

Dawn-Song and the "Evolution of the Black Aesthetic" An Outline of A Few, Key Concepts/Archetypes/Metaphors

by

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Co-founder of the Black Arts Movement

Professor and poet Askia M. Touré was born on October 13, 1938, in Raleigh, North Carolina, to Clifford Roland Snellings, Jr. and Nannie Lynette Bullock. In 1952, Touré won a Motion Poetry Association Award while attending Roosevelt High School. Two years later, he participated in a successful sit-in at Roosevelt. Touré graduated from high school in 1956, and joined the United States Air Force. After being discharged in 1959, Touré took art classes at the Dayton Art Institute. He then moved to New York City and joined the Art Student League and the Umbra Poets. He and his associates Tom Feelings, Tom Dent, David Henderson, and Calvin Herndon were mentored by Langston Hughes. In 1961, Touré joined Max Roach, Abby Lincoln, Alex Prempe, May Mallory, and Maya Angelou at the United Nations to protest the assassination of Congo's Patrice Lumumba in 1961. In 1962, Touré became an illustrator for *Umbra* magazine, a staff member with *The Liberator* magazine, and a contributor to *Freedomways*. Touré was a part of the Atlanta staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and joined the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) in Mississippi in the spring of 1964. In 1965, Touré founded *Afro World* and organized the Harlem Uptown Youth Conference. Touré also participated in the rise of the Black Panther Party and co-wrote SNCC's 1966 "Black Power Position Paper." In 1967, Touré joined the staff of Nathan Hare at San Francisco State University and taught African history in the first Africana Studies Program. Touré organized the 1984 Nile Valley Conference in Atlanta and co-founded the Atlanta chapter of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) in 1986. Touré authored multiple books and received the 1989 American Book Award for Literature (*From the Pyramids to the Projects*) and the 2000 Stephen E. Henderson Poetry Award (*Dawnsong*); other works include films and plays. In 1996, Touré was honored with the Gwendolyn Brooks Lifetime Achievement Award from the Gwendolyn Brooks Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

"Taking Larry Neal's resurrection of the Orisha in blues to its ultimate development, Toure' replaces Neal's use of numerous references to Black Folk culture with allusions to Egyptian history and mythology. Consequently, Toure' expands and extends the Black Aesthetic paradigm, taking it to its natural conclusion as he develops an Afrocentric paradigm reflective of the intellectual progression of the Black Aesthetic from the 1960s to the 1990s."

--- Dr. Joyce A. Joyce

Introduction

In the "Sankofa" process, which is, in my opinion, ongoing, many independent thinkers attempted to "Return to the Source," explore the ancient, primordial roots of ancient African culture(s), researching the possibilities of finding useful concepts and wisdom applicable to modern Africans and the African Diaspora. In this process-and through the guidance of Venerable African scholars, like C.A. Diop, Theophile Obenga, John Henrik Clarke, Jacob Carruthers, Charles Finch, Asa Hilliard, and Ivan Van Sertima-we were able to discover what I take the liberty of naming, the "View of the South: Humanity's Primordial Worldview," the view of ancient Nile Valley Civilization: The Auset!Ausarian (Isis/Osirian) World-view, based on the principles of Truth, Justice, Righteousness, Harmony, Balance, Order, and Divine Reciprocity ...in a very simplified condensation: Our Universe functions via the Balance of Male (Ausar)/Female(Auset) forces. All things in nature are alive, sacred, and Humanity is linked to all things via an inter-relationship of what is known today as "environmentalism." The Earth is a sacred, living Being; and humans, mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, and insects are all inter-related, along with all plants; and even the waters, rocks, and mountains are alive and vibrating at whatever level with life. Some western scientists have labeled this view "animism."

Some Key Archetypes Flowing From This World-view:

The Semi-Mythical African Matriarchy: the resurrection of the primordial "Great Mother" rising from the Central/East African Lake Region. This archetype is embodied in the "Dancing Queen" of the poem, "Dawn-song!" The Dancing Queen of Ta-Seti (Kush/Nubia) as the primal embodiment of leadership development within the first, great Human Revolution-Agriculture-the foundation of human civilization. (Plant culture was developed by women!)

"Summer Worlds," the metaphorical/archetypal myth of Bronze Age Civilization, (led by Nile Valley Africa, but linked with the Asiatic "Blackheads" of Sumer in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and the Black Dravidians of Mohenjo Daro in the Indus, along with the Phoenicians, and the "Homeric" (Cretan-derived Pelasgian) Greeks of Nile Valley descent, according to the "Classical" Greek historians, Herodotus et al). This civilization as a living Amenta [Eden, earthly Paradise] ruled by the Laws of Maat and led by the women and men of Ancient, Classical Africa.

The Ta Setian!Kemetian symbolism of Au set (Isis) as the African myth of the sacred Female: the Companion/Soul-mate of the martyred Ausar (Osiris), who through mastery of certain magical arts re-connected her husband, after his murderers had scattered his body, gave him life, and became impregnated by him, produced a son, Heru (Horus) who avenged his father by battling his head murderer (Set, his Jealous uncle) for the Egyptian throne ...Queen Auset, the female ruling equal, and queenly wife of King Ausar, who embodied the Kemeti (Egyptian) worldview, which preceded, and countered the vicious, sexist myth of "Eve" of the Hebrews, who, tempted by Satan (as serpent), caused Jehovah (male, patriarchal God) to become angry and expel humanity from the Garden of Eden.

This "Return to the Source" functions as "Image-reversal": Resurrection of the Divine Female (Auset!Net!Great Mother), and therefore, a break with the male- dominance of both Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian cultures, which are out of balance with Nature (Harmony of Male/Female principles), and which posit a Homosexual (male only) Godhead!

"King Ausar, the Nile Valley Divine Myth of the Death and Resurrection of the First Avatar, and World Savior, who traveled throughout the known World, and brought the peoples agriculture (farming). This occurred thousands of years before the Hebrews and "Christ" existed in the World. A lesson that African-heritage peoples do not have to follow the later Creation- myths of the Semites or Aryans (forged from the Bible and the paintings of Michelangelo Buonoroti or Leonardo Da Vinci of the Italian Medieval Renaissance).

The Bimsha!Oiva: the ebony-skinned woman as the World's Original, Primordial Beauty Archetype, before the rise of the Aryans (whites) and Semites (mixed peoples). Bimsha, from the African-Caribbean, meaning a beautiful, jet-black woman. More in line with the ancient sculptures of Kemet, Nubia, Dravidian India, as images of the Sacred Female, Goddess/queens.

These are some of the archetypes/metaphors, which flow from the continuous scholarly, and literary, research of the Sankofa process, which is ongoing. What I have attempted to provide is a "model" from an Ancient, Primordial Perspective. I don't ask any special favors, as author/poet; I simply wish that the writers, scholars, and poets of the younger generation, and the Black Community in General, examine the work and reach independent conclusions, without prejudice and slander from people who have assimilationist "Axes to Grind." One must bear in mind, also, that this work flows from the International Struggle of former Colonized Peoples of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Far Asia against European Imperialist Hegemony in terms of "White Supremacy/" a Project with which they arrogantly attempted to "re-write" History, what Dr. Ivan Van Sertima has labeled as the "Modern Falsification of History." The writing of the Africans, and Darker peoples, in general, out of the key foundations and discoveries of Human Civilization.

Askia M. Toure', author of #Dawnsong! and the forth-coming #Jsis Unbound: The Goddess Poems," Book 2 of the Isis/Osirian Trilogy.

Seven Key Concepts of the Black Arts Cultural Revolution

One: The "Blues God"/Post-Middle Passage Orisha matrix of "Vuduh Music," "Devil Music" of the Negro Church, "Jungle Music" of Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong. Despite the obvious, racist stereotypes, there were strongly recognized African links [concept by Larry Neal].

Two: Musicians as Prophets/"Priest-philosophers" of African-Americans. Black Improvisational Art music ("Jazz") as a kind of living Spiritual philosophy of African-Americans, whose freedom-loving World-view was so broad, that it included all of Humanity. This view posited music as a kind of internal language of the African Diaspora, which linked Black people to the Cosmos. This, of course, led to a basic conflict with American capitalism, which viewed all art as "entertainment," and thus a commodity to be financially exploited by music corporations [concept by Askia Toure].

Three: The conscious recreation of the West African concept of the Djali or Griot: the Poet/Bard as the embodiment of the Communal Voice, Oracle, and Guardian of the National "Soul" or Consciousness-the Medium through which Ancestors speak to the Beloved Community/Nation. (This was practiced culturally by most of the major Black poets and Blues singers since before the New Negro Renaissance. The Black Arts Movement consciously articulated the concept.

Four: Cosmic Music: the evolution of advanced Black Music into a kind of spiritual apparatus to enable human beings to link up with the Cosmic Universe, through the utilizing of specific sound vibrations, and advanced acts of sonic exploration [concept by Henry Dumas, Master Sun Ra, and Master John Coltrane/ Onedaruth].

Four A: Main symbol- the Afro Horn, the mythical, magical "Summoner of Spirit" [Creation/Destruction] by linking to the Cosmic Universe. According to this myth, nothing false, corrupt, or artificial could remain undestroyed while in the Presence of the shamanic, magical Afro Horn [reputed to have originally been created by the ancient Kamites (Egyptians), lost to history, then discovered in the Black Diaspora [concept by Henry Dumas].

Five: Historical Discontinuity. U.S. Imperialism, via "Domestic Colonialism," interfering in the national development of Afro-America, so that the emerging younger generation is entirely ignorant of the values, goals, and struggles of the prior generation so that it ignorantly begins to "invent the wheel" all over again. A good example of this is the "Hip Hop" generation 's ignorance of the overall vision, goals, and values of the preceding "Black Power" generation 's efforts at liberating the African-American nation from U.S. domestic colonialism and imperialism [concept by Prof. Harold Cruse].

Six: "Domestic Colonialism": the concept that the landscape of the United States contains two (or more) nations, White America, the colonizing nation, and Black, or African-America (New Africa) the U.S. Internal Colony; which would go a long way in explaining U.S. chattel slavery, and, later, apartheid, "Jim Crow" racial segregation, and the "Inner City" ghettos (Bantustans) of Today. It would also explain Afro-America's passionate mass identification, and support of, the African liberation struggles against European colonialism and apartheid. It would also explain the U.S. Black masses considering "Down Home," the Southern Black-belt as a kind of unsung "Homeland" for the U.S. African-Americans [concept by Prof. Harold Cruse].

Seven: Re-Africanization: Sankofa, Return to the Source: the attempt to systematically study indigenous Black (African diaspora) culture and its links to the Matrix of indigenous African cultures, starting with the Black-belt South, in order to determine what remnant of the original Matrix we continued after the Maafa, the Black Holocaust of the Middle Passage. Using this research as a foundation, we then tried to resurrect an African -centered World-view, in our generation's effort to Imagine a Liberated Future. In other words, what of the African-centric Vision is applicable in the efforts to create an African-American Liberated Future? Culturally, we attempted to recapture important aspects of our African Identity stolen by the white American enslavers: we "Re-Africanized "our names: from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka, Rolland Snellings to Askia Toure', Sonia Sanchez to Laila Manan, Don L. Lee to Haki Madhubuti, from Abby Lincoln to Ami nata Moseka, Jewel Latimore to Johari Amini, Herman Sonny Blount to Sun Ra, John Coltrane to Sri Rama Onedaruth, Sylvia Jones to Amina Baraka, Ron Everett to Maulana Karenga, Tom Dent to Kush, Vallery Ferdinand III to Kalamu ya Salaam, Donna Moses to Marimba Ani, Helen Hobbs to Halima Toure', Joanne Chesimard to Assata Shakur. We also learned to speak Swahili, Arabic, Yoruba, Twi and other languages. We created new holidays, such as the internationally known Kwanza & African Liberation Day. We created whole new areas of scholarly and academic studies: African-American, African, or Africana Studies. New philosophies, such as African-centeredness, Africology, and other related disciplines and areas of study were researched. This process continues [concept by Askia Toure', Larry Neal, and Malcolm X].