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4

Africalogical Theory Building *Positioning the Discourse*

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Afrocentricity and *Africalogy* are two terms that have consistently ignited much controversy throughout various disciplines whenever they are spoken in conservative scholarly circles. Africalogical theory building is a needed paradigmatic renovation among rhetorical-critical approaches. For me, it is more than an intellectual gesture or exercise—it is an enduring venture, the objective of which is to clarify and demonstrate what it means to be African and what it means to epistemologically locate and define oneself within discourse(s) and the analyses of the discourse(s).

What is often identified as “good rhetorical criticism” is usually determined by the perspective of the rhetorical critic within the ongoing conceptual debate regarding the superiority of audience-centered versus speaker-centered criticism. It has been argued that audience-centered criticism is superior because it measures the efficacy and inducement of the message by placing the emphasis on the audience. However, speaker-centered criticism is considered by some to be more valuable, because the intent and identification efforts of the speaker provide worthwhile information regarding the history and production of the text. On the one hand, it is rather surprising that a relatively sharp group of intellectuals would allow themselves to be eased into a battle of futility that ultimately resists what we know to be critical thought. For an intellectual, it should be apparent at some point that every inquiry does not deserve a simple yes or no and every evaluation a simple good or bad, but that sometimes there is a continuum. The Africalogical method is holistic; consequently, it does not conform to either a speaker-centered or an audience-centered perspective. It is word centered, audience centered, and speaker centered. Because I have already elaborated elsewhere (Jackson, 1995) the centrifric nature of the word, audience, and speaker within

the method, I will not spend much time here on this issue. The primary objective of this chapter is to express my position on rhetorical theory building and to challenge readers to recondition their minds and redefine the range of rhetorical methods in order to embrace Africological theory building. This is not an apologia for Africology, nor is it an attempt to dismiss Western approaches. It is an opportunity to further consider a non-Western approach or method among other viable rhetorical paradigms. The chapter begins with a few basic concerns regarding the nature of rhetorical theory building. This is followed by an explanation of Africological rhetorical approaches, a cursory glance at doing Africological criticism, and the issuing of a challenge to rhetorical scholars. Finally, a few suggestions for future rhetorical theoretical directions are provided.

SOME BASIC CONCERNS

Whenever I begin writing to explain the Afrocentric-Africological rhetorical method, I find myself feeling compelled to justify Afrocentricity, because Afrocentric thought has been so widely criticized. Furthermore, I am also admonished by those of my colleagues who are also Afrocentric thinkers that apologia is unnecessary and a waste of energy. Yet I am too frequently confronted by master's and doctoral students who are initially interested in using the Afrocentric method in their theses and dissertations but are then discouraged by their advisers on the grounds that Afrocentricity is unsystematized or incoherent. In other words, it is not considered traditional or classical; however, I would argue that every culture has a different interpretation of classical thought.

Classical is a culturally relative variable. Within the past century, scholars throughout the various disciplines have begun to seriously consider African philosophy and traditions. Anthropologists, linguists, sociologists, psychologists, musicologists, and theologians are but a few of those who have intensely studied the Africological worldviews. The communication discipline has yet to fully consider the theoretical dimensions of African cosmological structures. The buzzword is *nommo* among scholars privy to the Afrocentric paradigm. At one National Communication Association national meeting a couple of years ago, a young scholar, who apparently wanted to appear knowledgeable on the topic, placed *nommo* in the title of his paper. Because it seemed so awkwardly insignificant to his paper, I asked him during the question-and-answer period to explain or define what *nommo* means. He confessed that he didn't really have any idea what it meant. "I just thought it sounded appropriate for this study," he replied. Although that moment must have been embarrassing for him, there are several other scholars I have discovered since then who are equally ill prepared to discuss Afrocentricity and Africological thought.

THE APPROACH

Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates all the departments of life so fully that it is not always easy or possible to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life (Mbiti, 1990, p. 1).

Paradoxically, Afrocentricity is both complicated and parsimonious, young and antiquated, culturally particular and yet useful for examining other cultures. Afrocentric methods intend to expand the repertoire of human perspectives on knowledge (Asante, 1990). They are not limited to the rhetorical texts of Africans or African Americans. The conceptual foundation of these methods includes a recognition of the connectedness of all things in the universe. Consistent with African philosophy, Afrocentric paradigms clearly envelop the notion that the universe is sacred in origin. Even the word has life within it. The spoken word is not seen as an utterance that is the consequence of skillful manipulation. It is seen as *nommo*, a life-giving mystical force or vivacity offered through verbal and vocal discourse (Asante, 1987). The *magara* principle is a companion concept to *nommo*. Jahnheinz Jahn (1961) defines *magara* as "the system in which one force can inwardly strengthen or weaken another and in which the individual growth can take place" (p. 111). Essentially, the effective presentation of the word is evidence of a spiritual substance enacted within a rhetorical event. African cultures place high value upon the establishment, maintenance, and continuity of relationships. As a result, the effectiveness of African-influenced orature is measured by the response from the audience, the articulate and dynamic presentation of the word, and the moral intent and character of the orator. As John Mbiti (1990) suggests, by studying the African-influenced word-text, one gains insight into the culture of the orator. This is true for Western orators as well. If one studies the manner in which the message-text within film, TV, sitcoms, music, and other mass media is produced, one will also be studying the people themselves. For example, the linear nature of most American films, progressing from the introduction of characters to the clear distinction between hero and villain, is indicative of Platonic dialogic thinking. It is also interesting to note that the American sense of maleness or masculinity is reinforced at the end of movies where the "good guy wins the girl" theme is reenacted. An Africological rhetorical paradigm becomes especially useful in adding clarity to the unorthodox film production technique of Spike Lee. In each of his films, Spike Lee never really tells his audience what to do, nor does he make it simple to identify the heroes and the villains.

It is precisely this interconnectedness, this observance of circularity, harmony, and dialectic that was taught to Plato by Socrates. As we know, Plato

was inclined to use dialogues, for dialogues hinted at circularity. The basic argument has more than one side or one dimension, so by offering a juxtaposed set of contentions, one is systematically able to examine more than one side of an issue. The term *dialectic* does not, from an Afrocentric standpoint, suggest opposites. Africalogical scholars prefer synthesis over dichotomy. As a result, it is practically a reflex to challenge dichotomous thinking wherever it is discovered, simply because there is the possibility that other factors, alternatives, and rationales may be excluded. Essentially, it is characteristic of the Afrocentric epistemology to explore, uncover, and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data (Asante, 1990).

There is no doubt that Afrocentric inquiry diverges from mainstream methodological approaches. This divergence is what cosmologically distinguishes and heuristically privileges this paradigm. But both sets of theory, traditional and nontraditional, European and African influenced, do seek to define certain parameters within which scholars choose to investigate human behavior, whether communicative or otherwise. Certainly, the disciplinary and subdisciplinary perspectives of the modern theorists facilitate increasingly controversial discussions of Afrocentricity as method. By the nature of the terms being used, traditional and nontraditional, the latter must distinguish itself in some way from the former. The kaleidoscopic nature of metatheory is a bit misleading when discussing the nontraditional method of Afrocentricity. Whereas a metatheory is defined as a formulated paradigm that outlines how a given set of theories should be structured, much more is frequently expected of the Afrocentric metatheory. Afrocentricity is so broad a concept that it can be adopted as a theoretic label for intercultural, interpersonal, mass, intergroup, organization, or rhetorical communication theories. One must understand, however, that Afrocentricity is a metatheory that guides the discussion of Africalogical rhetorical theory building just as *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* (Golden, Berquist, & Coleman, 1997) guides the discussion of modern analogic paradigms (i.e., fantasy theme analysis, dramatism, narrative analysis). From the way *cultural criticism* is defined in contemporary rhetorical theory textbooks, Africalogical theory building can not neatly fit as a rubric. According to Rybacki and Rybacki (1991), "All other [traditional] approaches in this book differ from cultural approaches by their linkage to communication theory rather than to values or ideologies" (p. 134). Chapter 7 in their book, which is devoted to cultural approaches, suggests that much of cultural criticism is related to what might otherwise be labeled pop-cultural or feminist criticism as opposed to composite nativistic cultural criticism. In order to include Africalogical rhetorical theories under the heading of cultural approaches, scholars will need to

reconsider the possibility that cultural rhetorical criticism does envelop communication theory. The introduction of feminist communication theories by Julia Wood (1996), Lana Rakow (1992), and Marsha Houston Stanback (1988) has already begun to challenge the notion that cultural approaches are devoid of communication theory.

DOING AFRICALOGICAL CRITICISM

Rhetorical criticism is the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and then explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient manner. Rhetorical critics must make arguments to perform these functions. "[For example,] feminists argue that articles in popular magazines demean women. While a few of us speak poetry day to day all of us, as Moliere reminded us, speak prose . . . rhetorical criticism is criticism of life itself, of our own participation in the experience of living" (Hart, 1997, pp. 23-26).

The beauty of the modern rhetorical methods is in their multiple and textured perspectives on the lived rhetorical text. Although several of the modern approaches are analogically defined, each still offers important commentary on the criticism of life itself. If Roderick Hart (1997) is correct in postulating that all rhetorical critics are arguers, then the next logical question refers to what the principal argument for the Afrocentric-Africalogical critic is. An Afrocentrist would respond with the claim that all rhetoric is meaning centered and that meaning is derived from culture. Furthermore, all rhetorical criticism is grounded in the individual critic's and rhetorician's cultural interpretations of the text's meaning. I use the words *individual* and *cultural interpretation* neither to exclude the notion of community nor to confuse the reader, but to accent the influence of the community in forming individualized perspectives on knowledge and experience. In short, the Afrocentric critic considers it erroneous for one to think that he or she has escaped culture in the process of analyzing the text, or as Hart (1997) says, in the criticism of life itself.

Before commenting on doing Africalogical rhetorical criticism, it is imperative that criticism be defined and understood. Roderick Hart's (1997) definition of rhetorical criticism, as mentioned before, is relatively consistent with definitions found within reputable rhetorical theory texts in the discipline. Rybacki and Rybacki (1991), for instance, suggest that rhetorical criticism is the analysis of the development and use of verbal and visual symbols that function to persuade an audience. Ultimately, the authors contend, rhetorical criticism is a quest for meaning within the rhetorical act. Criticism is theoretically driven yet encapsulated in pragmatic experiences. The norm for effective criticism has been to systematize the observation of ideas, circumstances, attitudes, histories, language, and meaning so that the text yields insight about the nature of human events. The critic maintains a

certain reflexivity between theory (that is, a set of predictions about the substance of the text) and systematized observation, so that the rhetorical method becomes the instrument used to determine whether the text is consonant with a given set of theoretic predictions. For example, Kenneth Burke's pentadic method is named in *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* as a rhetoric-as-motive paradigm. That is, Burke's model assists the critic in analyzing the motive(s) of the orator. Golden et al. (1997) remind us that Burke's idea of motive is a reference not to causal tendencies, but rather to the completed action. Therefore, the analysis of the orator's motive is really the analysis of a completed rhetorical act. The prediction is that all human action is situated in symbols that reflect "guilt," "conflict," and "victimage." The method is useful in explaining and justifying completed actions that are considered applicable to these themes. Each method, no matter how it is presented, is an interpretation of the human condition. The Africalogical approach enlists the themes of community, liberation, and relational ethics in order to discuss the human condition. Relational ethics reinforces what is meant by community. Each cultural community creates and maintains its ethical standards, and the value placed upon the standards emphasizes relationships with others.

In analyzing the typical public-speaking situation, the critic (by using the Afrocentric method) is able to uncover the cultural worldviews of the orator and the audience, because all rhetoric is meaning centered, and meaning is derived from culture. A few of the terms that represent the paraphernalia of Africalogical rhetorical method when doing rhetorical criticism are as follows: (a) *nommo* and *magara*, (b) "The Manifestations of *Nommo*" (a phrase coined by Jeffrey Woodyard), (c) the seven senses, and (d) the logofoms. Each of these four terms can be used separately as critical devices, and they are all based on three methodological premises. First, all rhetoric is culturally self-reflexive, because rhetoric is meaning centered, and meaning is derived from culture. Second, audiences are the barometers of effective oratory. Third, rhetorical criticism is at its optimum when it considers all of the following: pretext, text, and context. Fourth, in analyzing the "word" or the text, logofoms (that is, signification, indirection, metonymy, substitution, codifying, etc.) are the guiding discursive elements to be used. Finally, all rhetoric is relational, and therefore the work, speaker, and audience are interconnected.

There are a few investigative questions that should be asked by the critic (this list is not conclusive): Because the speaker is never said to use the work, to what extent does the presentation of the work engage audience? For whom is the message intended? What are the circumstances that led to the production of the text? How does the audience engage the speaker? How does one or more of the manifestations of *nommo* affect the vivacity of the word? Where is the principle of community found in the rhetorical act? Does

the speaker use the *magara* principle in influencing the audience? How and by whom is *nommo* produced within the rhetorical act? And finally, what does the text inform about liberation?

When doing Africalogical rhetorical criticism, the critic must be familiar with the paraphernalia, methodological premises, and investigative questions. Each of these aids in using the paradigm for rhetorical criticism. Beyond applying the method, however, there is an even greater challenge.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge is to attempt to think in a non-Western manner, to avoid categorizing, splicing, reducing, and universalizing human phenomena. Naturally, this is antithetical to covering law models such as Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory and Sherif and Hovland's (1961) social judgment theory, which claim that all humans impulsively categorize environmental stimuli. One point of reference that elucidates the challenge is the scholarly definition of communication. Most professors walk into their classrooms and teach their students that all communication is either verbal or nonverbal, vocal or nonvocal. These instructors are willing to admit that there are combinations of these terms that can exist simultaneously, but essentially they have reduced all human interaction to dichotomous pairs. I propose that communication has an aggregate continuum from pretalk to nontalk. There are at least five points on the continuum—preverbal, verbal, epiverbal, subverbal, and nonverbal. The preverbal has much to do with both sociocultural history and body politics. For example, my skin color conjures certain feelings, apprehensions, and insecurities for some persons. Race as biologicistic construct is social and physiognomic, because it carries with it a memory of a set of experiences or episodes. Before I begin to converse, these preverbal elements intercede because of my undivoriceable personal history.

Then, there is verbal communication (exchange of words), during which epiverbality takes place. Epiverbal communication is that which exists—"on top of the communication"—the context or what we might call the "rhetorical situation." Subverbal communication is the underlying meaning of the message as communicated at any of the points on the continuum. One form of this is signification, and metonymy would be another. All of these points can occur simultaneously, except the preverbal.

Nonverbal communication has already been defined and extensively studied. Terms like *objectics*, *paralanguage*, *chronemics*, *kinesics*, and *proxemics* are concepts produced to facilitate the discussion of these communicative dimensions. Perhaps it could be argued that postverbal communication also exists and relates to subsequent relationship renewal, repair, and initiation. This continuum is yet another dynamic to the holistic nature

of Africalogical rhetorical theory and is considered to be part of the previously mentioned logofoms. It is evident that preverbality and epiverbality can be studied independently to determine how the pretext or context affects production and dissemination of the text. These pairs, among the others, can provide insight about the word meaning, orator, and the audience.

James Baldwin asserts that the Black intellectual is a "bastard of the West" (quoted in West, 1993, p. 85)—an illegitimate offspring developed and sustained by standards that are foreign but that are nevertheless treated as familiar. The objective of Africalogical thought is to reintroduce the composite African cultural personality to mainstream scholarly discourse. Martin Bernal (1996) explains his version of the Afrocentric scholarly continuum:

The label of "Afrocentrist" has been attached to a number of intellectual positions ranging from 'all good things come from Africa' . . . to my own shared position that maintains that Africans or peoples of African descent have made many significant contributions to world progress and that, for the past two centuries, these have been systematically played down by European and North American historians. (p. 86)

Clearly, since its rise in the 1960s, Africalogical research has been met with intense resistance by the most unlikely critics—white women, Black women, and Black men. Some of the individuals who have led the national conversation in opposition to Afrocentricity are Mary Lefkowitz (1996), Cornel West (1993), and Stanley Crouch (1995/1996). Among the popular proponents defending Afrocentricity are Molefi Asante (1987, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1996), Martin Bernal (1996), G. G. M. James (1992), Marimba Ani (1994), Wade Nobles (1991), E. A. Wallis Budge (1994), Na'im Akbar (1991), and the entire Temple School of Africalogists. The arguments have become so inflammatory that Lefkowitz refused to include Bernal's response to her latest polemic in her forthcoming book *Black Athena Revisited*. Nonetheless, the debate on Afrocentricity between Bernal and Lefkowitz was moved to the Internet in May of 1997, sponsored by Lefkowitz's publisher, HarperCollins.

DIRECTIONS FOR RHETORICAL THEORY BUILDING

Rhetorical theorists are an interesting brand of communication scholars. We don't want to use the argot of the staunch and rigid quantitative statisticians and researchers. Yet we are not so quick to embrace the interpretivists either. The jargon of rhetorical communication is specific to rhetorical theorists and critics, yet what we study is ever growing. It seems that it is fitting that our methods also be ever growing to accommodate the perspectives that modern approaches are not adequately equipped to discuss. Perhaps there should be a metaphysical rhetoric that assists the critic in properly analyzing religio-spiritual texts. I am particularly leery of any paradigm ap-

proach that claims to have all the answers to human behavior, for if you claim to know everything, then it is probably more accurate to say that you know nothing. In 1998, I attended a family reunion and heard a relative confess that when she was younger, she thought she knew it all, but as she has grown older and more mature, it has become crystal clear to her that she knows nothing at all. For rhetorical theorists who have studied classical Greek rhetoric, this anecdote draws an obvious parallel to Socrates's defense in the trial at Athens. It was there that he stated as a line of defense that he should be exonerated because of his superior ethical, intellectual, and experiential position of acknowledging his ignorance, something his opposition was not so willing to do.

As rhetorical scholars, we must be willing to invite new perspectives, to experiment with nontraditional ideological paradigms in order to progress. Humanistic inquiry is guided by the need to understand the human condition. Rhetorical scholars are invested in analyzing rhetorical acts to gather information about human behavior, events, and phenomena. Every direction in which rhetorical theory is driven must move us (as humans) forward. Kenneth Burke, in devising his concept of identification, explained:

Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and true of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence. (Burke, 1950, p. 22)

Humans are cultural beings with values, morals, beliefs, standards, ideologies, practices, and norms. Consequently, if we are ever to understand human behavior, we must focus on culture. Our students, who are culturally diverse, appreciate the recognition by their instructors that culture is central to their everyday lives. The test of whether it is worthwhile to use the proposed Africalogical or Afrocentric method is whether it allows us to acquire further knowledge about the discursive manifestations of human behavior while accenting culture. We must ask if methods of this sort are useful in critically assessing rhetorical acts and meaning that is culturally grounded. As with any theory, to determine its heuristic value, it must be tested to determine if it can actually do what it purports to do. One Africalogical method has been proposed, and the challenge to rhetorical scholars has been issued. It is time to test and continue the development of Africalogical communication methods to be employed within and beyond rhetorical studies.

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5

Opening the Future Postmodern Rhetoric in a Multicultural World

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My purpose in this chapter is to comment on three themes: first, rhetoric's orientation to the critical analysis of discourse in a multicultural world; second, the significance of a postmodern perspective on that rhetoric; and finally, what *opening the future* means in terms of training future critics. As an initial caveat, whatever our focus of study, we need to approach the future with far less arrogance than has been our past practice. As critics fully subjected to and qualified within a Western culture, we need to remind ourselves constantly that ours is not the only way, much less the best way, in which critical conclusions might be drawn.

To that end, I have argued for a re-visioning of rhetorical theory—a retheorizing that moves us beyond the strictures of what is otherwise a hegemonic view of rhetoric's nature and practice. We need to conceptualize a rhetoric that does not privilege, at the outset, any one singular means of achieving goals (McKerrow, 1995). Until and unless we are successful in reworking our theoretical assumptions, we will forever be mired in a narrow, provincial perspective that automatically consigns some rhetoric to the world of the irrational, regardless of how its practitioners perceive its utility. The task before us is not simply to include more new subjects into our present way of thinking, but to change our way of thinking. As a specific illustration, the challenge is not simply to write the missing into our history, for to do so is merely to provide them a place in our already constructed present (Ballif, 1992). Rather, the challenge is to write history into the lived experience of those who are currently missing. To be more precise, the task is to write rhetoric out of the lived experience of women and people of color, and thereby produce their history, rather than to merely write their efforts into the history of rhetoric as already constructed. Only through such a reconceptualization