

Pan African Metaphysical Epistemology: A Pentagonal Introduction

by

Denise Martin, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Pan African Studies and Humanities

Department of Pan African Studies

University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky

denise.martin@louisville.edu

Abstract

This paper suggest that a Pan African metaphysical epistemology collects concepts, practices, patterns, symbols, and terms from various African cultures, past and present, continental and in the African Diaspora, as a resource for discussing 21st century perceptions of the person, time, phenomena, and healing.

Introduction

This paper was presented at the 19th Annual Cheikh Anta Diop Conference premised by the observation that the millions of people who read historical novels and attend recent theatre productions based on ancient Egypt, particularly the 18th dynasty, are being misinformed under the guise of being entertained.ⁱ The novels, while historically accurate in the sense of names, dates, and places, omit key cultural values of Egypt such as Maat, in favor of drama and intrigue. Furthermore, those who consume these works include the literate, active book-buying and theatre-attending segment of the world's population, and most likely include people who teach. The consequences are that a subtle misconstrued image of Ancient Egypt can indirectly be perpetuated within the academic setting.ⁱⁱ

Hence, the proliferation of themes in the popular media concerning ancient mysteries, quantum physics, ghosts, death (near, after, and during), time travel, secret societies, UFOs, aliens, etc, could lead one to conclude that the only cultures that have secret societies are Euro-American, the only psychics in the world are white; and the only technology regarding remote viewingⁱⁱⁱ comes from the declassified CIA Project Stargate.

What is rarely discussed is the fact that the shaman of the San of South Africa are able to go into an altered mental state and “go to far-off camps where their families and friends are living; [because] they want to know if they have food and that they are safe” (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2004: 91). Is this not comparable to remote viewing? Other practices such as a Dagara elder peering into a clay pot containing virgin water to view activities occurring at a distance (Somé 1994: 25) called forming by Mbiti (1990); or enslaved Africans in the Americas using a pot filled with virgin water to “catch sound” or ensure privacy during secret meetings (Raboteau, 1980), echoes the concept of remote viewing. Embedded in these cultural practices are technologies that have distinct epistemologies which have implications beyond ritual and tradition.

The mode of this work is reactionary in the sense that it is responding directly to trends identifiable in Western popular cultural spheres mentioned previously, as well as in the academy: frontier science or vibrational medicine in biomedicine (Gerber 2001), quantum mechanics in physics, and so-called “new age” or metaphysical studies in religion (Alabanese 2007). Equally intriguing is the apparent parallel or perhaps double helix relationship between this scholarly activity and the popularity of works such as *The Secret*, *The Matrix*, *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, the Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings series and the growing list of media programming with “metaphysical or “new age” themes.^{iv} As the lines between cutting-edge ideas and mainstream media outlets—witness PBS’ series *NOVA Science NOW*—get blurred, the default perspective and context and therefore perception of this phenomenon will be based on a Western epistemology with its language and conceptual frameworks.

African epistemology is already equipped to discuss these views of reality because it contains four basic ways of knowing: divination, revelation, intuition, and reason which can be separated into the categories of supernatural, natural, and paranormal (N’Sengha 2005). In addition, the humans’ relationship to the supernatural is one of three fundamental Afrocentric themes of transcendent discourse along with human relations and human relations to their own being (Asante 1987: 168). Thus, a synthesis of knowledge, spirit, and cosmos is acknowledged (Holmes 2002; Livingston 2004).

Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop commenting on the advances of Western knowledge observes, “Man is a metaphysical being and it would be catastrophic if a genetic or chemical manipulation were to take away his innate anxiety.” For Diop, this anxiety is man reconciling himself with himself and to bypass this process using scientific knowledge means would make him “cease being himself, a being with a destiny, no matter how tragic” (Diop 1991: 366). This statement, by one of modern Africa’s most prolific scientists and scholars underscores the importance of acknowledging, integrating, and balancing metaphysical and physical knowledge and being.

Metaphysics simply deals with first principles and seeks to explain the nature of being or reality, and ontology. Many religions, interpreted in a substantive sense, that is dealing with explanations and beliefs (Clack and Clack 1998), would qualify as metaphysical. Further, when Mbiti poetically stated that “Africans are notoriously religious,” (Mbiti 1990: 1) we could also say that “Africans are notoriously metaphysical” though not in a purely philosophical sense of spectators and speculators, but as practitioners. Therefore the cultural practices of African people and their descendants are valid sources of knowledge (Asante 1990; Gyekye 1995; Diop 1974; Outlaw 2004; Obenga 2004). When these are studied, it is inevitable that one encounters the esoteric or the metaphysical.

Though the mode of this work is reactionary it gives agency to various African traditions by collecting concepts, practices, patterns, symbols, and terms from African cultures, indigenous and contemporary, continental and the Diaspora to discuss them as significant in light of emerging ideas in 21st century Western thought and culture. This epistemology is distributed into five categories: Person, Time, Phenomenon, Concepts, and Healing. Hence, taking Diop’s cue that man is both physical and metaphysical, let us examine the person.

Person

In the Bantu-Kongo ontology (Fu-Kiau, 2001; Thompson 1984) and indeed most African ontologies (Mbiti 1990), the person is at the center. The person is priest or priestess of the universe (Mbiti 1991) and the fullest expression of creation (Fu-Kiau 2001). The person is a part of creation like animals, trees, and nature but distinct through empowerment by choice and the ability to consciously direct the energies flowing through all creation. Generally speaking, African understandings of person are multifaceted (Kaphagawani 2004; Menkiti 2004) and contain several intrinsic characteristics: (1) a person is made up of numerous components, (2) a person has an active moral component; and that (3) the components are synchronized between the physical and metaphysical bodies. This complexity described in the Bantu-Kongo word for person, *muntu* is a “set of concrete social relationships...a system of systems; the pattern of patterns in being” (Fu-Kiau 2001: 42). *Muntu* is “*n’kingu a n’kingu*” a principle of principles; such that *muntu* is able “to produce materially or technologically other mechanical systems” (Fu-Kiau 2001: 70). Therefore, a *muntu* is distinguished from other beings by intelligence (Diop 1991) and a unique human quality (Ani, 1994). Fu-Kiau (2001) adds that *muntu* is not or comparable to an animal because *muntu* has a dual soul-mind, *mwèla-ngindu*, which can remain and interact with the local or world community after death.

Indeed, the composite and transcendent person is found throughout Africa. In ancient Egypt, the physical body is called the *zed* or *khet*. In addition, the soul or *ba* which according to Diop (1991) is equivalent of the double of the body found throughout Black Africa, the *ka* is the immortal soul, or aspect of the divine that is within, the shadow (*šwt*), the name (*ren*), and heart (*ib*). Often these aspects were rendered on temple structures as separate entities with their own vibrant existence.

For example, the name would be encircled in a *snw* or cartouche meaning all power in the universe belongs to the person whose name was encircled. The *ba* would be rendered as a bird with a human head. Material goods, offerings, invocations, and prayers would be drawn or written for the *ba* or *ka* of the person who occupies the tomb. Egyptian cosmology teaches that the *ba* of the deceased is free to wander, but must return to the body before the sun sets (Budge 1959).

A Zulu person is a cluster including the body, aura, Law, and UQOBO or essence (Asante and Abarry 1996). For the Nupe, the person includes the body or *naka*, the soul, *rayi*, the shadow soul or *fifingi*, and the personal soul or *kuci*. The *fifingi* is vulnerable to external forces, such as witchcraft (Nadel 1954). Among the Dagara, the spirit double is the *Siè* and is also vulnerable to manipulation which impacts the well being of the living person (Somè 1994). The Yoruba also include a shadow, called the *ojiji* in their concept of person as well as the *eye*, mental body, and *oka*, heart-soul (Lucas 2006). Generally speaking, however, the Yoruba concept of person has four main components: *ara* the physical body, *emí*, the soul, the *orí*, or inner head or divinity called the *orí*, which each person selects before birth, and the *esè* which is individual effort (Abímbolá 1994; Abímbolá 2006). The *orí* determines a person's potential for material success and actualization more so than a predetermined destiny. As a personal divinity, the *orí* must grant permission before an *orisha* can bless the person. Your *orí* is a "free will" choice before birth. Though, once born, it is *esè*, the individual struggle and strife that determines what potential of the *orí* will manifest. Whatever personal or functional goal a person has in life, being of good or moral character, *ìwàpele* is paramount.

The Yoruba concept of *ìwàpele* describes the active moral component of the African person. It distinguishes the *muntu* (being) from the *kintu* (thing) (Diop 1991). Also among the Yoruba, the word for human, *èniyàn*, translates loosely as "entities in the world chosen to do good." Therefore, if a person working with their *orí*, achieves various successes in life without exhibiting *ìwàpele*, they would not be highly regarded. Good character is the prerequisite of all human activity including the creation and application knowledge. N'Sengha calls this concept the thinking heart and notes that "in most Bantu languages, the word heart also stands for thought" and "a *muntu wa mucima muyampe*" is not only a person with a good heart in the sense of being kind, compassionate, and generous but also a person of good thought" (N'Sengha 2005: 42). Someone who is not applying ethics with their knowledge is referred to as a witch. The importance of a person acting morally has been identified in the Nile Valley cultures (Karenga 2004), in feminine beauty among the Mende (Boone 1986), Akan cultural values (Gyekye 1996), and general African religion (Magesa 1997) and aesthetics (Welsh-Asante 1993,1994).

The last characteristic of the African person is the intricate relationship amid the various physical, moral, communal, metaphysical and spiritual components. In Yorùbá cosmology, specific body parts are created by specific òrìshà. Ógún creates the skeleton while Obàtálá molds the form of the body. Ajala, who is not an òrìshà per se, makes *orí*. *Emí*, is the breath of life and soul contributed by Olódùmarè. Specific parts of the body correlate with affective qualities such as *esè*, the leg with struggle, the *idi*, buttocks with stability, and the stomach *inu*, with deep thought. The cognitive body is echoed in the thinking heart mentioned previously. An aspect of the physical body that has emerged in the Diaspora is melanin. It is highly controversial because of its association with race and the lack of specialists who understand and can synthesize its biological, spiritual, and cultural aspects (Moore 2002). However, 21st century scholarship may yield intriguing information in this area as scientists learn more about this substance found in all humans (Moore 2002). Then, perhaps it can be discussed from less racially charged views.

Furthermore, the Pan African concept of person is in constant tension with the community; indigenous wisdom understands that individual activities impact the entire community, but also understands that each individual is unique, hence the *Zulu Personal Declaration* states,

My neighbor and I have the same origins;
We have the same life-experience and a common destiny;...
My neighbor's sorrow is my sorrow;
His joy is my joy;
His survival is a precondition of my survival.

And yet
I do not prescribe destiny for my neighbour;
My neighbour is myself in a different guise;
Equals do not prescribe destiny for each other;
(Asante and Abarry 1996: 372)

Time

Like the concepts of person, African perspectives of time are equally multifaceted. They address agricultural, astronomical, genealogical, ecological, and economical cycles among others (Adjaye 1994). Kenyan scholar John S. Mbiti proposed that time is “the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts” and “may help explain...practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation” (Mbiti 1990: 16).

Generally speaking, time for African people “is meaningful at the point of the event and not at the mathematical moment” (Mbiti 1990: 19). Among the Bantu-Kôngo, abstract time exists but “it is *danga* (events) that make time perceptible, providing the unending flow of time with specific ‘dams,’ events, or periods of time” (Fu-Kiau 1994: 20). Time is also cyclical. The image that expresses Bantu-Kôngo time is the cosmogramic altar or *dikenga*. The circumference of the circle is time and the four points are *n’kama* “dams” or “events”. This image can represent time on a cosmic, a natural, or a human scale because people, animals, inventions, social systems, etc, are conceived and live through four stages: pregnancy, birth, maturity, and death (Fu-Kiau 1994). The cornerstone of the cosmogram is *musoni*. This is a time of beginnings: for the creation of the universe, a time of “the sparkle of the ongoing process of time and life” (Fu-Kiau 1994: 23), and formation of the physical earth. For nature, it is the time when a seed is put into the ground, the time of human conception in the womb, and the time an idea takes form in the mind. Moving counterclockwise to *kala*, this is the time during creation when the earth cooled as well as the time of the sun rising, and the physical birth of a person. *Tukula* is the period of maturation. During creation, animals and human beings appeared on earth. In the human life cycle, it represents the peak of creativity. *Luvemba* time is marked by the separation of an androgynous being into male and female, thus the beginning of a new cycle of creation. At this point, the Bantu-Kôngo cosmogram spirals into another cosmogram and another aspect of time called *ntangu a zinga/moyo* or vital time.

Among the people of Mali, time has an ecological, ritual, and genealogical context (Koné 1994). The ecological context is based on a conceptual cycle of events that constitute the passage of seasons. These events are composed of pragmatic choices that are performed based on when they will be successful, not necessarily a specific mathematical time. An example would be a Dogon circumcision ritual postponed “if by midsummer Sirius does not shine according to expectations” (Koné 1994: 91). Therefore “the fact that events sometimes serve as temporal orientation does not mean that the times when they occur are ritual or religious times to which people are bound” (Koné 1994: 95). Similarly, genealogical time depends more on “context (like space and place) than on precise chronology” (Koné 1994: 93). Koné further explains, “Among the Mande, we relate to space by talking about events (evidence), while Westerners refer to events by mentioning time (abstract)” (Koné 1994: 94). There exists a distinct perception of time in Africa and its Diaspora cultures (Pennington 1993) and has been described as having “salient differences, conceptually and behaviorally, from those observed in the West” (Adjaye, 1994: 9).

Mbiti proposes African time as consisting of two dimensions: *sasa* and *zamani*. *Sasa*, a Kiswahili word meaning now or at present includes events that are about to occur, occurring, or recently experienced. It is where people are conscience of existence or where their perception of existence is focused. *Sasa* has its own past, present, and future, though narrowly defined. The future would be events that are part of the rhythm of natural phenomena, and other events would be “no-time.” *Sasa* is unique, relative to the individual and reflective of his or her experiences. The community *sasa* is “bigger” than the individual’s and equally focused on the “nowness” of experience.

Mbiti's second category, *Zamani*, consists of "big time" and means ancient times, antiquity, epoch, already, earlier, and before in Kiswahili. *Zamani* has its own past present and future. *Zamani* is where the myths that support the cosmology of a community exist. It is the home of people who died long ago and the future home of individuals who physically die and are no longer remembered. It is the period "beyond which nothing can go...the final storehouse for all phenomenon and events," (Mbiti 1990: 22) and a reality that is not after or before. Because *zamani* houses the collective myth of a people by which they live, it supports *sasa*. It gives foundation to the rituals, dances, and experiences of now. And in turn, as an individual collects experiences, physically dies and is no longer remembered, they move into a nourish *zamani*.

Mbiti has been criticized for his assertion that an African perception of time is two dimensional so it cannot contain a future, particularly in the context of philosophy (Wiredu 2004). However, other aspects of African concepts of time are arguably more relevant for 21st century scholarship. In fact, they might be right at home with some perspectives of time that have emerged courtesy of quantum mechanics: time can just as easily flow in one direction as another making it possible to "remember the future and predict the past" (Finch 1998: 267). On the sub-quantum level, matter consists of particles that flash in and out of existence, or at least, this dimension. Where the particles go is not understood.^v Perhaps they are travelling between *sasa* and *zamani*?

The subquantum understanding of time has implications for understanding such time bending activities as prediction and prophecy. What is regarded as prophecy according to a Western definition, that is, the prediction of the future under the influence of divine guidance, takes on new dimensions given the fluidity of African time. Because many African perspectives of time are endless spiraling interwoven circles, where the future if moving forward brings you back to a beginning? Or as Mbiti says, time in Africa moves backwards (1990). Here, the polycentric rhythms of African thought that parallel quantum mechanics are apparent. African prophecy is the ability to move anywhere in time: past, present, future, parallel. Fu-Kiau calls this "*zinga ye zingumuna luzingu lwa ntangu* (roll and unroll the scroll of time) (Fu-Kiau 1994: 31). According to Zulu Shaman Credo Mutwa, prediction... 'is a very vital human power. It is an 'early warning device' that the gods placed within the human soul so that one can recognize future dangers" (Mutwa 2003: 177). For this reason it is important that information be acted upon. For Mutwa, prophecy is not an empirical phenomenon to be validated by accuracy, instead "When God reveals to you something that is going to happen, when God reveals to you dangerous things that are yet to come, it is because he has also given you the power the [sic] avoid those things" (Mutwa 2003: 184).

Constrictively, I will conclude this discussion on time with a brief discussion of celestial calendars via the ancient civilizations of the Nile valley and of modern Dogon, two African cultures with astute celestial awareness wherein movements of the sun, planets, stars, and select constellations have been meticulously documented. Now, a recent find at Nabta Playa, a megalith site located 100 miles west of Aswan in Egypt could expand our knowledge of African celestial time even further.

The site contains a set of stones that appear to convey intentional placement (Brophy 2002). The placement of the center stones correlate to the alignment of the stars of Orion's belt with the summer solstice in 6,400 B.C. Brophy further suggests that other stones indicate an alignment with the heliacal rising of specific stars at the vernal equinox, events which occur once every 25,900 years. Lastly, he maintains that the Nabta Playa site tracks the movements of stars in relation to the Galactic center.^{vi} If Brophy's assertion that Nabta Playa tracks movement of celestial bodies in relation to galactic center can be corroborated, this would be a revolution regarding African perspectives of time.^{vii} Nabta Playa could be a significant site because galactic orientation factors into the Mayan calendar which intrigues many timekeepers and adherents of New Age philosophy, because of the interpreted significance of the date 2012 (Stitler 2007).^{viii}

Phenomena

African ideas of time challenge linear thinking just as African phenomena challenge what is understood with the rational mind. Second, the rational, supernatural, natural, and paranormal paths to knowledge identified by N'Sengha create a staggering range of phenomena within African cultures that defy empirical assessment, ultimately perceived and experienced through direct participation. Thus, because of their worldviews and preponderance of rituals, African cultures are rich with opportunities for such experiences. Given this scope, only one phenomena is explored here; one which is readily identified and acknowledged in African and African Diasporic cultures, the spirit or life force which has perhaps as many names as there are cultures in Africa: *ntu* (In Bantu-Kongo); *chi*, (Igbo); *nyama* (Bamana, Dogon); vibration (Rastafarians); *loa*, (Haitian Vodou); *vodun* (Fon); and simply Spirit among (African American). Spirit has equally as many functions; it is accessed, praised, raised, celebrated, fed, wed, danced, manipulated, surrendered to, played, sung, drummed, channeled, embodied and worked (Richards 1993; Murphy 1994). And consequently, the primary focus here is to discuss the saturation of African life with Spirit and some of the ways Spirit is acknowledged and engaged.

In Bantu-Kongo, *ntu* or Spirit is found conceptually and etymologically in all categories of being: *muntu*, *kintu*, *hantu* and *kuntu*. Even though an entity is a "thing" it still has a life force. Among the Bamana and Dogon *nyama* is the power, vital force, or energy that resides in all creation; its qualities are such that it is found in varying levels of intensity in the universe at different times. Humans, animals and objects contain *nyama*. When an animal is killed, its *nyama* is released so the hunter must protect himself. Humans can manipulate the intensity, flow, and direction of *nyama* through ritual and the spoken word. Simple objects undergoing "ritual pronouncements" infuses them with additional *nyama*. This ability is at the heart of both sorcery and healing/protection wherein sorcerers manipulate *nyama* to cause harm, while priests, smiths and herbalists offer healing and protection from harmful *nyama*. One of the most visible forms of protection is the door lock which is less about stopping intruders than regulating *nyama*. Another is *dassir*, or village protector spirits found in trees, animals or unusual rock formations (Imperato 2001).

The San also perceive a life force inhabiting creation. In their rock art, zigzag lines surrounding elands, one with bowels releasing, are drawn to indicate the potency of the supernatural force believed to inhabit eland. This is similar to the Bamana perception that an animal's *nyama* is released at death. The San further engage this force through the use of their rock paintings because if a 'good' person were to place his or her hand on a painting of an eland, power would flow from the image to the person while a bad person's hand would stick permanently and they would die. Further, when dancing, the San would "raise their arms and turn toward the images when they wanted more power" (Lewis Williams and Pearce, 2004: 105).

The engagement of Spirit is also found among a community of Rastafari in North Carolina. The concept of vibrations is one of four major themes identifiable in an adherents perception of Rastafarianism (Van De Berg 1998). These vibrations inform Rastafari perception of reality and permeate every aspect of existence: food, clothing, emotions. They have a dualistic quality of being good or bad, positive or negative and can impact the person's mind body or spirit. Positive vibrations come from Jah, negative one's are of the "world." To combat negative vibrations, one must emanate positive vibrations. Like the Bamana who maintain "ritual pronouncements" infuse and increase *nyama*, witness one Rastafari testimonial:

Upon realizing he was talking about tornadoes, he stopped himself and said to another I-dren (brethren) that he had to watch out for what he was saying. The member explained that by focusing on such a topic, he was empowered to call down the vibrations on the earth accidentally, just by thinking about vibrations such as tornadoes and the like (Van de Berg 1998:166).

The concept of vibrations is found among the Bantu where "a person lives and moves within a ocean of waves/radiations. One is sensitive or immune to them. To be sensitive to waves is to be able to react negatively or positively to those waves/forces." (Fu-Kiau 2001: 114). The word-sound vibration manifests in nature with the Dogon while playing the *koro* drum: "The life force, *nyama*, reaches and penetrates the instrument by the beat of the stick used to play it with; from there it travels with sound and reaches the millet" (Griaule and Dieterlen 1986: 481). Hence, the ways in which African people perceive and engage Spirit are infinite. Indeed, the San say the spirit world is "multifaceted, mercurial, and mysterious" (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 97). And perhaps, some clues to its nature lie in the concepts that reflect and explain the phenomena of the African spiritual world.

Concepts

African concepts are often included in initiatory knowledge or esoteric traditions and therefore can be difficult to obtain. Knowledge that would be found in a library in the West is not directly accessible in Africa, even to the most thorough scholar. Therefore it is vital to give careful consideration to information that is revealed by initiates as this provides a direct link to an African perspective.^{ix} Thus, I will now turn to discuss concepts revealed through initiated persons as well as those from academic sources.

Among the Bântu-Kôngo, the *ngânga* is the initiated African man in the African way of thinking (Fu-Kiau 2001: 70). Interestingly, one concept from this way of thinking is the “Vee,” the basis of all realities whether biological, material, ideological, or immaterial and thus its living energy is the symbol form of attraction, repulsion, celebration, pain, individual, and community, a prominent image in Bantu cloth weaving. Hence, when placed on the *dikenga* or cosmogram, the Vee is a “living pyramid in constant motion which follows the path of life and passes the four main points of demarcation” (Fu-Kiau, 2001: 132). And the more centered a person is in this Vee, the more powerful the person.

There are four main Vees on the *dikenga*: *Vangama*, *Vaika*, *Vânga*, and *Vûnda*, analogous to the *dunga* or “events of time.” The *Vângama* is the starting stage of the formation process, and biologically speaking, it equates with conception and when genetic codes are set. In thinking this is the stage of an idea. Second, the *Vaika* is the transition from the internal to the external environment or birth wherein the idea transitions from being in the head to a material form. The *Vânga* is creativity and maturation, a time to become an *ngânga*, or master. And the last demarcation is *Vûnda* where “one goes naturally or unnaturally into the process of dying or *Vûnda*, i.e., to rest, to extinguish, leave the physical world, to re-enter the world of living energy” (Fu-Kiau 2001: 141).

Continuing, when a person re-enters the world of living energy, they have a new set of experiences, but to those still on earth they are ancestors, either *mukulu/n’kulu*, a spiritually deified ancestor, or *n’kuyu*, a stunted ancestor (these experiences occur in the deepest world, *ku mpèmbe*). According to Fu-Kiau “it is the period of birth-growth of that world, a penetration through the accumulated cultural roll of the past time in order to regenerate one’s own life potentialities for a possible return of that ngolo energy...in the physical world” (Fu-Kiau 2001: 34), thus, a concrete example of an African concept of reincarnation. Fu-Kiau further explains “After accumulation of all spiritual, moral intellectual or genetic potentialities at *ku mpèmbe* ... the Kongo cosmology tells us, the dual soul mind, *mpève ngîndu* is ready to reincarnate” (Fu-Kiau 2001: 34).

Like many other aspects of African cultures, reincarnation is profound when considered as an isolated concept, but when integrated into the cosmology, it is not the defining feature, but rather its implicitness is seen in the equal energy spent on insuring the well being of the person in the present physical world. And in addition, the experiences of the *mpève ngîndu* are not discussed as “punishment” as found in some Buddhist teachings, but as simply experiences.

Hence, one does not leave the cycle of the *dikenga* through a concept such as *nirvana*. Regarding reincarnation, Mutwa states bluntly, “We in Africa believe that the soul goes through a number of incarnations in its development—toward reaching the goal of maturity” (Mutwa 2003: 201). Among the Dagara, “the living must know who is being reborn, where the soul is from, why it chose to come here, and what gender it has chosen” (Mutwa 2003: 20). The task of the community then is to assist in the soul’s remembering accomplished through the naming of the person, and rituals designed to help the person remember.

Respectively, there are variances in this concept of the person as a living-dying-living being. Fu-Kiau explicitly states that *muntu* experience the constant cycle of living because of the dual soul-mind, *mwèla-ngindu* which animals do not possess. Somé states that the life energy of ancestors who have not yet been reborn is held in trees, mountains, rivers and still waters. And thirdly, the interaction between the life energy of the person and the energy of other items in creation when a person is not incarnated is complex and a potential area for more consideration.

Healing

The fifth and last aspect of my Pan African metaphysical epistemology construct addresses healing. Hence, indigenous knowledge and its application is framed in the context of restoring or maintaining the physical, mental, and spiritual well being of the person, family, community, as well as ensuring right relationships with the ancestral, spiritual, and natural worlds (Asante and Nwadiora 2007; Abimbola 2006; Karenga 2004; Magesa 1997). And via this we also know that practitioners in African healing traditions have the knowledge, skills and finesse of an herbalist, priest, psychologist, clairvoyant, mediator, medium, shaman, singer, musician, dancer, to name a few; and if the multidimensional aspects of the person are combined with the dazzling array of forces that populate creation, the possibilities of what could be causing disharmony are equally spectacular because African concepts of healing address all factors as it involves all materials and modalities.

For example, *n'kisi*, the root of which means “to take care, to cure, to heal, to guide by all means even by ceremony” (Fu-Kiau 2001: 37); which contains elements from the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms (because the person, *muntu* lives in the world with each element). *N'kisi* is therefore medicine found among the Bakongo, yet with equivalents throughout Africa and because of the large number were taken to the Western Hemisphere during enslavement, variations and adaptations of *n'kisi* are found in Cuba, Brazil, Haiti, and New Orleans (Thompson 1984). In the experience of African descendents in North America, *n'kisi* exists as High John the Conquerer, a gnarled and twisted root reminiscent of Funza, the first distributor of *minkisi* among the Bakongo symbolized by a gnarled and twisted root (another aspect of *n'kisi* are the anti-hex roots that exist throughout the African-American community; typically made with red flannel, a derivation of the *minkisi wambi* or danger *minkisi* which are wrapped in red cloth). And juxtaposing migration and aesthetics, *n'kisi* the Bakongo confirmed that illness, harm, protection and healing existed beyond physical realm, thus their perception of illness was a “state of motion and of body energy... a motion of an abnormal flow of body energy... [hence].. to be sick is to feel that motion of the abnormal flow of body energy and the decrease of individual self-healing power” (Fu-Kiau 1991: 39). Fu-Kiau continues, “this body functioning power diminution is often caused...not by bacteria or virus but by the loss of the body’s balance or energy...Disease becomes evident when the individual...is unable to neutralize in-coming known and unknown waves and radiations” (Fu-Kiau 1991: 39).

Here the wisdom of the Bakongo-Bantu intersects with one of the frontiers in Western medicine termed vibrational medicine (Gerber 2001). Vibrational medicine is based on an Einsteinian paradigm which “sees human beings as networks of complex energy fields that interface with physical/cellular systems” (Gerber 2001: 39). Vibrational medicine therefore may be the underlying mechanism behind therapies such as crystal healing, psychic healing, plant/flower essences, therapeutic touch, etc. To determine if African understandings of vibration and energies operate on an Einsteinian, quantum, or sub-quantum level would involve a synthesis of knowledge from esoteric African traditions and cutting edge physics and medicine, interesting work for the scholars up to the challenge. Diop (1991) proposed that this type of work requires a new philosopher who is able to go beyond the mechanistic view of the naturalist and simultaneously ground the physicist’s calculations and equations in the material world. This philosopher “undoubtedly will integrate in his thought all of the above-signaled premises, which barely point to the scientific horizon in order to help man reconcile man with himself” (Diop 1991: 375). This is yet another example of the thinking-heart, offering in a way, a “healing” in scholarship.

It is clear that a major characteristic of a Pan African perspective on healing is that it acknowledges subtle energy and vibrations as playing the causal role in illness. A Yoruba diagnosis of illness (*àrùn*), would include divination to be sure that any potential spiritual causes are identified so they can be addressed in the treatment (Abímbolá 2006) Among the Dagara, “methods of healing must take into account the energetic or spiritual condition that is in turmoil, thereby affecting the physical condition” (Somé 1997: 30). Focusing just on the physical “denies the needs of energy, the adjustment of Spirit needed to make the cure last.” This energy finds a new and more potent way of impacting the body, thus by addressing “the energy of the mind and Spirit, whose status is affecting the physical body, then you are likely to heal truly” (Somé 1997: 30). This integrative approach to healing the individual can be found in varying intensities among traditions in the African Diaspora. For example, Kumina practices are primarily focused on healing, and practitioners are known for their deep knowledge of bush medicine and the complex rituals involved in the gathering of plants, leaves, and flowers for use in curing rituals, and their preparation of various medicines (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini Gebert 2003: 149)

Vodun, Regla de Ocha, Regla de Palo, Myal, Obeah, Quimbois, Yoruba, and devotees of Mami Wata also have strong healing aspects, because many communities in the African Diaspora suffered the trauma of physical separation from Africa, and interestingly enough, some healing rituals are targeted specifically to this experience via the healing baths in Quimbois as other aspects of healing in the African Diaspora encourage the incorporation of traditional African views of self, ritual, community and healing into a modern Western lifestyle (Fu-Kiau 1991; Somé 1997).

Conclusion

Indigenous and African Diaspora cultural practices contain critical insights comparable to topics in 21st century scholarship particularly from the areas of quantum/subquantum mechanics, vibrational medicine or frontier science, and metaphysical-new age philosophy in popular religion and culture. Hence quantum mechanics is providing the conceptual basis to systematically discuss the latter two areas^x; African cultures have an epistemology that is “hard wired” for quantum realities and new age-metaphysical studies, and although Ancient Egypt has long been evoked among adherents of new age philosophy its contribution has been filtered through the cultural eyes of those not always sympathetic to the whole context of culture. Yet, this work attempted to sketch the “innovative” aspects of African culture into the discussion while simultaneously honoring the cultural integrity of each tradition.

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Notes

ⁱ The title of the paper was "The Literary Treasure of Ancient Kemetic Traditions: The Missing Dimensions" by V. Nzingha Gaffin. The specific novels mentioned were *River God*, *The Seventh Scroll*, and *Warlock: A Novel in Ancient Egypt* by Wilbur Smith; the two, four-volume series of novels on Ramses by Christian Jacq; Naguib Mahfouz, Egyptian Nobel Laureate and author of *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth*; and Paul Doherty's trilogy *An Evil Spirit Out of the West*, *The Season of the Hyenas*, and *The Year of the Cobra*. Smith and Jacq have sold a combined 82 million copies in 30 and 27 countries respectively.

ⁱⁱ Jacq is the founder of the Ramses Institute which is dedicated to preserving the endangered archeological sites of Egypt and Doherty is a noted British historian lending an air of "credibility" to their works, though fiction.

ⁱⁱⁱ A term used for a form of clairvoyance used in intelligence circles that allows a person in one place to view events in another using only the abilities of the mind.

^{iv} Examples of such programs are *Medium*, *CSI*, *Crossing Over*, *24 Hours*, *Ghost Whisperer*; DVDs *The Secret*, *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, PBS's *Nova Now*, *Ancient Mysteries*, *Histories Mysteries*, and *Investigative Reports*

^v See Chapter 17 in Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization of Barbarism* for a technical summary of the scientific revolution brought about by the work of Albert Einstein.

^{vi} Galactic center is the rotational center of the Milky Way galaxy. The most recent studies indicate that a giant black hole is found there and to flares of radiation burst from the region.

^{vii} This type of study, known as archaeoastronomy began in the 1960s with the study of Stonehenge. Scholars in this area are often inter- and/or multidisciplinary and their findings challenge the orthodoxy of most disciplines. For these reasons, they have yet to gain full acceptance by established disciplines. The value of these works is that they bring fresh perspectives to cultural studies that are not bound to the unchallenged assumptions that exist within many disciplines. The downside is that they do not get to engage many mainstream scholars who either are not aware of or avoid their findings. The International Center for Archaeoastronomy is housed at the University of Maryland and has published a peer-reviewed journal *Archeoastronomy: The Journal of Astronomy in Culture* since 1977.

^{viii} The research waters in this area are quite murky. When examining Mayan culture, the date 2012 appears only twice amidst the volumes of hieroglyphs and then in an enigmatic context, rendering it of little significance to scholars. However, many researchers with various motives and little actual contact with contemporary Mayan culture have contributed to the vast body of information and speculation regarding December 21, 2012. The few ethnic Mayans who speak of 2012 have learned of the Mayan Long Count calendar, the one from which the 2012 is derived, through the academy. The Long Count ceased to be used before the arrival of the Spanish. Two interesting speculations in this area warrant further investigation. The first is the Long Count originating with the Olmecs and Van Sertima's evidence for an African origin of the Olmec civilization.

^{ix} There are several notable works that come from the practice of initiatory knowledge. *Conversations with Ogotemmel* was the result of a Dogon elder Ogotemmel revealing aspects of Dogon culture to Marcel Griaule. Ogotemmel was in contact with other Dogon elders so the information flow was monitored. *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo Tying the Spiritual Knot Principles of Life and Living* by Fu-Kiau shares knowledge he received during initiation into Bantu knowledge. In *Of Water of the Spirit* Malidoma Some speaks explicitly of his initiation experience, though admits he is only writing that which he was given permission to write. Credo Mutwa started sharing initiatory knowledge when he realized that when he died vital information would die with him though this compromises his vow as an initiated man.

^x Cheikh Anta Diop in his 1991 work *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* credits studies in parapsychology that use the work of Einstein and quantum physicists to establish scientific grounds for phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and distance viewing.

