppression. These are the products of Western culture, with its emphasis on materialism and individualism and its negative view of human beings. Therefore,

Schiele stresses the inadequacy of all approaches, even those that claim to be culturally sensitive, that do not deal with the problems inherent in European culture. Afrocentricity, Schiele contends, is the only paradigm that not only gives African social workers the means to analyze correctly the situation but also proposes an alternative in the form of a conscious reconnection to one's African core cultural values, especially a profound sense of spirituality and collective existence. The Afrocentric social worker, Schiele further insists, must not attempt to be objective and remain distant from the person who needs assistance. Such a posture would be incompatible with Afrocentricity, which stresses the epistemological validity of feelings. Much to the contrary, he or she must work toward establishing a close and reciprocal relationship based on the recognition of the ultimate interconnectedness of all life forms, in this particular case, of the patient and the social worker. What is labeled "social problems" may very well, in the end, prove to be "cultural problems."

EXEMPLARS: "CONCRETE PROBLEM SOLUTIONS"

The many dissertations produced by our students in the Department of Africology at Temple University serve as exemplars for others to use as models. The Afrocentric textbooks that have been published also fall in that category. It may also be said that this article represents an attempt to give the discipline more definite boundaries.

THE STRUCTURAL ASPECT OF THE AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM

A paradigm cannot be without "an integrated community of practitioners" (Eckberg & Hill, 1980, p. 121). The same authors explain that a paradigm "is made of the consensual beliefs of a self-contained community. No analysis which neglects the communal nature of a paradigm can capture the essence of the concept" (p. 122). At the beginning of this introduction, I insisted that the

development of the Afrocentric paradigm could not be understood outside of the development of the graduate program, in particular, the Ph.D. program, in the Department of African American Studies at Temple University, in 1988. This is where the first and most important community of Africological scholars and scholars-to-be emerged. The development of the first Ph.D. program in Africological studies was critical to the development of the Afrocentric paradigm. It was a milestone not so much because the Ph.D. validated the African experience but because, for the first time, we were systematically and consciously building an army of scholars who were going to challenge White supremacy in ways it had never been challenged before—an army of scholars whose aim was to finally set us free from mental slavery.

Another important piece in the building of a community of Afrocentric scholars is, of course, the annual Diop Conference. This conference, in existence for 11 years, is a unique opportunity to share with others, especially outsiders, our understanding and practice of the Afrocentric paradigm.

The *Journal of Black Studies* is also important, because it provides an outlet for Africological scholarship, giving visibility to the Afrocentric paradigm.

Other conferences, such as the Graduate Student Conference in the spring, and other journals, such as *Imhotep*, are also very important for the same reason.

THE FUNCTIONAL ASPECT OF THE AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM

To be considered a paradigm, Afrocentricity, it was stipulated above, must prove able to activate our consciousness, to open our heart in such a way that membership in the Eurocentric plantation is no longer appealing or an option. Although it is correct and unfortunate that many have attempted to reduce Afrocentricity to an intellectual exercise, confusing it with the creation of a shallow discursive space with no serious and real implications for one's life choices, the lives of many others who have been deeply touched by

Afrocentricity attest that Afrocentricity is indeed a true paradigm for African liberation.

Afrocentricity's profound impact on African lives can be detected in at least three areas (Asante, in Yaa Asantewaa, 1999): (a) the exhibition of cultural phenomena, such as music or dance, clearly informed by Afrocentric consciousness; (b) the emergence of a new political discourse and praxis in Africa, where leaders such as Mbeki have openly acknowledged the need for Afrocentric policies; and (c) the building of institutions, such as schools and spiritual centers, in Africa and in the diaspora whose main purpose is to spread Afrocentric consciousness. In other words, Afrocentricity meets the functional requirement identified as critical.

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