

Keepers of West-African Humanism and Healing:
African-Centered Storytelling Praxis by Asè in Chicago

BY

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DISSERTATION

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SUMMARY

My dissertation explores how African orature fosters African humanism and traditional healing for older adults, elders and youth through African-centered storytelling praxis offered by cultural keepers in Chicago. Chapter one centers the work in the African oral tradition and migration that storytelling tradition with African descendant people in the U.S. Chapter two of this intervention investigates current and emerging literature across traditional African culture and healing, African and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, West-African oral narratives, decolonization, and African-centered education. This is the literature review African antequitous education and knowledge systems, humanist praxis in African orature, storytelling scholarship, and African-centered education.

The subsequent chapter outlines my methodology and methods. Since this work is an Indigenous research case study, this chapter outlines how I approach research and the way I went about engaging with the storytelling collective in Chicago. Due to the orality-based nature of this intervention, qualitative interviews, observations, storytelling performances, were used to illicit information and conversations about how storytelling impacts the audience and storyteller. The last two chapters engage findings with emerging scholarship and discusses how the storytelling collective in Chicago facilitates new possibilities within the educational policy canon.

ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the interdependent connection between African oral tradition and traditional African healing strategies found in storytelling in Chicago. In examining a nonprofit based in Chicago that offers cultural education through political resistance oral narratives (i.e. storytelling), my research examines how storytelling can provide emotional and cultural edification for youth and older adults that experience mental, intellectual, spiritual and racial subjugation. My work builds on the work of George J. Sefa Dei, Kmt G. Shockley, Kofi Lomotey, Lifongo Vetinde, and Jean-Blaise Samou, in that it centers African cultural production and knowledge as the source and connection to African spiritualism, communalism, and humanism and thus African traditional healing. Lastly, it presents a structured framework for an African-centered storytelling praxis as a way towards Africanization and healing.

INTRODUCTION

Our Africanness is our stories. There is not a moment when we are not being called to return home and know our African Indigeneity deeply. Returning home happens in our languages, our thoughts, our approaches to parenting, the ways we dress, the values we have, and the way we remember. Oftentimes, we think the kind of instruction occurring in mainstream schools, popular culture, and digital screens is sufficient. We absorb what we can and move to the next. Sometimes they absorb us.

What is less known, however, is the heart-to-heart, head-to-head interactions between us and our stories. As an educator, storyteller, and artist, I have personally witnessed the value of strong educators and artists in my childhood and career. I have also seen strong men and women apply and practice a certain kind of cultural wisdom that has forced me to raise my internal and external standards as a father and human being. Preserving and celebrating these cultural warriors is a critical part of what is missing from both informal and formal educational spaces. We also do not learn how cultural keepers, knowledge custodians, and warrior scholars become purveyors of truth and wisdom.

The answers to these questions reside in stories – and this is why stories are so critical to our souls. They provide sustenance and help us reset what we think is possible in our hearts and minds. This reset can come through laughter, crying, sharing, ritualizing, learning, researching, connecting, planning, and ultimately allowing the story to take us where we need to be taken. Our Africanness is our Indigeneity; and our stories are our lifeline. Taking this magical dynamism into account, my dissertation examines how storytelling from African descendants in the U.S. – performed by older adults, elders and youth – provides the building blocks for self-determination and healing. I then explore how these tools facilitate the cultivation of an African

moral ethic, personhood development and unique meaning making for the storytellers and their audience. Specifically, I investigate how storytelling – paired with an African-centered education – creates an *African-centered storytelling praxis*.

Rationale for preserving African storytelling in the 21st century

Storytelling has shown to assist with self-expression and healing for African descent people in the U.S. (Cox, 2000; Simpkinson & Simpkinson, 1993). It also provides an essential style of cultural utterance and is a technique for overcoming trauma and deprivation (Daniels & Sandy, 2000). A version of African storytelling preserved by Enslaved Africans has thrived for African descent people in the U.S. (Banks-Wallace, 2016; Hamlet, 1998). This study examines a subset of storytellers of African descent in the U.S., the national collective they belong to, and unearths how storytellers are creating a unique African-centered, community education model.

Studies that center on storytelling span the literary canon. Storytelling has been studied from an African storytelling and oral tradition context for almost 40 years. Scholars from other academic domains have also embraced storytelling as a tool for teacher development and pedagogy (McAdams, 1993; Banks-Wallace, 1994, 2002; Carruthers, 2006; Prescott, 2009; Tuwe, 2016). What is less studied is how storytelling facilitates healing.

CHAPTER 1: ORAL TRADITION IN GLOBAL AFRICA

The African oral tradition is deep and vast. It is the vocal transmission, archiving and expression of what it means to be African. It is imbued in spirit and highly intertwined with the magic and secrets needed to preserve and further African people as a whole. This is a unique organic kind of accounting of African knowledge. One of the most customary ways to transmute cultural legacies and beliefs systems is through the African oral tradition (Abraham, 1962; Zirimu, 1973; Ford, 2000; Dei, 2012; Ba, 1981; Emeagwali, 2014; King, 2016). This is just one of the many reasons why the African oral tradition is extremely sacred.

H. Hampaté Bâ (1981) outlines the importance of oral tradition in African descended people (ADP) and West-Africa extensively. He argues that the African written tradition or history is still an oral tradition (Bâ, 1981). And for those that argue that oral tradition is not a reliable source of historic memory, he asserts that what is said gives birth to what is written over time and within the individual (Bâ, 1981). Here, oral tradition is accompanied by trust; the value of the person transmitting the information, the source, and the collective memory – all wrapped up in a profound oral truth (Bâ, 1981). This becomes the “bond between man and the spoken word” (Bâ, 1981, p. 166).

In oral societies that do not have written words, cultural memory is greatly developed and the link between people and the word is paramount (Bâ, 1981). Ba contends, “in African traditions, the spoken word had, beyond its fundamental moral value, a sacred character associated with its divine origin and with the occult forces deposited in it. Superlative agent in magic, grand vector of 'ethereal' forces, it was not to be treated lightly” (Bâ, 1985, p. 167). This West-African tradition is a continuation of how oral transmission was perceived in ancient

Kemet, one of the first documented oral traditions of African peoples from about 2,500 B.C. (Carruthers, 1999).

Oral cultures acknowledge verbal expression (oral tradition) as both a way to engage in daily speaking and a practice for safeguarding the wisdom of Ancestors and their key utterances (Vanisa, 1961; 1981). This could be an attestation from generation to generation and is also a conscious choice oral African communities make, not a deficit or inability to write (Vanisa, 1981). According to Vanisa (1981), oral traditions should be internalized and digested slowly, like a poem and not read like a book. In addition to learning oral traditions, one must study how oral societies understand the world. Oral communication is paramount in oral societies; however, all verbal transmission is not tradition (Vanisa, 1981).

The distinction between all verbal transmission and sacred oral communications reside in the how information is shared. There are many names given to those that are given the honor of being the oral historian or oral composer (Vanisa, 1961; 1981). A *dieli (jali)*, is a Mandinka term for an oral historian that learns the oral traditions of an oral society (Ba, 1981). They can be the following:

1. The musicians, who play every instrument (monochord, guitar, cora, hand-drum, and so on). Often wonderful singers, they are preservers and transmitters of ancient music, and composers too.
2. The ambassadors and courtiers responsible for mediating between great families when differences exist. They are always attached to a royal or noble family, sometimes to one particular person.
3. The genealogists, historians or poets (or men who are all three in one), who are usually also storytellers and great travelers, and not necessarily attached to a family (Ba, 1981, p. 187).

Tradition bestows a beloved social status for the *dieli*. They are allowed to be brazen, and have an extended freedom of speech (Ba, 1981). They can be free hearted, even impolite, may even joke about the gravest, holiest things without it being taken to account (Ba, 1981). In the Bafour

tradition (a group in the Western Sahara), the chief is not allowed to perform music in public. Instead, the *dieli* – who is revered by families – is the intermediary and sometimes ambassador when issues arise (Ba, 1981).

Since African communities are oral communities, the *dieli* are essential to this oral communication. The elders in the community have to discern; and the *dieli* has to make it work. As a result, they are often intelligent and trained to collect and share news and information (Ba, 1981). There are also *dielifaama* (*dieli*-kings) who are considered noble and have bravery, integrity, and wisdom. They do not abuse rights or customs and are a tremendous powerful ambassador of human trade and culture (Ba, 1981). They are brilliant and instrumental in the Bafour's traditional society due to their guidance over nobles (Ba, 1981). They also travel often for historical information and insights; and while they can make a good living, it is not about money for this and other noble traditions (Ba, 1981).

Lastly, while a *dieli* can be called a traditionalist, that term is usually reserved for the exclusively historical strand of oral tradition – and there are many elements of that tradition (Ba, 1981). Even if you are born into *dieli* that is still no guarantee you will be a historian, although you have a path toward the tradition (Ba, 1981). It also does not make a *dieli* master in traditional matters or one who has knowledge. Normally, *dieli* groups are outside of the dominion of initiates – since they mandate silence, discernment and command of one's oration (Ba, 1981). Still, they can be masters just everyone else. An *ioma*-traditionalist (the traditional master of knowledge) can also be a phenomenal genealogist and historian; a *dieli* can become a traditionalist-*doma* if their disposition allows and they have undertaken the related initiations (Ba, 1981).

A West-African term used to describe oral historians or *dielis* is griot. Kouyate (1988) describes griot as a Senegalese term for someone who preserves the cultural and historical past with the present. The griot was – and still is – the oral historian and educator in any given nation (Kouyate, 1988). The griot was deeply treasured and was often closer to the king than his wife. The griot translated facts for the king and educated people about their own Ancestors – the work they accomplished and how they were able to do it (Kouyate, 1988). They gave African society oral history and cultural knowledge so they could, “maintain a high level of understanding their heritage” (Kouyate, 1988, p. 182).

Kouyate states that all people of African descent (Latins, Jamaicans, Haitians, Brazilians, Caribbeans, African Americans, etc.) experienced enslavement in some way, and must recognize that even though they were not born in Africa, they are still African (Kouyate, 1988). This is similar to Kwame Nkrumah, former Ghanaian president, who said “I am not African because I was born in Africa but because Africa was born in me.” Kouyate continues:

In order to get back what is ours, information and knowledge about African culture must be learned now. This the griot gives to all who need it. Our children need to have the facts about their ancestral homeland...When a Black person understands his or her African past, accepts being African, he is different from one who does not know these things. Those of us who know, know our value (p. 182).

Lastly, while griot is used here, it is a term that is not used as widely due to the French origin of the term. Hale (1997) argues that there are many other terms across the African lexicon that mean griot (*dieli*) that should be used instead. These terms are:

iggo (Moor); *guewel* or *gévél* (Wolof); *mabo* or *gawlo* (Fulbe); *jali* (Mandinka); *jeli* (Maninka, Bamana); *geseré* or *jaaré* (Soninké), *jeseré* (Songhay), and *marok'i* (Hausa);

jeliw and *jalolu* (Mandé) (p. 251).

As a result, many “griots” and storytellers use the word *dieli* (or *jeli*) to refer to the African oral tradition and African descendant storyteller (Hale, 1997).

Traditionalist-*doma*, genealogist, and oral historians were in charge of storing various different kinds of accounts in their memory banks. To keep historical accuracy, the eyewitnesses’ observations must be highlighted first. Any oral tradition should be based on an eyewitness testimony not an alleged account (Vanisa, 1981). Rumor is not included because it is gossip. True tradition transmits evidence to the next generation (Vanisa, 1981). Certain important social infrastructure, like what is needed to run the institutions, accurate comprehension of social groupings and their roles, everyone’s rights and responsibilities, are transmitted in tradition (Vanisa, 1981). However, in a society that uses writing, memories with the least significance are relegated to oral tradition (Vanisa, 1981).

Table 1.1 Basic Forms of Message

		Content	
		<i>fixed</i>	<i>free (choice of word)</i>
Form	<i>set</i>	poem	epic poem
	<i>free</i>	formula	narrative

In addition, Vanisa (1981, p. 145) outlines four basic forms of message. The designation ‘poem’ is an identifier and includes all material learned by heart with a specific structure, including songs (Vanisa, 1981). The label ‘formula’ consists of proverbs, riddles, prayers, genealogies, and everything that is learned by heart and bound by written rules, except grammar (Vanisa, 1981). These two types of traditions include both the message and the exact words it was transmitted. Fixed are the most exact, formulae can have some interjection (Vanisa, 1981).

Examples of these kinds of traditions are found in “praiseful poems or songs of southern (Tswana, Sotho), eastern (the lake region), central (Luba, Kongo) or western (Ijo) Africa” (Vanisa, 1981, p. 146).

An ‘epic poem’ is a term that allows the oral historian to select his or her own words within a structure of prescribed rules (i.e. rhymes, patterns of tone and syllabic quantity, etc.). Epic poems should not be confused with long literary heroic works like the narratives of Sundiata, Mwindo (Zaire) and several others (Vanisa, 1981). There are messages and a fixed structure but nothing else. Certain sentences may be spoken that trace back to the origin of the epic poem. Examples of these are in Rwandan poetic forms and the Fang (Cameroon/Gabon) song-fables (Vanisa, 1981). Also, there is “no true archetype for these epic poems” since the oral historian determines diction. Even still, it is likely ‘epic’ variations ruminate from a “single original” (Vanisa, 1981, p.147).

Lastly, the term ‘narratives’ consists of most of the time specific historical messages. The oral historian or storyteller has a great deal of freedom to combine, refashion, reorder occurrences, magnify depictions, and more (Vanisa, 1981). It is a challenge to reconstitute an example. The oral author is entirely free from the literary standpoint. Her cultural and social environment may require conformity to certain truths in history (Vanisa, 1981). In order to be consistent, we must study a tradition in relation to all its variations – even those that are not histories and may emerge from adjacent peoples (Vanisa, 1981). Indeed, storytellers may gradually move “from the world of history to a wonderland” yet a form of this oral tradition disregards interpretations that are not grounded in truth – their evaluative methodology is key (Vanisa, 1985).

Lastly, and of extreme importance in regard to healing, the African oral tradition assists with acknowledging and honoring spiritual realities and expressions that are integral to the African experience and environment (Ogundokun, 2015; Emeagwali, 2014; Ford, 2000). Creation myths, epics, stories, and proverbs explain how African Ancestors dealt with everything from untimely death to respecting nature (Ogundokun, 2015). Many folktales, proverbs, legends, and myths have spiritual beings that behave like humans and thus can also be socially binding and develop a sense of community (Ogundokun, 2015; Emeagwali, 2014).

African Orature

If African oral tradition is the content within African knowledge systems, orature is the way that message is delivered. African orature, a term coined by Ugandan linguist Piio Zirimu (1973), aids in developing a code of ethics for human nature, cosmology, onomatology, and many other origin concepts. African orature (i.e. oral narratives, proverbs, epics, poems, etc.) is as ancient as the continent of Africa herself. These practices (e.g. narration, storytelling, poetics, etc.) are examples of how meaning and history are preserved through an oral tradition (Nketia, 1958; Tambiah, 1968; Kunene, 1970; Olatunji, 1973; Dseāgu, 1975; Anyidoho, 1983; Okpewho, 1988; Sunkuli & Miruka, 1990; Anyidoho, 1988).

In this way, the African oration world, as Kofi Anyidoho (1988) describes, is a “kaleidoscope” of resources from which we can draw from. African orature refers to the oral contributions, practices, and traditions of ADP from Africa (Zirimu, 1973). It names the intellectual sophistication and worldview centered in language, oral texts, performances, histories, epics, proverbs, and other mediums (Zirimu, 1973). Previously, oral literature and oral arts – terms used by Western scholars – misrepresented and degraded the complexity within the African oral tradition (Zirimu, 1973). Orature centers Africans and is a scholarly response that

elevates a uniquely African literature within the words, sounds, and tones of a transfuse Pan-African oral heritage.

Wa Thiong'o (1992), a renowned African author and historian, argues that, "the problem lay[s] in the English language...the equation between orality and illiteracy," which devalues African-rooted oral traditions. He shares that in the Kenyan language of Gĩkũyũ and the Lakes Plain dialect of Kĩrĩra, the word for the idea of "literature" does not differentiate between oral or written words. It is English that creates a false binary between "orate" and "literate" (Wa Thiong'o, 1992, p. 150). He concludes, "writing and orality are natural allies not antagonists, so also are orature and literature." (Wa Thiong'o, 1992, p. 147). This distinction is extremely important and demonstrates that the African oral tradition is in harmony and often synonymous with the African written tradition.

Meaning making also includes an understanding of spirit and spirituality. Supernatural tales, proverbs (wise advice) and magical characters are used to implant traditions, daily values and long-standing spiritual beliefs that help people with their journey in life (Ford, 2000). Oral and written magic speaks to the internal and external challenges and triumphs we face every day. How we respond to those situations is how we operationalize and personalize our African way (i.e. compassionate, relationship with nature, 'brothers'/'sisters' keeper, etc.).

African Tradition of Storytelling

African storytelling has been around for thousands of years on the African continent. Storytelling is a practice of noting and sharing emotions, beliefs, and reactions to participation within the social ecosystem (Gbadegesin, 1984). African storytelling adjudicates and transmits local knowledge from generation to generation – while transferring wisdom to future generations regarding culture, worldview, morales, expectations, norms and principles (Tuwe, 2016).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1965) also states that the psychological aim of opening children up to storytelling supports reasons for sharing stories in the African world. Storytelling is recounting tales and narratives to an audience using rituals, voice and movements (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986; Tuwe, 2016). This is juxtaposed to simply reading stories and recounting them from memory (Tuwe, 2016). Storytellers mold and shape various conceptual analogies and visuals linked to cultural ideas (Tuwe, 2016). As a result, storytelling can be found in styles like songs, poetry, dramas and sermons (Tuwe, 2016; Utley, 2008; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). Stories also use other rituals like drumming and another musical instruments (Tuwe, 2016).

Because the African world is embedded in oral rituals and customs, they possess profound stories and passionate storytellers (Tuwe, 2016). Many classical African writing systems are present, but most Africans today, and historically, are fundamentally an oral people with art practices and stories that are oral instead of written (Tuwe, 2016; Achebe, 1958; Chinyowa, 2001). Since African antiquity, storytelling both preserves an African humanism (i.e. social ethic) while transferring traditions, codes, and principles of acceptable behavior (Pouille, 2019; Tuwe, 2016; Emeagwali, 2014). The tradition of storytelling preserved history and ritual ceremonies, and “is one of the oldest in African culture, across the continent” (Tuwe, 2016).

Traditional oral stories were interlaced with how Africans have endured hardships, land struggles, movement and relocation, kingdom wars, disputes about pastures and waterholes, grappling with existence, magic, life or death, and spirituality (Tuwe, 2016; Emeagwali, 2014). These narratives mirror human interactions and how people should interact with nature and the animal world (Tuwe, 2016). The concept or “*Ubuntu*” (Mandela, 1994) personalizes these ideas deeply. *Ubuntu* stands for, “I am what I am because of you” (Tuwe, 2016). This idea is centered on the individual standing for the group, and the group standing with the individual (Mandela,

1994; Carson, 1998). These stories are an educative rooting of a sense of identity and tribe or community; they also offer teachings for moral values, natural phenomena, and spirituality (Tuwe, 2016; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1982; Mandela, 2002).

Mireku-Gymiah (2016) discusses how these characteristics are found in West-African and specifically the Akan culture, a group of people in Ghana. She argues that a distinctive trait of African storytelling is that it is uniquely able to provide both entertainment and education (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016; Tuwe, 2016; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986; Utley, 2008). Repeating words, rhythms, and gestures are key elements in African oral storytelling (Tuwe, 2016; Matateyou, 1997). Incorporating repetition as a technique ensures that more people will be able to comprehend and reproduce the stories from memory (Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gymiah, 2016). Once the audience knows a story, they become active participants while learning central cultural rituals and customs (Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gymiah, 2016).

Storytelling from the African world is inherently collective and a “participatory experience and phenomena” (Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gymiah, 2016). Collectively, people gather to listen for wisdom, counsel, mores, historical facts, and myths (Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gymiah, 2016; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1982). Usually, the storytelling environment is one where both the storyteller and audience have rights and responsibilities (Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gymiah, 2016, 2014; Soyinka, 1978). This collective responsibility is a fundamental component of African communal life and children’s Indigenous education as they move into “initiation into full humanness” (Tuwe, 2016). Most storytellers are respected members of the community who have mastered difficult oral application of “proverbs and parables, musical, and memory skills after years of traditional training” (Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gymiah, 2016; 2014; Achebe, 1958; Mungoshi, 1975; Chavunduka, 1988).

Many Akan oral narratives include the following main sections, “the introduction, the body and the conclusion” (Mireku-Gymiah, 2014, p. 175; Matateyou, 1997). First, the storyteller captivates the audience by introducing characters and tensions through a myriad of methods and applications (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016). The audience also has a supportive role. In Zimbabwe for example, the crowd accompanies the storyteller in singing, shouting, and dancing in response to the storyteller (Tuwe, 2016, Vambe, 2001). In the Akan tradition, the storyteller calls out with a phrase, and the audience returns with a response to begin the story – “this is commonly referred to as call and response” (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016, p. 176). When the story is over, the storyteller reiterates a moral or closing affirmation that was previously shared in the opening and body (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016; Tuwe, 2016).

African Storytelling and Pedagogy

Chinyowa (2000) argues that Western theories and researchers have been inclined often regard African peoples as void of a valid oral tradition (Tuwe, 2016). Some scholars relegated African oral performances as ordinary phenomena (Tuwe, 2016). Nonetheless, Africans possess many “pedagogical African storytelling traditions” all whom possess their own a critically unique importance and hierarchy in African rituals, performance, and education (Tuwe, 2016, Chinyowa, 2000). African storytelling (and theater performance) resembles The African worlds’ humanistic beliefs, therefore, stories provide germane instruments of social, cultural, mental, axiological, cosmological, spiritual, and emotional edification (Tuwe, 2016; Pouille, 2019; Dei, 2019). Thus, Chinyowa (2001) demands a paradigm shift concerning pedagogical approaches in storytelling (Dei, 2019; Tuwe, 2016).

Chinyowa (2001) contends that research regarding West-African oral narratives, storytelling and staging concentrated mainly on anthropological collections and/or translations of

various styles of local stories. Whether they are stories from Ghana, Senegal, or Nigeria, several scholars argue that “West-African storytelling provides “powerful pedagogical tools” toward articulating West-African “knowledge and wisdom” (Chinyowa, 2001; Dei, 2019). Beyond just mere entertainment, storytelling aids in honing creativity and imagination, in molding behavior, in preparing mental faculties, and in regulating emotions (Dei, 2019; Tuwe, 2016).

Vambe (2004) disputed Western critiques which attempted to slander and belittle storytelling from the African world. African oral storytelling praxis remained strong through Zimbabwean creative writers and their use of oral narratives in written works (Vambe, 2004). In the midst of “colonization, liberation and post-independence periods,” African orature in written works has always been and continues to be a medium for articulating defiance and an unwillingness to accept Western values and warfare (Vambe, 2004; Tuwe, 2016).

Decolonization and African Storytelling

Joseph Staples (1976) offered the colonial paradigm as a lens for analyzing Western exploitation and the underdevelopment of African communities (McDougal, 2014). This model splits colonization efforts into a dominant group and subordinate group (McDougal, 2014). Under this framework, the dominant group uses an institutional apparatus to control those with less power (McDougal, 2014; King, 2014). One main assertion of the colonial paradigm is that the colonized are repressed, forced, and taught to give up one’s cultural beliefs and embody beliefs of the dominant group (McDougal, 2014; King, 2014). This is able to take place because of the dichotomous power relationship in the colonial environment. As a result, social problems that are educational, economic, political, crime-related, and health-related are seen as being a part of the colonial project (McDougal, 2014).

Kuokkanen (2000) states that Western classification systems, academic research approaches, ways of thinking and being were and have been disputed since the end of the 1060s. This is one of the first insertions of “Indigenous paradigm” and resembles objectives of poststructuralist frameworks that aim to deconstruct Western narratives, hierarchies and systems (Tuwe, 2016; Koukkanen, 2000). Essentially, postmodernism requires shifting and discontinuing dominant ideologies from the West – an ongoing resistance as a result of the cessation of 500 years of Western exploitation and conquer (Tuwe 2016, Dion-Buffalo and Mohaw, 1992).

The decolonization process presents an opportunity to self-determine and realize Indigenous ways of knowing and living (Tuwe, 2016; Koukkanen, 2000; Dion-Buffalo and Mohaw, 1992). The “Indigenous paradigm” must honor and fully affirm “Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies as paramount to Western belief systems within academia” (Tuwe, 2016).

Dei & Linton (2019) assert that ADP should be unapologetic about re-centering their work, research, and solutions in African and Indigenous Knowledge systems (AIK) – especially in education where schools are not centering African ways of knowing and being (Dei, 2019; Dei, 2014). Dei (2016) argues that spiritual restoration and rebirth is key to this process. While decolonization is a holistic practice, it is fundamentally a political movement that sees the ‘spiritual’ as the root or backbone that undergirds the economic and political superstructure (Dei, 2019).

ADP in the U.S. (Black) Storytelling Tradition

One area where African oral tradition and West-African orature are in practice through ADP storytelling in the U.S. Hamlet (1998) wrote extensively about how older generations of ADP in the U.S. have a deep oral tradition that stems from the continent *and* locally in the U.S.

Before enslavement, Africans developed advanced spiritual systems and a majestic oral communication (Hamlet, 1998; Karenga, 2013). This concept, often called, '*Nommo*' speaks to "the generative power of the spoken word" (Hamlet, 1998, p. 3). For ADP in the U.S., this term represents a sense of collectivity, the heart spirituality of African Americans (Hamlet, 1998; Smith & Asante, 1972, p. 297).

Nommo was known to activate life and give people triumph over things (Hamlet, 1998). All actions, practices, activates, and shifts in nature were predicated on the procreative power of the spoken word (Hamlet, 1998). Furthermore, this force is not simply relegated to public spaces, it includes all communication settings and circumstances (Hamlet, 1998). As a result, ADP in the U.S. discovered power "in dance, the rhythm of the drums, and the mysticism and dramatism of stories" (Hamlet, 1998). This storytelling, storymaking, and story-preserving tradition is at the heart of this research intervention.

The way ADP in the U.S. used communication, language, and song while enslaved is a telling example of how African oral tradition evolved over time (Hamlet, 1998). During transfer from Africa to the Americas, West-African languages were one of the first cultural attributes that enslavement traders tried to repress. Because use of Indigenous languages was not allowed, the enslaved conjured up a unique language that was part West-African, part American (Hamlet, 1998; Gay & Baker, 1989). This fusion birthed the African American oral tradition. This fusion became an identity.

This oral tradition of ADP in the U.S. is a powerful tradition. As Hamlet (1998) states:

Culture was transmitted through this oral tradition. The people's cultural mores, values, histories, and religions were transmitted from generation to generation by elderly individuals known as griots [*jelis*], who were considered excellent storytellers. These storytellers gave to their listeners narratives that contained elements of realism and magic

in situations and characters with which they were familiar. They infused their storytelling with dramatic power that appealed to the emotions; it satisfied inner cravings, cloaked signs of unrest, evoked laughter, provided solace, and fostered a temporary release from the misery of chaotic experiences (Hamlet, 1998; Faulkner, 1977).

While storytelling is known to facilitate meaning making and morality – something that is widely known across the African world – very few studies exist that looks at how Black storytelling impacts storytellers and the larger ADP population in the U.S.

Language from enslaved ADP in the U.S. was “full of allusion, metaphor, and imagery and prolific in the use of body gestures and nonverbal nuances” (Hamlet, 1998, p. 4). This also meant that communication styles of enslaved Africans were largely due to their creativity and will to survive (Hamlet, 1998). Focus shifted from using language simply as a way to communicate, to a determination to be mindful of presentation, verbal artistry, and sharing about resistance efforts and rebellion plans in the face of horrendous circumstances (Hamlet, 1998). This language was poetic; the enslaved African was the poet (Hamlet, 1998; Bennett, 1971).

The oral tradition of ADP in the U.S. consists of key elements which are rooted in a refusal to accept current conditions, and a survival tradition. The energy and genius in African American oral tradition and delivery “revitalizes and re-energizes bland Euro-American talk” [and culture] (Hamlet, 1998, p. 4; DuBois, 1906). With a mix of poetry, imagery, and metaphor in “Black talk” (Smitherman, 1994, p. 19), ADP in the U.S. are able to “make the ordinary extraordinary” (Hamlet, 1998, p. 4). The African nature of the ADP’s oral tradition in the U.S. are as follows:

1. Rhythm as a frame of mentality
2. Soundin’ out as a verbal artifact
3. Repetition for intensification
4. Stylin as a quality of oration
5. Lyrical approach to language

6. Improvisational delivery
7. Historical perspective
8. Use of indirection to make a point
9. Reliance on mythoforms
10. Call-and-response pattern of participatory communication (Hamlet, p. 4, 1998)

These 10 virtues of “Black” *nommo* encompass both voiced and non-voiced patterns from West-African oral tradition of ADP in the U.S. – a tradition that works to preserve a sacred African energy (i.e. spirit) that has survived the test of time.

Theoretical Frameworks

Joyce E. King’s (2014) *Afrocentric praxis*, reimagines how we can use educational spaces and platforms as humanizing and healing spaces for ADP. Not only is Afrocentric praxis about remembering histories often neglected and destroyed through conventional public education, but also instructs educators on the necessary steps to take to ensure a culturally informed practice (King, 2015; 2014).

In addition, this framework offers several conditions for teachers as well. Instead of simply addressing curriculum content, the Afrocentric praxis states that teachers must also engage in a deep uncovering of historical, social, and cultural work in order to be an adequate educator of Africans in the U.S. in the 21st century (King, 2015; 2014). Using her seven principles, “inclusion, representation, accurate scholarship, Indigenous voice, critical thinking, collective humanity, and practitioner inquiry,” a renewed process of African education and practice has emerged (King, 2014).

For *Afrocentric praxis* to be successful, the following tenets should be embedded into new curricula and pedagogy geared at educating the next generation of learners of African descent:

1. Collective Consciousness;

2. Collective Responsibility;
3. Centrality/Location;
4. Self -Determination;
5. Subjects with Agency;
6. Reclamation of Cultural Heritage;
7. Anteriority of Classical African Civilizations (King, 2014).

‘Reclamation of Cultural Heritage’ is an extremely important pillar in this research intervention. My work aims to be a conveyor of Afrocentric worldviews for ADP learners and educators by connecting real magical realities that other West-African children learn as a birthright – and seeing if those realities increase understanding and connection to self-healing and moral development.

Dillard (2008) and others argue for the value of reconnecting local ADP knowledge and realities to the larger Pan-African community:

Utilizing this African understanding of community, there is a common theme of our on-going need to connect the unfamiliar (whether language, traditions or other cultural ways of knowing) to our “home” communities, communities that continue to be more expansive and generative given research connections made within the African world and beyond (p. 11).

The proximity of a communal people or group (e.g. African people) should not determine their identity – nor should it matter whether their moral, Afrocentric (African-centered) praxis is used inside a school or in the surrounding community (Dillard, 2008). The cultural production should be based on its ability to penetrate hearts, minds, and souls and whether or not it is able to raise consciousness.

Cultural production must be seen as self-healing and an assertion of power (Nobles, 1992; Fu-Kiau, 1991; Carruthers, 1999). Wade Nobles, a prominent black psychologist, stated that we must use our “consciousness, personality, and culture as instruments of power to

transform our situation” (Nobles, 1992). It is not about taking power, it is about recognizing how it already exists in the ways we move around the world. This is extremely important in America where African culture is not the predominant culture in schools and popular culture. As a result, power is a conscious and continual choosing of culture and this act should be used to help us relate to others around the world (Nobles, 1992).

African-centered Educational Model

Wade Nobles (1972) argues that African-centered education draws from African and ADP in the U.S.’s cultural knowledge, processes, laws, and traditions to resolve and direct the educational process (Nobles, 1972; Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). Furthermore, he states that *Afrocentricity* is the knowledge and practice of connecting African descendants to their roots and should build measured and contain an ethical rubric for the process of “belonging” and “being” African (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994, p. 487.) This is African-centered, meaning-making. He stated that it should meet several criteria:

1. Refer to the life experiences, history, and traditions of African people as the center of analyses;
2. Utilize African and African American experiences as the core paradigm for human liberation and higher-level human functioning; and
3. Assist African American students in the self-conscious act of creating history (Piert, 2015, p. 20; Nobles, 1990, p. 20).

In *Nation building: Theory and practice in African-centered education*, Akoto (1992) provides a succinct description of what an African-centered curriculum should entail: (1) Cultural/Ideological, (2) spiritual/psychological, (3) sociopolitical and economic, (4) technological, and (5) nation building (Piert, 2015).

The *Afrocentricity* (Afrocentric) framework was further developed by Molefi Kete Asante (1988). He sought to provide tools for ADP to examine self-consciousness and further

ADP in all aspects of society (Asante, 1988). The Afrocentric framework is a classification of beliefs and praxes entrenched in the cultural representations and concerns of ADP (Asante, 1988; Carroll, 2010). For Asante, simply learning about the totality of Africa is not Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity (a.k.a. African-centeredness) directly translates to “placing African ideals at the center of analyses that involve African culture and behavior” (Shockley & Fredrick, 2010; Asante, 1988, p. 2). Dismissing African intellect and philosophy in America moved scholars of African descent to develop new ways to communicate expansive, interdisciplinary complexities found in African cultural realities and practices. As a result, African-centered researchers approach their phenomena with a unique attention to African history, practices, and culture (Shockley & Fredrick, 2010).

Lastly, according to Chike Akua (2020), African-centered educational leadership (ACEL) uses African ideals and worldviews to activate people and resources needed to address problems in the African world (Akua, 2020) The principles are as follows:

1. ACE (African-centered or Afrocentric Education) places Africa, African people, and African points of view at the center of all things studied.
2. ACE helps students critically examine how the subject or object of study is related to the image and interests of Africa and African people.
3. ACE requires an African value system, that is, one rooted in African culture.
4. ACE requires the restoration of African identity and history.
5. ACE taps into the spirit of the children.
6. ACE requires a sharp orientation towards social justice.
7. ACE requires methods that are unique and indigenous to the nature and needs of African children.
8. ACE requires a relentless quest for agency and a consciousness of victory.
9. ACE asks this simple question of all things: “Is it good for African people?”
10. ACE requires an understanding and appreciation for all cultures.
11. ACE requires an understanding of cooperative economic empowerment strategies.
12. ACE prepares children for sovereignty (p. 173).

Education not Schooling

Mwalimu J. Shujaa (1993) explains that his *Education not Schooling* model is rooted in this Africana worldview. Originally, it arose as a result of parents coming together to discuss how they could provide effective instruction and cultural education in the face of public-school failures and lack of cultural institutions (Shujaa, 1993; Lomotey, 1992). Instead of responding with a replica of the problematic “schooling” concept, he contends that education, not schooling, is what is needed in communities that struggle through cultural combat (Shujaa, 2003; 1993; 1992).

For Shujaa, there is an essential distinction betwixt schooling and education. This distinctness is integral to providing cultural orientation and identity (Shujaa, 2003; 1993). Because ADP in the U.S. operate within a U.S. social context – and an African historical continuum – they must honor and acknowledge their African social context because it would exist even if the U.S. were to transform or crumble (Shujaa, 1993). Not only are each of these social contexts present at the same time – they are constantly in conflict (Shujaa, 1993). Schooling is not situated outside of this conflict; it is a perpetuating force. Our African story is not an absolute wrapped and wound only within a U.S. context – it is tethered to African experiences and histories across the diaspora. Regardless of our ‘location’ in our sociopolitical time and space, our social movements and shared reality is a piece of the African narrative (Shujaa, 2003; 1993).

Shujaa underscores, “schooling is a process *intended* to perpetuate and maintain the society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 330). This is not a coincidence; there are no mistakes in how schools behave and the roles they play in society. Quite the contrary. Schools are spaces that

transmit values, concepts, and skills. In the case of African descendants, the U.S., it is the political leadership within the dominant culture that guide schools to inculcate dominant cultural values, concepts, and meaning (Shujaa, 2003; 1993).

Education is vastly different from this concept of schooling. For Shujaa, education is the practice of the intergenerational transfer of cultural identity through values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and anything else that makes a culture, a culture (Shujaa, 2003; 1993). It is education that helps us to see who and what is in our collective interests. Education is not simply a *result* of a process – or a practice to learn and master – it is an organic modeling of what processes (and people) are important and which are not. Without a process of transference, cultural groups will go extinct (Shujaa, 2003; 1993).

Knowledge of our cultural process is key to this model. In fact, Shujaa insists that his model is a culture-based model and not a race-based model (Shujaa, 2003). As a result, he is focused on the transference of intergenerational knowledge and historical worldview (Shujaa, 2003). In order to understand this model, he provides the following prerequisites:

- (a) a knowledge base grounded in the culture;
- (b) a worldview perspective focused through the culture; and
- (c) interpretive frameworks driven by the interaction between the knowledge base and worldview perspective (Shujaa, 2003).

Shujaa's model is important for educational research because it both provides the steps for culturally relevant replicability and continues alongside a long list of African educational theorists that explain how African descendants in the U.S. are exceedingly getting more schooling than education (Shujaa, 2003; 1993; Lomotey, 1993; Rattery & Shujaa, 1987; Gordon, 1993; Lee, 2008; King, 2014; 2015; Mazama, 2012; Field-Smith & Kisura, 2013).

Shujaa (2003) concludes that education is not simply a school or school system, it is a *function* of culture. He states that while many ADP in the U.S. experience an American social

environment, there is an extended village and responsibility to Global Africa (Shujaa, 2003).

This is a reframing of the double consciousness that DuBois originally articulated in his essay in 1903 entitled “The Souls of Black Folk.” Shujaa extends this concept even further by arguing that the African story predates any U.S. social context (Shujaa, 2003). Furthermore, he posits that this is the “gap” – the space between being taught our full history in compared to our U.S. history – is not simply troubling, it is widening (Shujaa, 2003).

Culture is power in education. In the American education system, culture is separated into the dominant culture (Western culture), and everyone else (Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Amen, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Carroll, 2010; McDougal, 2014). The dominant culture has an important role in determining which history is taught and remembered and which is not (Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Carruthers, 1999; Shujaa, 2003).

As a result, ADP in the U.S. experience a prioritization of non-African values and principles over African cultural norms – which creates a unique cultural trauma (DuBois, 1907; Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Wright, 1979; Asante, 1988, Wilson, 1992; Akoto, 1992; Hilliard, 2002; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Carroll, 2010; Ani, 2010; Azibo, 2011; Rodríguez, 2012). Both cultural assertion and cultural resistance are common practices in the decolonizing and worldview framework. These spaces also preserve and protect their own cultures in the midst of constant cultural attack (Shujaa, 1993; Blyden, 2005; Rashid, 2012).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: TRACKING THE PATH OF ORALITY

Introduction

Africa has been home for African Descended Peoples (ADP) for tens of thousands of years. This means thousands of languages, dialects, names, laws, schools, stories, and so much more. The wisdom and value systems found in African realities were not simply created by ancient civilizations, they were preserved and transferred from generation to generation. Documenting these rich knowledge systems took on many forms. Oral tradition was one of the first traditions. And the West-African oral tradition, provides great insight into this age-old sacred practice and the practice of African American oral tradition.

The inner values and traditions of African people have been transferred from generation to generation (Azibo, 1996; Carruthers, 1995). Yet, western research, scholarship, and literature has often ignored the contributions from ADP. As scholars of African descent resurface African-centered thinking, emerging research that uses local African ways of knowing to resolve the needs of youth from the African world is gravely needed. This kind of culturized education centers African and Indigenous knowledge into the community education ecosystem. The following is a review of literature that covers significant contributions in these areas from African antiquity to present day.

Traditional African Cultural Worldview: From antiquity to West-Africa

A wealth of literature exists that covers African-centered education, eldering and African storytelling. There is also a fair amount of research on orature and healing-arts in education. However, there is very little literature on how Black storytelling is rooted in African thought, culture and oral tradition. This prioritization of African culture – specifically West-African oral tradition in educational research – is overlooked in community education scholarship.

Nonetheless, proverbs and epics (stories) are rooted in an African-centered worldview and are known to transfer meaning (Dei & Jaimungal, 2018). They present situations and help learners make choices based on what is best for the whole. They are also a part of a local knowledge production that leads to personal and collective journeys of healing and transformation (Dei, 2013).

In order to understand how West-African wisdom has evolved over time, it is important to first begin with understanding the importance of early contributions to African knowledge and ways of knowing. For example, the Lebombo Bone (35, 000 B.C.) and the Ishango Bone (20,000 B.C.) were found in “South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo” respectively and are the oldest known signs and proof of mathematics on the continent of Africa. Some accounts state that mathematics first began in Africa 25,000 years ago (Ta Neter Foundation; MIND Research Institute). These and numerous other discoveries underscore the profound ancestral wisdom and value systems across the region.

The late great Jacob H. Carruthers (1995) was quintessential in identifying some of the earliest examples of African ideas and value systems. He coined the term, African Deep Thought, to refer to the wisdom and oral tradition that extends from African antiquity. This includes Kemet [Egypt] and other civilizations (Carruthers, 1995; Ba, 1981; Obenga, 1991). The oral science from ancient Kemet is not only “at the heart of African oral tradition,” it is also a cultural heirloom that connects other African cosmologies and knowledge systems (Carruthers, 1995, p. 39; Diop, 1991; Obenga, 1991).

In, *Mdw Ntr: Divine Speech*, Carruthers (1995) describes in detail how African Deep Thought was preserved through oral tradition and written texts (Carruthers, 1995; Ba, 1981).

These values and principles are deeply embedded in all Kemetic knowledge customs and traditions. Most importantly, deep thought in Kemet is powerfully summarized in “*mdw ntr* ‘Medew Netcher’ (God Speech) and *mdw nfr*, ‘Medew Nefer’ (Good Speech)” (Carruthers, 1995, p. 39). These terms predated and were identical to “the Greek terms ‘theology’ (divine speech) and ‘logos’ (reasoned speech)” (Carruthers, 1995, p. 45). However, there were stark differences in what constituted wisdom.

There are many examples where the language of Kemet and other African antequitous cultures demonstrates plainly how important oral and written words have been historically. The root word *mdw* translates to staff or cane (Carruthers, 1995). This invokes thoughts of elders as bearers of wisdom and truth (Carruthers, 1995). This word for speech is identical to the concept of authority or authoritative utterance (Carruthers, 1995). In this way, Medew Netcher is both human speech in general and divine invocations (Carruthers, 1995). Thus, *Mdw Ntr* as principles and a practice, represents one of the first documented oral traditions on the planet (Carruthers, 1995).

Carruthers (1999) said this about Medew Netcher.

At the human level, what you receive from your teacher in order to negotiate social life is Medew Netcher (Good Speech). Education is good speech. You are instructed through Good Speech and the test of whether you have attained it is whether you possess Good Speech. Good Speech is also synonymous with wisdom. Therefore, everybody is evaluated by how well they speak. It is not only how ‘proper’ they speak, but also how profound and moral the content. (p. 289).

By mapping the language, we can see how Kemetic culture remains alive and well to this day. In *The Reawakening of the African Mind*, Asa Hillard (1997) explains how Kemetic speech is sewn into African language.

In ancient Kemet, *Ma'at* means, “truth”; in Caffino (Cushitic, Ethiopia), *moyo* means, “motive,” “reason” (truth and reason are inseparable); in the Kongo (Congo), *moyo* means, “life,” “soul,” “mind” (same semantic field); in Kgbaka (Central African Republic), *ma* means, “magic,” “medicine” (in order know the truth); in Fang (Equatorial Guinea, South Cameroon, Gabon), *mye*, *mie* means, “pure” (*tabe mye*, “to be physically and morally pure”); in Mpongwe (Gambon), *mo* means, “to know” the truth (knowledge); in Yoruba (Nigeria), *mo* means, “to know” the truth (knowledge); in Hausa (Nigeria), *ma* means, “in fact,” “indeed” (affirmative truth) and *ni ma na ji* means, “I in fact heard it”; in Nuer (Nilotic Sudan), *mat* means, “total,” “sum up,” “forces” (*ro mat*, “to join forces with”) (Hillard, 1985, p. 16).

Ma'at (a Kemetic Goddess and benevolent way of living discussed below), was and still remains one of the highest virtues for humankind can strive towards (Hillard, 1997, p. 15; Carruthers, 1995). In Rkhty Amen's (1988) *A Life Centered Living Maat*, she outlines the educative energy embedded in Kemetic and Maatian education. Maat is a goddess from ancient Kemet, but she is more than that. Amen explains that Maat is the element of harmonious balance and is symbolized by an ostrich feather or a woman wearing a feather on her head (Amen, 2012). Even more, Amen shares that these “NTRU (Gods and Goddess or attributes of nature) are not merely attributes but powerful energies within us that we can use and control to bring balance into our lives” (p. 11). Maat is not simply a symbol, she is a “sense of caring for, nourishing, mediating, and harmonizing in the family, community, and nation” (Ameen, 2012, p. 14).

Kemet was about more than just characters and symbols; it was about providing instructions for future generations to reach the multiverse. Maat includes 42 laws that govern behavior and seven principles that direct life (Order, Reciprocity, Justice, Harmony, Balance, Propriety, and Righteousness). Thus, ‘living’ Maat is the nexus between planes or levels of existence – the connection between the human plane and all other planes reality (Amen, 2012). To live Maat, is to care about all living things. To be Maat is to share and give to others. To embody Maat is to put energy towards making life better for others and nature – doing this makes life better for yourself (Amen, 2012).

The way ancient Kemites (Kemetic people) defined divine speech is essential to understanding why oral tradition – across all ADP populations – has such cultural, metaphysical, and spiritual significance. Mdw Neter is not simply about speech, it is also about action. In the Kemetic oral tradition, there is no separation from speech and action (Carruthers, 1995). As Carruthers stated, “human action follows the model of divine action through command or speech (Carruthers, 1995, p.45). And we see this with prayer often, yet we rarely understand the origin story of prayer. Nonetheless, teaching “good speech” is a cultural responsibility for those who know (Carruthers, 1995). This oral practice is the “memory” of the nation, *and* the nation itself (Carruthers, 1995). These early cultures did not simply birth the African oral tradition, they lived it.

Carruthers (1995) uses Obenga’s (1989) outline to show exactly how developed African antiquity thought and theory has been historically:

- 1) Pharaonic Egypt expressed through such writings as the *Pyramid Texts*, the *Shabaka Inscription*, the *Instructions of Kagemni* and the *Teachings of Ptahhotep*;
- 2) the North African thinkers who included early Christian theologians from Alexandria, Cyrene, Carthage and Hippo (323 B.C.-400 A.D.);
- 3) Maghrebian Philosophy 1100-1400 A.D. which includes Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun;
- 4) the Medieval Philosophical School of the University of Sankore;

5) Modern and contemporary African Philosophy (Anton Wilhelm Amo [18th century] and E.W.Blyden and other post-World War II thinkers) (p. 22).

It is through this deep intellectual tradition that this story within a story is told. Kemet is not simply a place of magical pharaohs and pyramids, it is where Africans first began documenting deep thought and science (Carruthers, 1995; Obenga, 1989; Ba, 1991). ADP in Kemet practiced astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, music, mathematics, grammar, logic, and rhetoric for thousands of years before the Greeks (Carruthers, 1995; Hilliard, 1985; James, 1992). Kemetic education was so dynamic, so rich, and so effective, many cultures traveled from across the world to study in Kemet (Carruthers, 1984; Hilliard, 1985). Some Greeks were students to African teachers and many renowned Greeks talked about the knowledge gained from studying within Kemet (James, 1992).

As a result, western education and Greek philosophy is a byproduct of ancient Kemet (Carruthers, 1995; Hilliard, 1985; James, 1992; Ba, 1981). Kemetic education was “functional; a blend of theory and practice – a holistic education” (Hilliard, 1985, p. 9). The overall goal of Kemetic education is illuminated by the driving principles of Tehuti, Ma’at, and Seshat (Carruthers, 1995; Hilliard, 1985). Tehuti (renamed Thoth by the Greeks) was the masculine wisdom of God and Maat was the feminine principle of God and exemplified truth, justice, and righteousness (Hilliard, 1985; James, 1992). Seshat is essential to mathematics (Carruthers, 1995).

The connection between ancient Nile Valley divine speech and West-Africa is a phenomenal story in and of itself. Religious persecution, cultural warfare, and other factors dispersed Kemetic culture and knowledge across the African continent. In fact, it is the oral tradition in many ways that helped preserve Kemetic cultural memory within today’s West-African cultures (Williams, 1971). This – and the willingness of Kemites to allow other

civilizations to learn at their mystery schools – led to a dissemination of Kemetic knowledge across the African continent.

Another great ancestor, Chancellor Williams (1971), wrote *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, a brilliant account of the warrior tradition that various African dynasties used to combat conquest attempts. While Nubia, Kush, Kemet, and many other early civilizations represented independent African sovereignties, Asian, Muslim, and European groups targeted and tried to destroy these civilizations through ongoing onslaughts of warfare since the seventh century A.D. (Williams, 1971). This fighting also included ongoing fleeing and resettling by African groups or tribes (Williams, 1971). Furthermore, since the relocation of groups and tribes lasted far longer than each generation’s memory, “migrations and temporary settlements were among the most significant facts in the oral tradition of each society” (Williams, 1971, p. 38). Both culture and the warrior tradition were strengthened and protected by oral tradition.

Stories about the earliest educational systems and warrior traditions in the African diaspora should be sage cultural birthright tales for all ADP in the U.S. However, majority of this history has been omitted from history books (Hilliard, 1997; Carruthers, 1995; Williams, 1971). This migration demonstrates how cultural practices and traditions from Nile Valley civilizations merged with tribes and groups in West-Africa (Williams, 1971). In fact, while the pyramids are still standing in Kemet to this day, Kemetic cultural influence resides largely in West-Africa and the African world (Williams, 1971; Hilliard, 1997; Carruthers, 1995)

African & Indigenous Knowledge (AIK)

Increasing one’s understanding of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and African Indigenous Knowledge (AIK) is a paramount goal of this research intervention – in regard to African-centered education praxis. This reaffirmation of African and Indigenous thought and culture is a

form of ontological reparations and is taking place with ADP across the world. While many scholars speak to the unique qualities and attributes of IK and AIK – and how those qualities assist our children with their own African self-development (Dei, 2019; Zavala, 2013; Wane, 2013; Dei, 2012; Agyeyomah et al., 2010; Owuor, 2007; Smith, 2005; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999; Cajete, 1994) – few educators, professors, and advocates of this intellectual and cultural movement have ever heard of the terms. In order to understand how African-centered education and culture is intrinsically linked to West-African values, it is important to define those very values, practices, and belief systems.

For George Sefa Dei (2012), it is not simply about understanding IK, it is about claiming it. Sefa Dei argues that claiming ‘Indigenous’ is about a perspective anchored in IK and local cultural knowing. For Dei, one must differentiate among “Indigenous knowledge and local/traditional knowledge.” IK involves meaning making that traditional African people of a specific geographic location use every day (i.e. self and collective edification, social life, etc.). Local knowledge is a state of knowing that can be held by any group (whether Indigenous or not) who have lived through a period of time and have grown to have knowledge of their social environment (Dei, 2012).

Gloria Emeagwali (2014) has written extensively on the topic. For her, IK is loosely described as the collective cannon of “strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations, beliefs, and values accumulated over time in a particular locality, without the interference and impositions of external hegemonic forces" (Emeagwali, 2014, p. 16). This means IK is the transfer of deep, land-based knowing, coupled with little to no outside forces controlling what can be learned.

In addition, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) – the knowledge and social apparatus that transfers knowledge over time – are not restricted to the material (Dei, 2008). They are also deeply interwoven with spirit. With tone. With energy. IK not only possesses these characteristics, it also connects location, spirit, body and transcends time and space (Dei, 2012). This often looks like making meaning of the unknown and connecting the material to the immaterial. Passing down this knowledge and further disseminating IKS, is at the heart of this work.

IK is normally a locally produced knowledge (Dei, 2012). However, Pan-Africanism is about the dissemination of IKS to ADP across the diaspora. This is a vital education movement especially for ADP in the US who have been historically displaced from Africa via Transatlantic Enslavement. Thus, ADP in the U.S. are both creating new indigenous knowledge and pulling from IKS from Africa. Aligning local IK from an American context, with African IKS, is an extremely unique and invaluable cultural justice work.

AIK Creation and Preservation

IKS are sacred systems of knowledge that continue to serve generation after generation. Since these ways of knowing are invaluable, African and Indigenous civilizations developed various ways of creating, storing and preserving their wisdom. Throughout the African and Indigenous diaspora, there are written, verbal, and other techniques used to store, preserve and document information and the highly sophisticated nature of these civilizations. As Emeagwali (2014) explains:

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is about memory, culture, and various forms of knowledge-production and dissemination, and also includes the skills and expertise that communities

developed to sustain their city states, kingdoms, empires, and general communities (p. 6).

Memory and knowledge production can take many different forms when you are covering the long histories of a people. Although the oral tradition is foundational for IKS, artifacts, manuscripts, and other physical structures (i.e. pyramids, sculptures, etc.) were widely used to preserve thousands of years of irreplaceable information (Emeagwali, 2014).

Safeguarding AIK has been almost as important as the knowledge itself. This is because numerous colonial regimes stole “thousands of artifacts from Nigeria, Benin, Mali, Congo, and other West and Central African countries” (Emeagwali, 2014, p. 6). For example, in Benin, twenty thousand bronzes were taken from the Benin Empire (Emeagwali, 2014). As a result, some African civilizations had to bury their manuscripts to circumvent persecution and pillage (Emeagwali, 2014). These losses have been devastating to AIK scholars and researchers alike.

Other forms of written knowledge creation and preservation include “documents on papyrus and parchment inscriptions on tombs, tombstones, walls and doorways, and graphic representations, show up in many parts of Africa” (Emeagwali, 2014, p. 6). They also had pictographic and ideographic writing systems throughout Africa (Emeagwali, 2014). In Ghana, the Adinkra symbol of the Asante communicates complex ideas and meaning using patterns and symbols. Emeagwali argues that these should be catalogued as ideographic writings, but Western scholars refute that categorization. There are also about a million Malian manuscripts and countless documents written in Arabic in libraries across Africa (Emeagwali, 2014).

These documents have been stolen and under attack since their inception. Today, we see African manuscripts in dozens of museums in America and Europe (Emeagwali, 2014). Many of these items were never returned and so these museums have become warehouses of “African

primary sources of knowledge” (Emeagwali, 2014, p. 6). In this way, the multifaceted nature of African knowledge production and preservation (i.e. written and oral traditions), has helped African knowledge transcend time, place and invasion. AIK survived because of what Emeagwali calls, “recollections of the past” (p. 8). These recollections were inherited generation after generation, and transferred through kindred “forms of verbal testimonies (i.e. oral narratives poetry, songs, legends, proverbs, interviews, etc.)” (Emeagwali, 2014, p. 8).

African Worldview

The way a people organizes ideas and knowledge is called a worldview. One’s worldview can explain everything from how a people came to be, to what kind of cultural practices people prefer and why. Worldview explains how cultures make meaning of themselves, nature, and humanity. Understanding that not all worldviews are congruent is critical. Even more fundamental, is understanding how a worldview develops over time and how land and environment are monumental in that origination.

For African and Indigenous people, their worldview is connected to their environment. African researchers and philosophers agree that there are a series of rudimentary ideals and cultural practices that constitute the West-African worldview (Abrahams, 1962; Gyekye, 1987; Mbiti, 1970). Two of the most important components of the West-African worldview, in regard to “human nature, are collectivism (the interconnectedness of the phenomenal world) and spiritualism (or animism)” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 80)

African Collectivism

African collectivism promotes the understanding that all parts in the multiverse are linked with (and interdependent on) one another. A belief system which prioritizes group over the

individual, it is central to African worldview. Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae (2018) argue that collectivists' center the community, society and nation. Bodibe (1992) and Rudnick (2000) argue that this is the wellspring from which African communal living and a communal worldview is born. (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). The African cultural worldview understands human nature as an intermutual, indissoluble totality (Bojuwoye, 2006; Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae continue:

Humans are not separate from, but are part of, nature. Humans and the phenomena world are extensions of each other and influence one another. Thus, in this connection, Makgoba (1997) contends that the psychological and moral characteristics pertaining to African identity, personality and dignity place emphasis on community rather than individual. A very crucial aspect of the traditional Africa's view of human nature is that the individual exists for the group, and that whatever happens to the group happens to the individual (Mbiti 1989, p. 81).

As a result, Spinnelli (1994) contends that each individual self-defines in relation to others and it is through relational experiences that the self emerges. Consequently, human nature, in the African cultural worldview, is socially constructed (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). Nonetheless, Gyekye (1987) observes that African social order is simultaneously "collectivism and individualism." Indeed, local knowledge from Global Africa honors individuality yet it is largely insignificant in contrast to one's ethical obligations to the community; this supersedes personal matters (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Owusu-Bempah and Howitt, 1995).

An emphasis on the collective over the individual is a uniquely African and Indigenous positionality. Thus, an African worldview builds societies that produce individuals that believe in and operate according to this understanding. As a result, African minds are crafted into being human beings that embody sociality, patience, tolerance, sympathy and acceptance (Nyasani (1997; Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). Raising Africans to live in this righteous way is evidence of how the African worldview of human nature ensures social cohesion, social harmony and mutual concern (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

Lastly, Cheikh Anta Diop (1989) offered Two Cradle Theory (TCT) to better understand how African and Western populations are fundamentally opposed to one another. He contends, “environmental conditions, modes of sustenance, familial structures and social systems impact cultural differences between African and European peoples” (Carroll, 2010). Two Cradle Theory provides a framework to look at the consistencies they relate to colonized groups and colonizers. Diop argues that TCT does not simply “illuminate the nature of African and European differences,” it also speaks to how these populations have lived historically (Diop, 1989).

The collectivism, groupness and interrelatedness and interconnectedness of the African worldview are a direct outgrowth of the Southern Cradle, while the individualism, particularism, separateness and distinctiveness of the European worldview [value system] are a direct outgrowth of the Northern Cradle. Race clearly constitutes the initial condition binding people to a common geography and history through which their common experiences evolve into a distinct worldview system (p. 83).

Inherent is this separation of geography is a distinct innate African collectivism. Built into the fabric of AIK is the blueprint for how all ADP can live virtuously.

African worldview works to resist these kinds of residual effects from colonization, neoliberalism and cultural violence. Some of the earliest contributions to the concept/framework of worldview were offered by Cedric X. (Clark) and Wade Nobles. They argued “African Psychology is the recognition and practice of a body of knowledge which is fundamentally different in origin, content, and direction than that recognized by Euro-American psychologists” (Carroll, 2010; Cedric X. [Clark] et al, 1975, p.9). This difference is at the heart of work that centers an African perspective instead of a Eurocentric one.

After their inaugural contributions, other authors developed additional definitions in African psychology. Joseph Baldwin [aka Kobi Kazembe Kalongi Kambon] (1986) commented that because African psychology explores the essence of the collective multiverse and provides a “conceptual-philosophical framework” for ADP (Carroll, 2010). Furthermore, Baldwin is not as concerned with a comparative analysis, as much as an expansive acknowledgement of cosmology and spirit within the worldview framework (Carroll, 2010; Baldwin, 1986). Together, these early contributions define African worldview through a more accurate analysis of Africana knowledge systems and culture – through an African epistemology.

For Azibo (1996), an African ontological reality means operating knowing that you are one with your unborn children, all living Africans, Ancestors, the spiritual community, and God/the Creator (Durden, 2007; Azibo, 1996; Dei, 2013). The major tenets of the African worldview found in “ontology, axiology, cosmology, epistemology, and praxis” (Durden, 2007; Grills, 2004). In addition, the African worldview is about progressing down your purposeful path and engaging respectfully with the energy around you (Durden, 2007). Using emotional intelligence as a tool through life, is also a large focus (Durden, 2007).

African Spiritualism

Another fundamental pillar of the cultural belief system of the African world is spiritualism. Spiritualism promotes a metaphysical belief comprised of interconnected frameworks such as: the world consists of “matter and spirit and the relationship between them; the universe (multiverse) is inhabited by spiritual entities (i.e. spirits of the dead, or ancestral spirits, deities and mediums); and everything concerning the spiritual or religious details of human existence” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 80). In many Indigenous worldviews, one’s understanding that spirit resides “within people and objects” is called animism (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

For traditional Africans, the universe contains abundant cosmic entities that possess “spirit or life-force energy (e.g. core energy essence) animating them” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 81). Crawford (1996) argues that “spirit (core energy essence)” is thought to cohere energies associated with the multiverse. This occurs when they work “together in unity, harmony and totality to ensure a balance is sustained between all elements in the universe” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 80). Furthermore, power relations are not evenly distributed across the material and immaterial. Instead, “some cosmic energies (e.g. ancestral spirits) are more powerful than humans” and “some humans more powerful than others” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 80). This means that certain energies have “supernatural” or “higher power than others” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 81).

Mbiti (1989) provides an important African religious worldview that expound on power relations among cosmic energies. Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae summarizes:

According to Mbiti, the African religious ontology (with cosmic entities arranged in hierarchical order) consists of the Supreme Being or God, considered the ultimate source of life-energy. The next category of entities comprises the spiritual entities including the

spirits of Ancestors. Traditional Africa believes that when a person dies the body disintegrates but the spirit lives on. Death does not make a person cease to belong to his/her social unit (family, clan or nation), but continues to lead similar life as spirit actively participating in the lives of the people influencing the latter's behaviors as they did while alive (p. 81).

Following this categorization in the fourth division is animals and plants (including all biological life) – understood to have lower life-energy than humans (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). The fifth categorization of cosmic entities is phenomenal and objects without biological life (i.e. earth, stars, bodies of water, soil, plants, etc.) (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

Within this traditional African religious ontology, cultural works are ingrained with the Supreme Being (God) and other spiritual entities (i.e. Ancestors) because they can impact events for good or for bad (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). Ancestral spirits have the capacity to manifest good health, wealth (good fortune), or illness and to spawn illness within human beings. They have the ability to prevent illness, disease and natural disasters, while mediating in communal disunity and acting as negotiator between God and humans (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). Even rapport is needed with these higher-powered cosmic entities.

Furthermore, traditional Africans equate spiritualism with religion. Across numerous African worldviews, “religion (the spiritual), and medicine” are essentially identical (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 82). Spirituality is medicine; and medicine is spiritual (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Owusu-Bempha and Howitt 1995). This means that the pursuit of holistic health – achieving mental, physical and emotional wellness – is a part of spiritual phenomena (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Mbiti, 1989).

Lastly, it is necessary to underscore an indispensable feature of spiritualism, one's 'soul' or 'spirit' and the journey towards intuition and aligning with "one's deep inner-self or mind" (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 82). This is the birthplace of all thoughts; a space every force constantly interconnects "and the realm where resources are cultivated for personal empowerment in dealing with all the contextual forces which people have to confront in everyday living" (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 82). Achieving and sustaining balance with one's spirit means a fusing of the physical and spirit. Without this spiritual characteristic, "it becomes natural not to see problems" (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p.82; Tulku, 1975).

African & Indigenous Eldership: Collective African memory and wisdom

African and Indigenous Eldership (AIE) is a critically core component of AIK creation and preservation. Eldership is a term given to those individuals who are old enough (usually 70 and over) to remember several generations of knowledge and history. In oral tradition cultures, these individuals are highly respected and reserved because it is through them that the culture lives and dies. They are historians, storytellers, writers, healers, educators, advisors, and serve many other sacred roles within the community. And achieving elder status is an honor.

Mazuri and Kokole (1992) argue that because oral cultures prized experience and the tangible, these cultures maintained a strong elder tradition. In this tradition, elders were treasured for enduring and living a long life. Old age was directly linked with wisdom (Mazuri and Kokole, 1992). The elder tradition thus required elders to pass cultural knowings (Dei, 2019) across generations using "word of mouth" and orality – this is known as cultural transfer (Mazuri and Kokole, 1992). This cultural transfer and elder tradition helped oral cultures develop strong

historical and memories. In addition, the intimacy and face-to-faceness of oral cultures led to deep genealogical memory and ancestral glorification (Mazuri and Kokole, 1992).

Cecilia Griffin Golden (2015) also writes about the role of elders for ADP. She contends that the role of elder is systematically granted to older men and women of African ancestry who routinely model wisdom, character, and honesty (Golden, 2015). Elders are transfers of cultural and familial knowings and their behavior and ethics are regulated by cultural values, customs, and traditions of their African Ancestors (Golden, 2015). They carry deep knowledge of African ancestry, history and practice those values daily. In addition, elders are mindful of retaining cultural memory and they honor narrative knowledge about Africa and the diaspora (Golden, 2015).

Cultural memory is a collective African memory that spans time, place and the diaspora. Pierre Nora (1989), a French historian coined the term “sites of memory” to define material and immaterial identities and memories. Others extend this term and collective memory as the way ADP unifies memory by including ancestral memory and the memories of other ADP throughout the diaspora (Merolla, 2019; Golden, 2015). These memories become the memory of the collective culture and nation (Merolla, 2019). Cultural memory is akin to “heritage,” which both hold emotion as a critical way of remembering (Merolla, 2019). African literature and oral narratives are considered “sites of memory” and so too are elders.

Irele (2000) adds that cultural memory is not simply about the past, it is also about how culture and memory engage the present and are used to create a “vibrant contemporary reality” (Irele, 2000, p. 23). This is the work of AIE. Their narrative memories have sometimes even been more valuable than written documents (Emeagwali, 2014). In this way, narrative memory or an oral narrative, is “resistance literature” (Harlow, 1987). Oral narratives, and the practice of

oral narratives, have been preserved in resistance to colonial attempts to silence and control AIK and memory. This is why the role of elders is so fundamental in African and Indigenous cultures.

The concept of honoring and respecting the value of elders is a tradition that was also carried into the Americas by ADP in the U.S. Golden (2015) explains:

Elders serve as spiritual and emotional guides, assisting the younger generation as they move through life in general and in decision making in particular. Through explicit instruction and storytelling in the oral tradition, elders teach customs, tales, family histories, and cultural traditions. Additionally, they engage in pedagogical practices including but not limited to the repetition of wise sayings, fables, songs, and proverbs that provide young people with culturally relevant affirmations and an internal dialogue for daily living and problem solving (p. 2).

Key in this description by Golden is the idea of service. For elders, their lives are dedicated to serving and they use their connection to various avenues of intergenerational cultural memory to achieve this ideal. Elders are not simply docile cultural custodians, they approve marital partners, perpetuate spiritual practices, approve wedding functions, and assist with other family and community events (Golden, 2015). Elders are both acknowledged and indispensable as honored community teachers, sages and cultural preservationists, especially for African descent youth in the U.S. (Golden, 2015).

Through engaging with elders, younger generations procure lessons they are supposed to know and how they should be unapologetically (Golden, 2015). Youth rely on elders to provide undeniable guidance as they navigate life, relationships, and the socioeconomic and political forces of power (Golden, 2015). In addition, they work as mentors and assist younger

generations with embarrassing their own responsibility of becoming elders in their future. Although *elder* is for AIE, in African contexts, preparing to be an elder begins early when children are responsible for caring and mentoring younger children (Golden, 2015).

Eldering is a centuries-old tradition from Africa that is currently being maintained by ADP in the U.S. Eldering is an embodiment of “cultural continuity across time and place” and continues to preserve the health and well-being of ADP across the diaspora (Golden, 2015, p.2). Eldering is linked to healing and healthily keeping the moral and cultural development of its youth. In addition, it furthers key traditions and is the fertilization of spiritual wisdom (Golden, 2015). A lack of eldership in any ADP community is a profound loss of the wisdom and power necessary for the survival of a community (Golden, 2015).

African Indigenous Wellness & African Traditional Healing

Harley (2006) notes that the entirety of every ethnic group in the world with a particular worldview contains a corresponding “traditional or Indigenous healing system,” whether honored or not honored by the Global health community. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2001) defines “traditional healing” as “knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in the diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental and social imbalances and relying exclusively on practical experiences and observations handed down from generation to generation mostly verbally, but also, to some limited extent, in writing.” These traditions are grown organically, honored and preserved due to the work of the descendants of a historical ethnic group, which integrate specific wellness strategies and necessities (Levers, 2006; Mpofu; 2006).

The term “African Indigenous health care” is akin to local traditions from Global Africa and speaks to “systems of health care” implanted in the sociocultural African descendent spaces

across Global Africa (Mpofu et al., 2011). These local healing practices states that “beliefs, attitudes, customs, methods” and agreed upon processes enhance wellness and better one’s life (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 83). This knowledge is closed and holistic and focuses on new experiences rather than analytical and focusing on deductive logic (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Odendaal, 2010). Lastly, “Indigenous health care knowledge is oral,” often not put in writing and considers everything as whole (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 83).

Traditional African health care knowledge offers metaphysical explanations contrasting the Western healing models that affix ‘scientific’ (objective instead of subjective) explanation (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). Indigenous health care knowledge encompasses techniques that assist with improved levels of holistic wellness “of the body, mind, emotions and the spirit” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 83; Atherton 2007). Intervention is also key for good health and treatment is the response to ill-health.

Indigenous healing in traditional Africa also uses a very significant practice called group healing. Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae illustrate:

...healing practices that involve not just the patient, but the patient’s primary and associational groups and the community in general. Healing is also perceived as arising from belief in spiritual power. Traditional African healers believe that spiritual processes cause illnesses and direct treatment interventions (p. 83).

The collectivist and spiritualism of traditional Africans is present in the way they collectively care for and provide care to the whole human being. Mpofu et al. (2011) assert that patients who take herbal infusions undergo “healing from the spiritual power of the medicine

separate from any benefit from the bioactive properties” of the medicine (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 83). This is not the case in Western medicine.

African Personality Theory

Traditional African cultures believe that personhood develops due to interdependent relationships in the community. For traditional Africans, one’s existence stems from the collective (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). In Sesotho, “*Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe*,” this translates to, “a person is a person because of other people” – or in Zulu, “*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (similar to Ubuntu) (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 84). From these phrases, one can deduce the grandness that is afforded collective identity in African cultures (Moletsane, 2011). Even when a person does good, praise is directed at the community to the individual (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

Ancestors also extend their role to support righteousness. Ancestors engage descendants through “dreams, signs, and traditional (spiritual) healers” to communicate wisdom and knowledge from God (or the gods) to living beings (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 84). Louw and Edwards (1993) conclude that this union “with the Ancestors – and through the Ancestors with God” – transpierces every entity (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). In addition, the physiological performance and psychological (mental health) levels of a person are critical. Survival and wellness is dependent on a healthy diet and sound mind (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). The spiritual resides on the inner part or the “seed” of a human being (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 84).

The spirit is considered a “seed because it does not perish even when the physical state of the person has been declared ‘deceased.’ In this way, the inner energetic field is a spiritual principle or soul that can never perish (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, Berry et al.

2002). While the spirit can exit a person's physical state (body) during "sleep and trance," it exits indefinitely when death occurs, also known as 'transition' in African traditional culture (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). More importantly, the "spiritual principle does not give life to the body" (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 85). As Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae explain:

...it [spirit] has an existence of its own, belonging to the sphere of the Ancestors and representing that sphere in each person. Every person has a connection or relationship with their environment; hence, people adapt to their own environment. If people do not adapt to their environment, they get sick. This happens because their state of equilibrium is weak. The firm connections between the gods or the supreme power, the Ancestors, a person, the environment, the family, and the community. This connection represents the state of equilibrium or sanity (p. 85).

For African and Indigenous people and their descendants, bringing all of these elements into balance is key for personal wellness and community health. This is a very serious task of AIE as seen in how they respond to ill-health and dis-ease (disease).

The Understanding of Health and Ill-Health

Human nature, health and ill-health are all socially structured in the traditional African cultural worldview. Following their collectivist framing, health is intimately connected to relationships. Being 'well' or having supreme human performance relies on "harmonious relationships with the universe and the local ecology (i.e. plants, animals, etc.) as well as harmonious interpersonal relations" with interconnected human beings (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 85; Straker, 1994). Several African cultures experience health as a journey towards achieving "balance in environmental and social relations within the family,

peers, society, Ancestors and deities” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 85). As a result, accomplishment, solace, prosperity, joy and living in balance with family, community and society are indicators of good health (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

African traditional culture affirms that a supreme human functioning is a person who enculturates and bestows to the community by working to sustain balance, restore order and manifest new planes of harmony (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Edwards, 2000). A mentally “healthy person is one who strives to be in harmony with forces or nature impinging on him or her (whether these be from humans or non-humans, seen or unseen)” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 86). In this regard, health, from the African cultural lens, has a greater emphasis on spirit, “balance, connectedness and wholeness both within the individual and the environment” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 86).

In addition, traditional African cultures view ill-health as socially constructed and reflective of disharmonious relationships. This can take the form of disconnected interpersonal connectedness (a disconnection of the physical and the soul) or “interpersonal relatedness (i.e. disharmony between people; between people and their Ancestors; between the individual and the rest of the universe; and/or a break in the reality beyond individual existence)” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 86). Feelings of isolation, anxiety, tension, confusion, frustration and alienation are said to be direct correlation with ill-health or disease. These feelings bring pain to the body and internal functions, since life is often devastating when severed from reciprocal relationships with the community (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Gilligan 1998).

As with other African and Indigenous cultures, traditional African cultures view disease as an affliction connected to a larger interpersonal challenge (Comarof, 1980). Disorder and ailments are often named instead of illness in ethno-medicine scholarship to designate more than

a merely physical disposition, but a “psychological, social, emotional, spiritual, career, and familial” aspect of living (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 87). A multilayered understanding of “health and ill-health” is represented by the WHO (1993) which qualifies health not simply as the “absence of disease and infirmity, but also complete physical, mental, social, occupational and spiritual well-being” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 87).

Severe or longstanding disruptions in emotional harmony and relationship systems can also cause ill-health (Dryden, 1984; Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). Thus, diseases can come from higher powers. The traditional African world acknowledges some disorder does simply just occur. However, most affliction is said to be sourced to a “life-energy essence or higher power” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 87). Since the African world maintains nothing happens by chance (everything is intentional), all occurrences within people in nature have meaning and purpose (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

Because African and Indigenous inhabitants live in conditions that are harsh and unjust, many environmental and social conditions are often highlighted to describe the root cause of disorder and imbalance. Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae contend that:

Competing for limited resources, living in marginalized and disenfranchised communities with diseases, deaths, and poverty, as well as social, economic and political repressions, perceived inequality and all forms of injustices and unfairness. All these negative forces or influences breed rivalry, ill-feelings and ill-health. Individuals perceiving these negative forces experience inner crises of emotions and sensations that disrupt normal consciousness. Moreover, not adhering to culturally constructed realities makes someone a rebel and an object of hate and ostracism. All these inevitably lead to inner crises which some construed as ‘demons’ of inner feelings manifesting as anger, fear, depressions,

hatred, self-loathing, abuse, addictions and compulsion—all symptoms of inner chaos, or apparent disconnection within the individual's deep self or soul which could also manifest in unpleasant somatic experiences (p. 88).

Indeed, supposed inequalities, social injustices and oppressive economic environments can increase health hazards. Social environments and power relations are immensely responsible for development of psychopathology (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Hayes, 1986). Thus, traditional Africa views ill-health as a symptom of lifestyle decisions and behavior cycles that lead to elicit disease, discomfort and ill-health (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018).

Decolonization & Re-Africanization in Culture and Education

Currently, there is a growing concern that the physiological, cultural, and psychological wellness of African descent students in the U.S. is deteriorating. A recent study about suicide rates found that Black children (ages 1-12) have higher suicide rates than white youth (Bridge et. al, 2018). While little is known about why, researchers suspect that feeling unsafe, having little to no access to healthcare or having lost an older sibling to violence are risk factors (Bridge et. al., 2018). In addition, there is a propensity for Black youth to face major challenges while in public school environments. These challenges (e.g. lack of connection with school curriculum; disenfranchisement and not feeling a sense of belonging and relationship with their schools/curricula, etc.) all constitute educational and epistemic cultural violence (Dei, 2013; Dei & Jaimungal, 2018; Nguyen, 2016).

While wellbeing statistics for Black youth are alarming, so too are statistics for Black adults, elders and seniors. For Black elderly men (ages 55 and up), 56% feel depression is naturally associated with getting older (Bryant et al., 2014). Indeed, Black adults have 20% more severe mental health challenges than Whites adults (Bryant et al., 2014; Mental Health America).

Furthermore, Black adults who experience impoverished conditions disclose critical mental disorders three times more than groups with higher incomes (Bryant et al., 2014; Mental Health America).

Similar patterns are seen when looking at feeling socially and emotionally supported. Social support (emotional and informational) is associated with reduced risks of mental illness, physical illness, and mortality. In fact, 12% of adults (65 or older) reported that they “rarely” or “never” received the social and emotional support they needed. In addition, when asked about life satisfaction (i.e. socioeconomic, health, and environmental factors), individuals 65 and older account for 20% of all suicide deaths even though they make-up one tenth of the U.S. inhabitants (National Institute of Mental Health, 1999). Finally, when suffering from depression, aging adults often “handle it themselves” as only 42% sought help from health professionals (National Institute of Mental Health, 2010).

Decolonization and Cultural Violence in Education

Frantz Fanon’s (1961) *Wretched of the Earth* is one of the first works where colonization is discussed especially on global terms. He argues that colonization is the way Western powers have used violence to subjugate, oppress, and control African and Indigenous people across the world (Fanon, 1961). This violence is not simply a “colonial violence,” it is an “insidious violence” since it forms the basis for which modernity stems from (Fanon, 1961, p. 40). As a result, it places African and Indigenous people in environments that are stepped into a larger colonial homogeneity (Fanon, 1961). This is deployed as a structural violence, a cultural violence, and a violence on sociopolitical and educational institutions.

Fanon made clear that African and Indigenous peoples must resist White culture masquerading as their own and free themselves from the dystopian condition that colonization creates. Fanon shared:

The colonized have adapted to this atmosphere. For once they are in tune with their time. People are sometimes surprised that, instead of buying a dress for the wife, the colonized buy a transistor radio. They shouldn't be. The colonized are convinced their fate is in the balance. They live in a doomsday atmosphere and nothing must elude them. This is why they fully understand Phouma and Phoumi, Lumumba and Tschombe, Ahidjo and Moumié, Kenyatta and those introduced from time to time to replace him. They fully understand all these men because they are able to unmask the forces behind them. The colonized, underdeveloped man is today a political creature in the most global term" (p. 40).

These words are ever so powerful today as a global pandemic has forced billions into survival mode and unmasked corruption and lengths some countries are willing to use state-sponsored violence to quail ADP resistance.

In this way, racism informs colonialism (Carmichael and Hamilton, 2001; Wane, 2013; McDougal, 2014; Grande, 2015). Western institutions, religions, social systems, governance structures, and socio-political elite re-inscribe colonization daily (McDougal, 2014, Grande, 2015; Staples, 1976). In addition to the impact of race-based African enslavement, many have written about decolonization and efforts to restore self, land, and culture (Tavares, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Agyeyomah & Butler, 2010; Bhabha, 2002). Tavares (2011) explains Bhabha (2002)'s postcolonial optic very well stating that the shared postcolonial challenge is the "growing, global gulf between political citizenship, still largely negotiated in 'national' and

statist terms, and the cultural citizenship which is often community-centered, transnational, diasporic, hybrid.” (Tavares, 2011, 196).

These acts of terror and assassination of ADP culture and social organization in the U.S. creates new social-emotional behaviors for ADP in America. Kamau Rashid (2012) explains how behaviors were inculcated by a dominant western hegemony – a terror that asserts its violence “upon the minds, bodies, and social systems of Africans” (Rashid, 2012). Political philosopher Nancy Fraser (1995, 2000) asserts that we need both a “politics of redistribution” and a “politics of recognition” (Dumas, 2008). Ultimately, we must recommit to African and Indigenous economic models that are coupled with deep African cultural values and epistemology.

This is not merely an internal struggle, this is a battle of land, space and place as it relates to living, learning and survival (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Not only are we colonized, but we are simultaneously the colonizers (Tuck & Yang, 2012) They explain this point very well:

This means, and this is perplexing to some, that dispossessed people are brought onto seized Indigenous land through other colonial projects. Other colonial projects include enslavement, military recruitment, low-wage and high-wage labor recruitment, and displacement/migration (such as the coerced immigration from nations torn by U.S. wars or devastated by U.S. economic policy). In this set of settler colonial relations, colonial subjects who are displaced by external colonialisms, as well as racialized and minoritized by internal colonialism, still occupy and settle stolen Indigenous land. This tightly wound set of conditions and racialized, globalized relations exponentially complicates what is

meant by decolonization, and by solidarity, against settler colonial forces. Settler Colonialism and its decolonization implicates and unsettles everyone” (p.133).

If we can agree with Tuck & Yang (2012) about the responsibility to revert colonization, then we can begin to take back our [psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and physical] place and restore African and Indigenous lands back to sacred healing spaces.

Neoliberalism in Education

Pauline Lipman (2011; 2012) has written extensively about the devastating neoliberal strategies that are destroying urban space, education, and ADP’s communities (Lipman, 2011; 2013). She articulates that resistance is necessary in a coercive state due to neoliberal experimentation, educational policy, and political corruption across the globe. In, *Economic Crisis, Accountability, and the State’s Coercive Assault on Public Education in the USA* and *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*, Lipman (2011) argues that the impact of ‘neoliberal urbanism’ on Chicago and other cities across the country documented thoroughly.

Using powerful links between school closings and economic redevelopment, she contends that:

In the United states, the spatial structuring and restructuring of cities has served racial containment and domination from the earliest days of slavery, through major waves of immigration, Black migrations to the North, suburbanization and White urban redevelopment. Thus, the right to the city necessitates a struggle against racism, ideologically and materially including the right for people of color to determine their own

institutions (p. 161).

Not only have urban spaces always been places of contention, a more hyper-colonial neoliberal politics and tactic are further displacing, dominating, and preventing African and Indigenous people from establishing counterhegemonic institutions (Lipman, 2011; Dei, 2010).

This is a global condition. Across most all ADP countries and communities “state takeovers” of mostly ADP and Indigenous schools (even neighborhoods), an eradication of just and representative government, squandering of billions of dollars by government officials, and a dismissal of African and Indigenous narratives constitute “coercive urban governance by political exclusion” (Lipman, 2011, p. 161). It is even happening in countries with majority African populations and leadership. Colonization has left a European mindsets and systems that function in opposition to African collectivism. Even still resistance continues to live on for ADP across the African world (Diop, 1989).

Caroll (2010) sources Dixon (1971) to summarize how we are still experiencing the residual effects of two very different value systems:

Among Euro-Americans the value orientation is guided by doing, future-time, individualism and mastery over nature. Among African descendants, the value orientation of their worldview is based upon being, felt-time, communalism and harmony with nature (p. 114).

Because neoliberalism is funding much of the greed, capitalism and globalization, it is structurally enforced by colonization conspiring individuals whose focus is on “future-time,” as it equates to future-money, the communal orientation of African Americans is being dismantled and destroyed. Neoliberalism is not merely a “market-political rationality,” it is sponsored by the

government of the individual and to a unique [white cultural] manner of living (Tavares, 2011). Furthermore, the goal of deconstruction in this situation is to, “question the authority of the investigating subject without paralyzing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility and possibility” (Pierre, 2000, p. 506). It is our right to even question this siege on our space and identity, and to reimagine a resurgence of African and Indigenous ways of living, thinking and being.

Our ability to transcend Western hegemony, colonization and neoliberalism is at the core of what African cultural practices and decolonization research interventions attempt to achieve. For Bhabha (2002), the postcolonial dilemma is to work through the “double and disjunctive inscription of the political and the cultural citizen” (Tavares, 2011, 196). African and Indigenous culture is medicinal; it is decolonization. It is an essential pillar of resistance and liberation. This power – not weakness – highlights why ADP institutions were colonized, remain colonized and continue to colonize without the immediate presence of the colonizer. These points also inform the importance of honoring, preserving, and repositioning African-based approaches to the forefront of our homes, organizations and spiritual practices.

Re-Africanization as Education in the African World

Amir Cabral (1970) was adamant about the value of culture in emancipatory efforts across the African world. For Cabral (1970), “whatever may be the ideological or idealistic characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people” (p. 5). Not only is culture a byproduct of history, but in liberation movements, there is an increase in cultural expression that is juxtaposed to dominant cultural norms (Cabral, 1970). In Cabral’s case, this was merely a returning to indigenous culture; this return was revolutionary. As Shujaa (2003) explains:

This cultural assault has provoked a state of cultural alienation among the people who, to varying degrees, possess a limited knowledge base of their own cultural history and a worldview distorted by Western cultural hegemony. Cabral (1973) wrote about a similar state existing among the Western schooled African elite living under Portuguese colonialism in Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands. The undoing of such cultural alienation, Cabral believed, requires a “conversation of minds – a mental set.” He called this process “re-Africanization.” Literally re-Africanization means engaging in cultural combat to take back our minds (p. 182).

This movement to take back our minds is a necessary act for all ADP across the diaspora. Left untreated, many ADP suffer from chronic stress, anxiety, and other mental and emotional health complications. One of the impacts of colonization and racism is the way mental health issues are impacting ADP in the U.S.

In this way, “African traditional healing” is the “art and science” of curating a “holistic intervention model” that necessitates a “reconstruction of the physical, social and spiritual orders of the socio-cultural systems” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 88). It transcends symptoms removal by confronting deeper contextual reasons for disorder and disease. As a result, African traditional healing assists patients in realizing all the forces of nature which may have a negative influence on people’s wellbeing and affirms that certain “parts of essence of life not to be wished away, but rather negotiated and accommodated” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 88). African traditional healing is a form of re-Africanization that addresses mental, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual conditions of a disharmonious environment.

Daudi Ajani ya Azibo (2014) classifies culture-centric mental disorders. He defines mental health stems from a difficulty in maintaining the nation or appropriate cerebral functioning (Azibo, 2014). He states:

For an original human being, in order for this self-preserving propensity to operate within the bounds of normalcy, mental health, or appropriate functioning, his or her orientation to living must be to prioritize protection, development, and maintenance of the self. In today's racialized world founded on full blown anti-Africanism (Ani, 1994; Williams, 1976), this translates into misfiring in own-race maintenance functioning as the final arbiter of mental health or appropriate psychological functioning for ADP.

Azibo, Ani, Kambon, Nobles, Akbar, and others define mental health as our ability to affirm and self-determine psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, axiologically, and culturally (Azibo, 2014; Ani, 1996; Nobles, 1970). This means that mental disorders should be culturally determined and nonarbitrary (Azibo, 2014). The process of reclaiming one's African self (e.g. epistemologically, mentally, culturally, spiritually, etc.) is a resistance that takes on many forms throughout the diaspora.

Resistance must include with a re-Africanization or "cultural revolution, defined as 'the ideological and practical struggle to rescue and reconstruct African culture, break the cultural hegemony of the oppressor over the people, transform persons so that they become self-conscious agents of their own liberation'" (McDougal, 2014, p. 41). This cultural revolution must occur at every level of human life (McDougal, 2014; Freire, 1970; Carruthers, 1999). Hegemony is extrinsically linked to epistemology. For Patricia Hills-Collins (1990), Translocal resistance through education, storytelling and cooperative economics epistemology is the "study of

philosophical problems in the concepts of knowledge and truth” (Hills-Collins, 1990, p. 48).

Centering a traditional African worldview is rudimentary for any cultural restoration framework.

Engaging in African and Indigenous-based cultural combat – re-Africanization through our oral tradition – is how we apply our cultural medicine. Indeed, African-centered worldview thinkers associate worldview construction and suppression as eternally connected to power (Rashid, 2012). This creates a knowledge system dichotomy; where some knowledge systems are favored over others. If a culture group operates their knowledge over others, the cultural meaning made aims to create and sustain systemic abject injustice (Rashid, 2012). Furthermore, Carruthers (1999) asserts that Western worldview creation along with an “attendant social structure” are indicative of knowledge in that “human survival necessitated aggression, and human flourishing required predation” (Rashid, 2012, p. 32; Carruthers, 1999). Nonetheless, African-centered epistemology centers continuity and a use of local knowledge and divine practices thought to “govern the universe” (Carruthers, 1999).

Lastly, cultural intervention must be seen as self-healing and an assertion of power (Nobles, 1992; Fu-Kiau, 1991; Carruthers, 1999). Wade Nobles, a prominent black psychologist, stated that we must use our “consciousness, personality, and culture as instruments of power to transform our situation” (Nobles, 1992). It is not about taking power, it is about recognizing how it already exists in the ways we move around the world. This is extremely important in the U.S. And for Nobles, power is an act that should be used to help us relate to others around the world and transfer our culture (Nobles, 1992).

Healing is at the center of cultural transfer. A profound writer and orator, Dr. Marimba Ani (2010), reminds us that “culture is medicine” (Ani, 2010). She goes on to illuminate that:

Culture brings us from chaos into order. Culture is powerful. It binds us to each other. It

gives us a reason for surviving; and then it tells us what we should live for and what we should die for if we have to. Culture is an energy source for thriving and it gives us a sense of security. It also puts us into a system of accountability - we are accountable to our Ancestors...And it is a petri dish, so that African culture becomes a petri dish and produces Africans. It cultivates Africans, and no other culture can make that statement, you hear me. No other culture can produce and cultivate Africans - only African culture can do that” (Ani, 2010, speech). If we look at culture like that and see it as a means by which a people protect themselves, then we could understand culture as the immune system of a people. Think of a people as an organism, and culture as that immune system.

Cultural energy fuels re-Africanization. It restores memory, mental stability, and spiritual connection. Cultural healing gives ADP their power back, and it is in the written oral traditions that this power lives.

Ginwright (2010), a healing-scholar, speaks about the value of re-Africanization as he shares what he learned while working with young Black men in Los Angeles. While his work was mainly with Black youth, the sentiment applies to all ADP throughout the diaspora. He argues:

An emancipatory vision for black youth means that being rooted in African culture is a starting point for identity development, but not the end point. Our understanding of culture and identity development must be viewed as a pathway to justice and freedom. First, this requires an acknowledgment that African cultural identity is perhaps the most effective weapon to fight white supremacy. For black youth who internalize negative images of black people without knowing why, culture is a powerful vehicle to uncover

their hidden shame of being black. Once black youth understand why blackness is degraded around the world, they can identify ways that they degrade blackness in their own lives (p.145).

As we continue to help ADP bodies re-read their world, we must continue to facilitate a process of re-Africanization that encourages all cultural resistance that honors African and Indigenous as the natural cultural offerings of the world. Thus, re-Africanization is not simply for African descendants – those who acknowledge their lineage back to Africa – it is counter-epistemological praxis of reunifying cultural revolutions worldwide. It is sacred and gives us both power and healing.

In addition to reconnecting ADP in the U.S. to their cultural heritage (oral tradition), storytelling has the potential to improve educational and socioeconomic conditions for ADP youth and elders throughout the African diaspora. As the relationship between cultural education and socioeconomic outcomes becomes more researched, so too will creative ways to address cultural trauma, self-doubt, and self-healing. With decades of socio-cultural miseducation across the spectrum for ADP in the U.S., more solutions are needed that fuse African and Indigenous traditional education with a newly emerging Afro-future scholarship.

Humanist Praxis in African Orature: African oral narratives

As mentioned before, African orature is the sophistication and African worldview centered in language, oral texts, performances, histories, epics, proverbs, and other mediums (Zirimu, 1970; Wa Thiong'o, 1972; 1992). Orature is the African-centered response that elevates a uniquely African literature within the words, sounds, and tones of a transfuse Pan-African oral heritage.

African orature is seeped into everyday life for ADP. Whether it is jokes, sayings, adages, proverbs, myths, epics, narratives, music, poetry, dance dramas, and so many other mediums, African orature gives life to culture and provides culture for the living. How one communicates is indicative of how they have been raised, what they understand as important, and what lessons they have gleaned from these genres and cultural experiences. Indeed, for us to understand how re-Africanization is being used as cultural resistance, it is important to understand these varied cultural forms.

African cultural humanism: Orality and the written word

African humanism is unique and specific to ADP. In their book, *African Cultural Production and the Rhetoric of Humanism*, Lifongo Vetinde and Jean-Blaise Samou (2019) produce several essays on the long history of humanistic thought and practice in African performance and literature. In this text, Adrien Mbar Pouille (2019) writes extensively on how African Humanism is a mixture of an innate neighborliness, cooperativeness, respect for humans and animals, appreciation for nature, and honoring of the balance of physical and spiritual within society. They argue that we cannot discuss African thought without a re-honoring of the re-humanizing and counterhegemonic African cultural arts (Pouille, 2019).

While this research intervention is focused on the African oral tradition, the African written tradition is also instructive. This is because the written and oral traditions in the African cultural arts scholarship often extract meaning and value from one another as a way to restore African humanism. As a result, the oral and written contributions from African descendant humanists centered on the liberation and healing the “dignity and humanity” of ADP and all oppressed peoples (Pouille, 2019, p.2). In essence, African humanism is about striving towards “human welfare” (Pouille, 2019, p.7). Even leaders of African descent must relinquish

governance structures that dehumanize and embrace the people-centeredness of African humanism (Pouille, 2019).

Oral and written cultural works – in African nations – have and will always preserve and encourage African Humanism. Across a wide range of genres and forms, artists unmask injustice and fissures that tear away at humanity. African works of cultural production (oral and written literature, cinema, painting, and cartoons) illuminate inhumanity across the African diaspora. Within these texts and publications, there is a shared theme of restoring the “humanist praxis” in African societies (Pouille, 2019, p. 8). This critical connection to African humanism is an important link for ADP storytelling in the U.S., as it seeks not simply to entertain, but to transform the African condition locally and elsewhere.

Lastly, due to the colonization of Africa, many traditional practices, knowledge systems and worldviews are at a crossroads across the African world. The installation of Western education into schools, the corporate sector, and other knowledge transmission practices, has created uncertainty around the value of oral narratives in society (Pouille, 2019). Nonetheless, African orature, oral tradition, and oral narratives still provide an undeniable function of proliferating cultural wisdom of Africa (Pouille, 2019).

The Akan Tradition of Onipa: Humanism, Morality and Moral Personhood

There are examples of this African Humanism throughout the African diaspora. The late great Kwame Gyekye (2004), one of Ghana’s premier intellectualists of the 21st century, wrote extensively about Akan humanism in, *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. He explained that there are several ethnic (language) groups in Ghana and each has a unique oral history. The “Akan, Dagbani, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, Gurma, Fulani, Guan, Gurunsi, and the Bissa/Mande” are all different indigenous language groups throughout the

country (Gyekye, 2004). Akans make up about 47% and are easily the largest language group in Ghana (Gyekye, 2004). Akan means, “Warrior King” and the “people have a long history” of defiance throughout the African diaspora.

A core pillar of that philosophical thought is *onipa*, or the word for “person” in Akan language. This word also means human being and the plural form translates to “people” (Gyekye, 2004). In the Akan tradition, when someone’s actions seem hateful, negative, self-centered, greedy, uncharitable or desensitized, it would be said that that individual “is *not* a person” [*onnye onipa*] (Gyekye, 2004). In this way, the Akan idea of *onnye onipa* undergirds a cultural value of moral personhood. Even further, the oral component works specifically as an ethical production for children and adults Gyekye (2004).

Individualistic ethics that pertains to the “welfare and interests” of the individual is rarely mentioned in African moral thought. Instead, an African social ethic is found in many maxims (proverbs) that underscore the significance of the practice of “helpfulness, collective responsibility, cooperation, interdependence, and reciprocal obligations” (Gyekye, 2004).

The Akan use many different proverbs to emphasize this concept. The duality of the African social ethic is expressed in the following Akan proverb:

(*onipa yieye firi onipa*)

The well-being of man depends on his fellow man (Gyekye, 2004).

This proverb states that a person should not always look to another (or others) for wellness and achieving our goals but that in certain situations – like assisting children with becoming a person. When the display of another person (or persons) is targeted towards “goodwill, sympathy, compassion, and willingness to help” it may greatly fortify someone’s life goals (Gyekye, 2004).

In order for this to work out for those seeking guidance and support, one must have a pathway to the advice and relationships of others. Storytelling, folktales, epics, dance, and other mediums are that pathway. Since an African Humanism and social ethic acknowledges the significance of mutual help, goodwill, and reciprocity, this ethic can champion human-to-human self-reliance based on innate gifts and abilities that help manifest one's basic needs (Gyekye, 2004).

West-African Oral Narratives

African oral narratives are where oral tradition and storytelling meet. Often stories told with truth and historical significance, narratives are stories told that give rise to new meaning and preservation of a collective cultural identity. These narratives promote the diffusion of educational projects across the diaspora and are used to transfer spiritual and religious wisdom (Pouille, 2019). Many African cultures still use oral rather than written, to communicate sacred meaning and theories about the creation and the Universe (Pouille, 2019).

Oral narratives are not just old stories and traditional tales, they continue to remain relevant due to the use of storytellers, artists and other cultural production interventions. As Pouille (2019) explains:

Besides the transfer of spiritual knowledge, oral narratives facilitate the transfer of moral values within the community. This is demonstrated by the morphing of contemporary arts and oral literature [orature]. Contemporary African filmmakers and writers borrow symbols, themes, and stories from oral literature [orature] to not only enrich their creation but also share traditional and ancient moral teachings with current generations (p.17).

Infusing oral narratives and historical events into contemporary culture is an art. However, when ADP do this across the diaspora, it is not simply entertainment, it is revolutionary African Humanism.

West-African Proverbs

Proverbs adages and jokes are as ancient as African antiquity. Each has their own purpose and are used in different mediums and cultural and social contexts. In his text *African Proverbs as Epistemologies of Decolonization*, George Sefa Dei (2018) asserts that proverbs, song, and stories can be used as tools in Canadian classrooms to teach personhood education to Black youth. Dei uses Mieder's (2004) definition of proverbs as "a short, generally known sentence of the folk [ways of knowing] which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form, and which is handed down from generation to generation" (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 28; Mieder, 2004). As a result, proverbs are at the heart of oral tradition and the knowledge of African and Indigenous people (Sefa Dei, 2018).

African proverbs contain "philosophical fields of culture" that offer rich ethical teachings on how to live and navigate life situations and circumstances (Sefa Dei, 2018). In addition, there are extremely effective tools for edification and can be used as pedagogy because of their "architectural form and cultural value" (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 28). They also contain "emplotments, histographies, style, figurative or metaphorical symbolism, and tropes" (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 28). Furthermore, teaching African proverbs in public schools creates a plethora of educative competencies for both students and educators (Sefa Dei, 2018).

Pouille (2019) conducted a literary study that outlined how African proverbs, jokes and adages, myths, fables, and oral epics differ and relate to one another. There are different proverbs across the African diaspora. And while this may give the impression that these cultures offer

disparate proverbs, many proverbs speak to similar ideas and meanings even though they are said in a different language and locations. Earlier the proverb from the Akan was mentioned this understanding. In Senegal, one might say, “*nit nitaye garabam*” which translates to the human being’s remedy is his fellow human being (Pouille, 2029). A few other proverbs are as follows:

When the occasion arises, there is a proverb that suits it (Rwanda)
Speech without proverb is like food without salt (Amharic, Ethiopia)
Without sleep there is no dream, without proverbs there is no discourse (Ghana)
One who possess much wisdom has it in the heart, not on the lips (Uganda)
They who possess proverbs get their way (Zimbabwe)

In these examples, we can see shared meaning across diverse cultures and languages. For Sefa Dei, there are a variety of proverbs for any subject or curriculum.

Proverbs are instructive because they are able to elicit deeper and often hidden meanings in written and oral works (Sefa Dei, 2018). In addition, African proverbs are congruent with transformative learning theory and humanistic approaches encourage questioning and problem solving (Sefa, Dei, 2018; Girardi, 2010). Proverbs are literary devices that are also great at translating long philosophical ideas and concepts into short meaning phrases (Sefa Dei, 2018). Lastly, proverbs are tools for meaning making and help learners plot life experiences (Sefa Dei, 2018).

West-African Adages and Jokes

Adages (sayings) and jokes are also an important form and practice of African orature. These are tiny and off-the-cuff uses of orality and the most commonly used in Africa to strengthen connections between community members (Pouille, 2019). Sayings are brief and pragmatic oral instruments that can catalyze a peer to act humanely (Pouille, 2019). Similar to proverbs, sayings transfer knowledge and place the onus of ethical behavior on the individual

and the community. They both share responsibility for sharing a saying when a situation calls for clarity and the recipient has the responsibility to head to the wisdom that has been shared.

In Senegal, jokes are repeatedly used to humanize social interactions (Pouille, 2019). This happens with the “cousinage a plaisanterie” between the Serers in Northern Senegal, and the Diolas, found in southern Senegal. Whenever either group is seen in the other groups’ community, they declare himself/herself king or queen and casts the others into slavery (Pouille, 2019). In a way, they elevate themselves and expect others to treat them accordingly. Another example is a joke between the Cissene and Pouyene of the Sereer Saafi-Saafi group of Senegal where members of the other group joke not to overreact during baptism, confirmation, funerals, and wedding (Pouille, 2019).

These practices and applications of oral traditions can expel the non-nativeness and separation that could keep them detached (Pouille, 2019). In addition, jokes are powerful because they can circumvent other habits that complicate relationships (Pouille, 2019). They are able to lift barriers and humanize the community (Pouille, 2019). This African Humanistic praxis is also seen in myths, fables, and epics.

West-African Myths

Myths take on many forms and function in African orature. They are often used to explain extremely important ideas about existence and are passed from one generation to another. Kesteloot and Dieng (2009) argue that there are three categories of myths in Africa:

1. The first is the myth of creation (creation myths) that scholars often call the narrative detailing the origins and foundational conventions of the group;
2. The second type is the myth of cosmic or universal rupture (fables) usually seen as a story that accounts for the origins of sin, of the fall; and
3. The third type of myth (epics) recounts and commemorates an ancestral and civilizing figure (Kesteloot and Dieng, 2009; Pouille, 2019, p. 20).

The last type is the epic narrative – this will be discussed in subsequent sections. An extremely critical myths is the creation myth or myth of creations.

Creation myths are stories about the beginning of a group's existence. They organize the initiate to the cosmology of his or her community (Pouille, 2019). In doing so, they introduce Ancestors' gods, and spiritual directives that imbue him or her the "invisible and eternal" (Pouille, 2019, p. 21). Mircea Eliade explains this process further stating that:

Consequently, in reciting or listening to a myth, one resumes contact with the sacred and with reality, and in doing one transcends the profane condition, the "historical situation." In other words, one goes beyond the temporal condition and the dull self-sufficiency which is the lot of every human being simply because every human being is "ignorant" - in the sense that he is identifying himself, and reality, with his own particular situation. And ignorance is, first of all, this false identification of Reality with what each one of us appears to be or to possess (Eliade, 1991; Pouille, 2019, p. 20).

Myths transcend reality and transport human beings into the spiritual and collective identity realm in real and tangible ways. It is from this movement that an intimate relationship with African humanism and African spirituality is born and sustained. While there are other ways that assist ADP in exploring and embracing African spirituality, myths are known for the ease at which they are able to make the unimaginable imagined; and how they make the invisible understood and magical.

Eliade argues that mythic narratives help ADP understand that their life is not only the material world that they live and breathe. This extends to communicate that one's practice should contain activities (i.e. meditation, yoga, prayer, fasting, etc.) that guide them back to the eternal (Eliade, 1991; Pouille, 2019). Most African myths of creation have these two characteristics:

acknowledgment of the profound superior energy that created the ethnic group; and offering the spiritual lessons emanating from the continuous re-encounter with the Supreme Being (Pouille, 2019; Eliade, 1991). There are many examples of these kind of myths through the African diaspora.

In Yoruba (an ethnic group in Nigeria) cosmology, the world was created by a Supreme Being who is composed of three characteristics: Olodumare the creator; Olorun the ruler of heavens; and Olofi the channel between Orun (Heaven) and Aye (Earth) (Pouille, 2019). In addition, “minor” divinities assist and manage immediate human need. The Yoruba also believe in reincarnation and judgement post-death (Pouille, 2019, p. 21). They also believe that those who do good end up in Orun-Rere (Heaven), and those who do not end up in Orun-Apaadi (Hell). Their spiritual self, called Iponri (or Orin-Orun) pushes the individual to act well through meditative practices and prayers (Pouille, 2019).

These myths and prayers are written and spoken through oral incantations. This is especially true for the Igbo Indigenous sacred order or religion. In his book, *The Book of Dawn & Invocations*, Ogonna Agu (1997) explains how the Igbo creation myth hails from ancient Kemet. In this excerpt from the myth, “Mamalite: Beginning,” it is clear to see how myths fuse the written and oral tradition to manifest the African worldview and African humanism.

In the Igbo tradition, Chi is the light (sun) and god of an individual and Chukwu is the great Chi energy (personification of the sun and originator of the world). After acknowledging the superior power of the gods and goddesses, this myth actually helps humans to personify nature and spirit. Here is an excerpt from the end of the myth (Agu, 1997, p. 35):

...*My Chi,
I am only a stranger in this world;
I have come with a clean heart
My face shines like that is pure; Clean hands are what I show to the sky;*

*I say that this place where I have come to stay with the others
As I stand looking across a mighty ocean:
A clean heart, a straight hand, and naked feet are what I have brought.
Do not make me a miserable child.
I do not know what is bitter except bitter-leaf
I do not know white, I do not know black -
I do not know what is in the land of other people.
I do not know what is in the land of the spirits.
Let what anybody knows also be known to him.*

*Look at me,
I am like a newly born day - I am going to a distant country from night to night;
Night gave birth to me - She carried me in her womb and covered me safe from the
wicked. She protected me till dawn when she delivered me.
I am not alone - I awoke and found the beauty of creation -
I awoke and saw that the green herbs are my brother -
Green herbs and roots by which we see spirits.*

*The green trees in the forest are my sisters because it is living this which bear fruit that
we draw life; The eye of spirits is in the otosi, the ear of the spirits is in the otosi -
I child am a spirit, from my branches men pluck their wealth; I am a flame in the forest.
I am not afraid because a forest in which there is ebu and mfu,
Has warriors who fight for it.*

This myth personifies nature and models the act of seeking a connection with the divine and creation through oral acknowledgements and manifestations. This myth also describes the very rituals and customs that lead to deeper connections with spirit and the eternal. African Myths bring out these kinds of sacred guided instructions through myths, incantations, songs, and mindfulness rituals by reminding human beings about their link to and responsibility with self, others and nature (Agu, 1997; Pouille, 2019).

The way the narratives are structured, and the themes are arranged in the previously mentioned Yoruba creation myth can also be linked to Serer creation myth. In addition to Yoruba beliefs, the Pangool, Ancestors, follow the gods and goddess and are the intermediaries between the living world and the spiritual world (Pouille, 2019). They exist with the living through the preservation of “xamb,” which are shrines where priest and priestesses perform various rituals

(i.e. libation, bathing, etc.) (Pouille, 2019). However, there is no idea of heaven or hell in the Sereer tradition. Every individual is a “free agent and rewarded according to his actions in the afterlife” (Pouille, 2019, p. 22). This freedom ethic is coupled with moral mandates and laws (i.e. forbidding premarital sexual relationship, adultery, and murder) geared at developing the personhood and the individuals’ benevolence to the community (Pouille, 2019).

Those who do not according to these mandates will experience dismissal from the Ancestors (the Pangol) while on earth and will be penalized in the Afterlife by the Supreme Being, Roog Sene (Pouille, 2019). This example of Sereer’s system of thought, promotes actions and behavior that preserves the African humanist spirit of community and discourages acts that corrupt it (Pouille, 2019). A similar process of humanization that is found in myths can be found in fables. Fables are literary devices that reinscribe myths into the community every day. Fables compliment myths and are designed to consistently reinforce the educational alignment goal of myths.

West-African Fables

Fables are stories that are told that carry life lessons, moral teachings and personhood development. Often these fables are in the form of recognizable characters, animals, nature, and other material frameworks and ideas that are easy for children and adults to understand. In addition, the process of African humanization occurs through the two linked yet separate narrative ideas: the refusal of food and hospitality to the stranger and the ensuing chastisement for not being generous to the one in need (Pouille, 2019). Examples of this food-hospitality motif are in “The Bone” taken from Birago Diop and Dorthy Blair’s *Tales of Amadou Koumba*, and “Le chasseur égoïste” [The Selfish Hunter] excerpted from Kama Kamanda’s *Les contes du griot: Les contes des veillées africaines* (Pouille, 2019).

In “The Bone,” the main character Mor Lam refuses to share a bone he acquired from Tong-Tong with Assane, his brother (Pouille, 2019). Mor Lam dies while faking his death to keep Assane away from his house and eats the bone alone. Equally significant is the fact that the Tong-Tong is a Senegalese communal ceremony where meat is shared periodically after acquiring a considerable savings. They also sacrifice and offer one or more cows – a ritual that includes offering meat to spiritual deities (Pouille, 2019).

After the scarification, each member of the community collects an amount of meat that is equivalent to their financial contribution. This ceremony ritualizes social well-being and reciprocity with one another (Pouille, 2019). They are also modeling that their community is collectively wealthy and has, in abundance, everything it needs to face the daily challenges of life (Pouille, 2019). This is especially true in times of need, and the Tong-Tong represents this ability and practice of coming together (African humanism). Mor Lam gets nothing but bone during this ceremony, and that should be a red flag. He is modeling scarcity when everyone else is showing abundance. This contradiction is a key to his plight.

There is another form of disharmony in the narrative. Assane is Mor Lam’s hut brother; this means he stays with an individual that has undergone circumcision and assists him through the healing process (Pouille, 2019). According to Pouille, the hut brother “is then like the fraternity brother or fellow combatant; he is an individual with whom we share a profoundly transformative training or experience” (Pouille, 2019, p. 23). As a result, the kinship bond between hut brothers should always be sustained. Mor Lam does not honor this social edict and does not share his bone with his hut brother – even at one point attempting to fake his own death.

What makes Mor Lame's choice even more disheartening is that his culture believes strangers should be well kept and fed. In Senegalese culture, members are taught to "Teral" guests. Teral means to welcome. It is a derivative of "terangaa," which means "to treat well, to honor visitors and strangers especially when they are relatives" (Pouille, 2019, p. 24). This is even more important in a culture where seemingly everyone is related (Pouille, 2019). It is intolerable to refuse a meal to a stranger – especially a harmless one (Pouille, 2019). As a result, Mor Lame participates in two transgressions; he severs the flow and social order he should sustain with his hut brother, and he disrupts his responsibility to his culture and community (Pouille, 2019). These choices end in his ultimate sacrifice, his death.

This same food-hospitality motif can be found in other ADP narratives like the Cameroonian Kama Kamanda. In "The Selfish Hunter," Kamanda offers the same pattern. Hospitality and food are used as essential assessment components. In the story, a favored hunter enters the forest packed with games and receives games throughout the forest. The breakdown happens when an elder (the genie of the forest) emerges and asks for food (Pouille, 2019). The hunter does not help the elder but instead asks why he cannot hunt like the hunter:

My son, I am hungry. Could you give me a bit of fresh meat?
I don't give anything to lazy people; my god, that's my only flaw. (Pouille, 2019, p.25; Kamanda, 1998).

The act itself is not in alignment with African personhood and his humanistic values and practices. It is a prime example of refusing food and hospitality. He is desensitized and remorseless. He does not contemplate or reflect (meditate) on his actions (Pouille, 2019). Even worse, he carelessly does not take the additional opportunities the forest gives him (Pouille, 2019). He continues to hunt but now cannot find his way home. He then runs into a young woman and he asks her for directions – she gives him the response he gave the elder:

Miss, I would like to go back home, close to the river. Which path should I follow? I can't find my way home in this vast forest.

Sorry, answered the passerby, I don't show anything to anyone. That is, my faith, my only flaw (Pouille, 2019, p. 25; Kamanda, 1998).

When the hunter received a similar response to the one he gave the elder, he was dealt a swift serving of the law of reciprocity; one of the most universal lessons for an intense rebuke of selfishness (Pouille, 2019). This fable shows how African narratives can be both pedagogic by forbidding greed and selfishness, while also affirming the erudition of generosity in African orality (Pouille, 2019). In addition, the setting of a forest insinuates that humans be beholden to both one's peers and nature – from which life originates (Pouille, 2019).

Food and hospitality is a central theme in African orature. It is found in the Koran, religious texts and many more well-known works and stories. This motif is prevalent because sharing one's food and space are behaviors that are in alignment with forgoing bodily pleasures (Pouille, 2019). The more supreme act a human can take is to coalesce with the other. When we do, we advance the primary bodily and emotional needs to “commune with the other” (Pouille, 2019, p. 26).

In addition to the juxtaposition and symbolism of food-sharing and hospitality, there are other ways one is guided to practice African Humanism. One of these ways is the defense of beings with extraordinary capacities. These seeds (stories) are commonly supplanted to the child and ethnic group through epic narratives (Pouille, 2019).

African Oral Epics

African oral epics are fascinating tales of triumph and honor. African humanism is achieved vis a vis the hero's dedication to fight for social justice and balance (Pouille, 2019). Epic heroes are generally passionate protectors of principles like generosity and integrity – values that are fundamental to sustaining and enhancing human civilization (Pouille, 2019). They

are renowned for two significant reasons: their supernatural capabilities and their unwavering commitment to the birthing of honorable and righteous communities (Pouille, 2019).

African Oral Epics (AOE) are one of dozens of tools and techniques that come from African orature and are used by West-African populations to educate children about cultural traditions and values. An epic is a story that illuminates how a people came to be and why they do the things they do (Emeagwali, 2014). This means AOE transfer memory, tradition, and customs passed down orally from one generation to the next. Together, AOE provide both a more defined process and alternative towards educating and returning young descendants of Africa to their roots.

There are many reasons why AOE are used and continued to be studied. Emeagwali (2014) highlights the important contributions that AOE have across the Pan-African community.

In the final analysis, these fictional identities reveal a quest for the ultimate truth or destiny; give a blueprint for empowerment and survival over trials, tribulations, and uncertain challenges; and reveal profiles in courage and resistance relevant to the understanding of Indigenous African values and philosophies. Oral Epics and Narratives may collectively reveal local or family accounts or the past history of lineages; family privileges and inheritances; migration of specific extended families and closely related communities; inspirational tales to guide generations; popular cultural belief system; or local fauna, flora, and ecology (p. 9).

In this way, AOE are not simply about fictional characters and inspirational messages, they reveal and impart truth and wisdom.

Clyde W. Ford (2000) has written extensively about AOE. His text, *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa* provided very good context for this study. In

it, he argues that there are five major “language families (i.e. Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo [Non-Bantu], Niger-Congo [Bantu], and Khoisan)” and that each family has its own separate and unique collection of AOE (Ford, 2000). In addition, he talks about the heroic and magical qualities of the creation myths in each region. But the part that resonated with this study the most is his explanation of what the BaKongo, a group of people in Central Africa, call the Mputuleezo or agitated waters (Ford, 2000).

He explains that in the BaKongo tradition, the Mputuleezo is where Africans disappeared and where Europeans appeared. Furthermore, Mputu, refers to Europeans or the land of the dead where the soul goes to be reborn and heroic figures battle “magical beings and bizarre forces” (Ford, 2000). In this way, the BaKongo teaches children and youth that slaves were heroes forced into the dire environment of the Mputu to combat the dark energy there (Ford, 2000). This is epic – and extremely monumental. It is also extremely ironic because the very human beings (ADP in the U.S./African Americans) that are named as heroic figures have probably never heard of this story before. This story, and others like this, will be phenomenal in providing cultural tools that affirm, honor, and have the greatest potential to promote Lendo kia (self-healing), BaKongo term that means self-healing, for African descended youth. These kinds of magical transfers are also found in other African epic heroes like Sundiata, Ozidi, and Mwindo (Pouille, 2019).

The *Epic of Sundiata*, by D. T. Niane (1965), recounts the life and ascent of Sundiata Keita. Sundiata was Mansa Musa’s grandfather and ruled over the Malian Empire from about 1230 to 1260 (Pouille, 2019; Wilkinson, 1994; Niane, 1965). Similarly, with Mwindo’s epic, the *Epic of Sundiata* is both about a “supernatural ability” and a passion for defending “justice and compassion” (Pouille, 2019, p. 27). Sundiata enters the world with theatrics (like other African

epics) and remains in his mother's womb for an extended period of time. In addition, his supernatural power is shown by his ability to will himself to walk from a paralyzed state and uprooting and relocating a baobab tree to his mother's residence (Pouille, 2019).

Adversity then catalyzes Sundiata to reveal hidden layers of himself to the community – as seen in Mwindo. These impediments and obstructions by “external and hostile forces” release an extraordinary chain of mystical affairs that illuminates the honor of the epic narrative (Pouille, 2019, p.29). Sundiata transcends himself after being humiliated about a baobab leaf by the queen mother, Sassouma Berete, and a stern conversation with his mother, Sogolon Djata (Pouille, 2019). Both Sundiata's pain and his mother's sadness propel him to use compassion to provide solace.

We also see this African humanism while he is exiled. Sundiata discovers that Soumaoro Kante has taken over Mande and forced Malians (especially the wise elders) to disrespectful treatment (Pouille, 2019). Sundiata's African humanistic values led him to rescue the downtrodden and illtreated. Once he becomes a leader, his humanistic mandate leads him to proclaim he will be an honorable leader and restore order and balance in Mali (Pouille, 2019):

Djata's justice spared nobody. He followed the very word of God. He protected the weak against the strong and people would make journeys lasting several days to come and demand justice of him. Under his sun the upright man was rewarded and the wicked one punished. In their new-found peace the villages knew prosperity again, for with Sundiata happiness had come into everyone's home. Vast fields of millet, rice, cotton, indigo and fonio surrounded the villages (p. 29)

Sundiata is not simply about a hero with magical powers, it is about restoring order, compassion, and humanism in Mali. He even does this through the creation of a more righteous and virtuous

justice system (Pouille, 2019). In this way, he also re-Africanizes them. If we apply his supernaturalism to his humanizing acts and ability to restore Mali as a principled culture and people, then we can begin to better understand just how powerful African orality can be.

Pouille does an exceptional job correlating the link between African orature and African humanism. His work not only illuminates the African humanist spirit across these African oral narratives, it elevates two pillars of African orature as a humanistic discourse. The first is a tremendous existence of humanist principles and symbols in African oral narratives, and the second is the applicability of the good-naturedness from African orature, even in social colloquialisms like adages and jokes (Pouille, 2019). Most importantly, Pouille argues that oral narratives should be understood as education first and foremost and everything else that you receive from the genres subsequently follows the innately instructive oral tradition.

The study of oral epics is a global phenomenon. While AOE's have limited familiarity and were heavily criticized and barely known by western scholars some 60 years ago, studying orality was common in Kemet, Greek, Latin, and other cultures (Blixen, 2015; Hilliard, 1997; Carruthers, 1995; Ba, 1981). While Etiemble and Yoshida (1968) were familiar with Asian epic literature, they only knew about two or three AOE's and missed the significance of these powerful stories (Kesteloot, 1989). Part of the reason why AOE's were overlooked is that they did not fit into the literary box – they were deemed “too spontaneous” and lacking a certain literary formula (Kesteloot, 1989). However, following the emergence of 20 or more AOE's of great significance, Etiemble and Yoshida revised their original position and stated that, “we need to go back to square one” (Kesteloot, 1989, p. 203).

While AOE's were used thousands of years ago – and are still used today – they are not in the mainstream African or U.S. school systems (currently practiced in American public

education spaces). This remains the case even though Greek myths are largely used to teach “values” and “ethics” in predominantly Black and Brown school districts. In addition, very little research exists that studies the origin of AOE, and how they are able to inculcate complex knowledge systems into the hearts and minds of West-African children. As magical stories, AOE build new meaning through tales of self-determination while preserving sacred forms of communal well-being and a cultural edict.

Future Research

By understanding the dynamics of African oral narratives, a new and important apparatus may emerge that can assist in providing Black elders and youth with cultural, economic, and socio-historical edification inside and outside of schools. How we educate and help Black youth and adults transcend their socio-economic and mental health situations are extremely important considering the cultural and economic state of ADP children and families across the African world.

Orality in this form is deeply humanistic. Epics also assists with acknowledging and honoring spiritual realities and expressions that are integral to the African and Indigenous experience and environment (Ogundokun, 2015; Emeagwali, 2014; Ford, 2000). Epics explain how ancient Ancestors dealt with everything from untimely death to respecting nature (Ogundokun, 2015). Many folktales, proverbs, legends, and myths have spiritual beings that behave like humans and thus can also be socially binding and develop a sense of community (Ogundokun, 2015; Emeagwali, 2014).

There are also other cultures and spiritual traditions that embody the concept of spoken word, utterance, and speech as manifestation. For example, in Ifa (a spiritual tradition in

Nigeria), there are essential divine truths and narratives that are passed on to preserve the tradition. Ogundokun (2015) explains:

Obàtálá, Ògún, Sàngó, Òsun, Oya in Yoruba land and Amadioha, Chi or Chukwu in Igbo land. Most of these oral narratives, no matter how they are perceived in these modern days, have created a world view, which appeals to the artistic moral and psychological being of the primitive African man. And, of course, the basic functions of these oral genres of literature are still there and will continue to be there (p. 181).

These spiritual and linguistic connections are the critical link to the self-healing power of orature and how it continues to influence African and Indigenous cultures throughout the diaspora. And although the use of “primitive” is a term used by colonizers to invalidate contributions of AIK, Ogundokun’s point is still extremely important. Additional scholarship must build on how African oral narratives can provide spiritual guidance and reparations for ADP.

Lastly, ‘hero’ is a contested term in the academy. The very notion of a ‘hero’ can indirectly, and unintentionally, silence and discount other narratives and undermine the value of a non-hierarchical approach to movement work and resistance (Roberts, 1989; Drayton, 2011; Hemphill, 2017). However, while this might be true in an American context, the term hero has broader implications across the diaspora. However, terms like African gnosis, warrior, and deified Ancestor are more commonly used. Whatever the term, the sentiment is often used to describe those who recognize wisdom, and the Ancestors that bring that wisdom (Slana, 2014; Omanga, 2016; Obiechina, 1967; Belcher, 1994; Quayson, 2001). Better understanding this contribution to the lexicon should be a critically important objective of future research.

Research Elements of African & ADP Storytelling in the U.S.

Given this rich amount of literature regarding the value of the African oral tradition, African orature, and oral narrative tradition in the U.S., there should be a large amount of research on these topics. However, educational research scholarship has yet to reflect the importance these cultural tenants hold in the hearts and minds of ADP in the U.S. While there is a scattering of research on storytelling, more research is needed that connects oral traditions in the U.S. with oral traditions from African and Indigenous communities – especially how this connection leads greater mental and educational impacts for youth and adults.

Storytelling Impacts for ADP in the U.S.

There are many studies that investigate how older ADP succeed in creating meaningful ways to preserve knowledge and culture. Emerging research is also showing how older ADP use storytelling to transfer knowledge across generations and create new knowledge (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Ogunleye, 1997). Chanee Fabius (2016) conducted a study that investigates how storytelling assists elders in identity formation. She writes that making meaning at this stage in life is key for long-term survival of the culture and older AIE (Fabius, 2016). In addition, building intergenerational relationships is key to fortifying families of African descent (Fabius, 2016; Waites, 2009).

AIE facilitate this by sharing their history through stories. This is also called generativity, or a “connectivity of the generations,” a term coined by Erikson [1950] (Fabius, 2016; Erikson, 1950). The results of this kind of cultural transfer is immense and deep. In the face of an assault on Black minds, bodies and culture, older ADP in the U.S have used oral tradition to preserve a heritage of “multigenerational kinship, resilience, spirituality, and hope” (Fabius, 2016, p.425; Denby, 1996; Waites, 2009; Banks-Wallace, 2002; Ogunleye, 1997). These connections extend

beyond the nuclear family to include extended family and fictive kin (Fabius, 2016; Stewart, 2007). Oral tradition and narratives strive to advance “social and cultural identities” of each generation (Fabius, 2016; Ogunleye, 1997). In addition, storytelling is an extremely effective practice for educating African descended children (ADC) about their legacy in order to excel in the face of environmental challenges and trauma (Fabius, 2016).

With the great level of use that oral tradition, storytelling, narratives, and folklore has for ADP and ADC, one would think that these strategies are front and center at every school in the U.S. that is responsible for the social-emotional edification of ADC. However, this is not the case. While research argues that storytelling provides distinct openings to further “evidence-based choices in a culturally appropriate context” (Fabius, 2016, p.425; Houston et al., 2011), very few studies exist that explore how these practices can impact both youth and older ADP in the U.S. (Fabius, 2016). Several studies explore concepts of narratives, generativity, and storytelling separately without understanding how they are interdependent. However, Fabius, (2016) explores how linking these concepts together can assist with personal, community, and cultural identity preservation (Fabius, 2016).

Older African Descended Adults or Elders

Life narratives of older ADP have many factors in common. Shellman (2004) designed a qualitative study to understand how to care for African American elders that examined cultural legacy, worldviews, and life choices. Research participants identified the amassed “effects of poverty, racial segregation, neglect, and disregard felt by African American elders across their lifetime” (Shellman, 2004; Fabius, 2016). In addition, it named poverty as a contributing factor in accessing African-centered healthcare – and the discrimination they face in society (Shellman, 2004; Fabius, 2016). There is also other research that compliments this work and underscores the

major support role that family plays in the Black tradition (Fabius, 2016). Indeed, culture from ADP in the U.S. underscores the significance of “informal support systems more than Whites culture” (Fabius, 2016). This also leads to a shared value of people collectively building resiliency to co-own resources in the face of economic injustice and oppression (Fabius, 2016).

Becker and Newsom (2005) administered a 10-year study of various ethnicities’ engagement with chronic illness (Becker and Newsom, 2005; Fabius, 2016). They aimed to understand how African Americans’ theories about chronic illness impacted their “chronic management” (Becker and Newsom, 2005; Fabius, 2016). They purport that the way ethnic minorities deal with sickness and infirmity as older adults is connected to how they preserve themselves in spite of racism (Fabius, 2016, Becker and Newsom, 2005). Their findings underscored the value of the “resilience philosophy” that accompanied African American testimonials (Fabius, 2016). In addition, race, religiosity, independence, and resilience were common themes across participants (Becker and Newsom, 2005). However, their research did not focus on how cultural groups build supportive communities (families) and impact older African descended populations.

The importance of ADP family and extended kin or village, is key. McCoy (2011) argues elders of African descent in the U.S. are tasked with working with youth to help them persevere when approaching new obstacles. This is particularly important because the focus of these families is rooted in the children (Fabius, 2016). Because of this, elders need to discern what social and historical content is relevant for younger generations to hear, and which messages should transcend time and place (Fabius, 2016).

McCoy reminds us that although elders of previous generations focused on “racial pride and dignity,” elders today may also focus on entitlement and redirecting rage against the

systemic injustice that has impacted their lives and families (McCoy, 2011; Fabius, 2016). Shambley-Ebron and Boyle (2006) highlight how women of African descent in the U.S. were given “positions of honor” and respect for rearing children and enduring against all obstacles (Fabius, 2016). These roles change as adults get older and age into the elder community. ADP in the U.S. are usually caring for older adults or elders in ways their white counterparts are not (Fabius, 2016). This makes the case for the inculcation of strong, thriving, and nourishing intergenerational cultural development in all forms.

In a recent study about AIE in Australia, Haines et al. (2019) showed how invaluable eldership is to African and Indigenous communities. Their study looked at how storytelling was used by elders and older adults to teach children within and outside of the public-school context. They concluded that “Elders’ knowledge is inherited from generational stories and the experiences of living on a particular land” (Haines et al., 2019). They also learned that the personal history of elders advises all parts of Elders’ cultural knowings and group histories foster rumination “of their own collective cultural and national history” (Haines et al., 2019). This knowledge is not fixed, it is constantly evolving and largely based on land and language (Haines, et al., 2019).

While this is a good collection of scholarship, more studies are needed that investigate how elders communicate across land and language to sustain the collective eldership tradition. In addition, emerging scholarship must investigate how AIE – paired with youth – can inform global educational policy and Pan-African solidarity.

Narrative Identity

Narrative identity was originally postulated by Erickson. In fact, the continued evolution of ones’ narrative identity also underscores “moment-by-moment stories that people live, or

perform, in daily social behavior” (Fabius, 2016, p.426). Narrative identity creates space for individual introspection, assesment, and assess personal development (McAdams & Cox, 2010; Fabius, 2016). Narrative identity put another way, is one’s embodied and emerging life story that incorporates history and future ideals that give life meaning and purpose (Fabius, 2016). This concept develops as one matures and reconstitutes one’s past and visions of their future in order to bring more significance and value (Fabius, 2016).

For ADP in the U.S., narrative identity is engineered in part due to suffering (Fabius, 2016). The suffering narration is one where older adults self-explore to comprehend lessons discovered and understandings that work to enhance one’s existence (Fabius, 2016). Black and Rubinstein (2009) noted in their qualitative study, that the narratives of six African American men highlighted how “racism led to suffering” while producing resistance and strategies to transform their local environments towards well-being and balance (Fabius, 2016). Several other studies explain how ADP in the U.S. define and determine their past and future realities using narratives and storytelling.

The narrative identity of older ADP in the U.S. is developed from enduring familial relations, “village-like” interconnectedness, and hope (Fabius, 2016). Shellman et al. (2011) researched supposed usefulness and purpose of “reminiscence in a sample of community-dwelling African American elders” (Fabius, 2016). Recalling strategies helps members rediscover wisdom from one’s existence using collective means (cultural arts) to ameliorate health as older adults age (Fabius, 2016). Fellowship, family, and faith was a common theme that came from this study (Fabius, 2016).

Participants also contemplated abouts connections with family, extended family, and the divine (Fabius, 2016). Shellman’s (2004) research on “lived experiences” of ADP in the U.S.

showcases how participants discussed strategies for dealing with discrimination (Fabius, 2016). One major theme was how families nurtured one another and recollections of familial perseverance through trauma (Fabius, 2016; Shellman, 2004). Elders mentioned that families nurtured “one another by working, playing, and praying together” (Fabius, 2016). These studies contribute to larger discussions of how storytelling might impact African descended youth and older adults, but they fail to expound on the impact of intergenerational storytelling programs that connect elders with youth.

African-centered Storytelling Praxis: Pan-Africanism & African-centered education

For centuries, ADP in the U.S. have fought to educate their children, in their own cultural way (DuBois, 1932; Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Hilliard, 1985; Lomotey, 1992; Akoto, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Kambon, 1998; Azibo, 2011; Carroll, 2010; King, 2014; Christian, 2014; Rickford, 2016). They re-erected Black-owned schools, edifying apparatuses, and societal systems that preserved and educated Black lives (Nobles, 1976; Anderson, 1988; Lee, 1992; Shujaa, 2003; Bush et. al, 2005; Nembhard, 2014; Rickford, 2016). Important cultural contributions emerged throughout the global, African world. However, cultural and institutional oppression has led to a dire socioeconomic environment for ADP in the U.S. While it is clear that African-centered education can lift ADP populations out of certain social conditions, there is still a widening gap between educational innovations for ADC in the U.S. and enhanced life outcomes for those children in one of the wealthiest country in the world (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994; Kunjufu, 2002; Yasso, 2005; Ginwright, 2010; Gammage, 2012; Sefa Dei, 2012; King, 2014).

Early Pan-Africanism

Chinweizu (1975) wrote extensively about the legacy of how the West disrupted peace through dismantling African and Indigenous culture and civilization. He argues that the West has been conquering and attempting to oppress the world for nearly seven centuries (Chinweizu, 1975). In 1415, we saw the first instances of Portuguese and Spanish seafarers that forced whiteness across the Strait of Gibraltar and Ceuta [a center for trans-Sahara trade in West-African gold] (Chinweizu, 1975). They inserted their Christian faith and eventually went to West-Africa looking for spices (Chinweizu, 1975). This led to them purchasing ivory, spices and gold, and capturing and enslaving Africans – a term used instead of “slave” to denote the enslavement and strength of African people and not the passivity of a slave.

By the sixteenth century, their enslaving empire in Africa, ran from Lisbon, and became extremely profitable due to plantations in Brazil and Angola. Major activity in Amboina, Axim, Bahia, Calicut, Cochin, Elmina, Fort Jesus, Goa Hormuz, Jaffna, Luanda, Macau, Malacca, Mombasa, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Tome, Sofala, and Ternate was seen through dungeons, settlements, and trading posts (Chinweizu, 1975). Spaniards would also enter the human trade, followed by the English and the Dutch later that century. The British and the French would then fight for North America during the seventeenth century (Chinweizu, 1975).

During the late 1700s, the Slave Trade in the U.S. – the legal chattel enslavement of almost 12 million enslaved Africans – was the one of worst enslavement of any people in the world (Chinweizu, 1975). Ani Marimba (2005) named this the Maafa (or the Black holocaust). And while the Emancipation Proclamation and subsequent civil war freed U.S. enslaved Africans in the 1800s, they continue, centuries later, to fight for their physical, mental, and economic freedom and be treated as any other U.S. citizen. While enslavement was genocidal, even more

damaging was the mechanisms used to erase ADP' humanity by rejecting that ADP ever cultivated great civilizations or had ever been a historic people (Chinweizu, 1975, Carruthers, 1995).

The story was much the same for different ADP across the world. Carter G. Woodson (1919), a prominent African-centered educator, wrote about how this migration impacted education. In *The Education of the Negro*, Woodson outlined how although inhumane enslavement was not imposed on all populations of African descent, white settler colonization – the forced removal and erasure of Indigenous people's culture, governance, schools, land rights, and other traditions and belief systems – was common practice across the continent of Africa, the Americas and many other parts of the African world (Woodson, 1919). African and indigenous populations that resists these kinds of power struggles, share that resistance tradition as a part of their legacy, in solidarity, across the African world. This too is a function of Pan-Africanism (Woodson, 1919).

There are disputing narratives regarding how and where Pan-Africanism began. Some state that Pan-African sentiments were born by enslaved Africans (Kissi, 2018). Similarly, some focus on how Pan-Africanism extends all the way back to ancient Kemet (Egypt) over 5,000 years ago (Kissi, 2018; Legum, 1965; Nantambu, 1998; Wiredu 2004). However, it began, ADP have fought for freedom and unity across the African world for thousands of years (Woodson, 1919; Carruthers, 1995).

For example, Nantambu (1998) highlights the era in which Kemet (Egypt) resisted attempts from others to conquer the entire civilization and shows how ADP continued to resist throughout history:

- Hykosos or “Sheperd Kings,” in 1783 B.C
- Assyrians, now known as the Syrians, in 666 B.C.

- Persians, now known as the Iranians, in 552 B.C. and 343 B.C.
- Greeks, the world's first Europeans, under Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.
- Romans, Europeans, in 30 B.C.
- Arabs in 642 A.D.
- French, Europeans, under Napoleon Bonaparte on May 19, 1798
- British, Europeans, in 1881. (p. 568)

These examples are essential to the resistance-based warrior tradition that is part in parcel to what it means to be African. However, Pan-Africanism is not simply physical resistance, it is also the cultural, intellectual, and epistemological battles that ADP people fashioned and continue to fashion in the face of socioeconomic colonization.

Hakim Adi (2018) argues that there has never been one true definition for Pan-Africanism. This vagueness is important and sometimes purposeful due to the very nature of the global application of the term. Even still, he asserts that most would agree that it is a “phenomenon that has emerged in the modern period and is concerned with the social, economic, cultural, and political emancipation of African peoples, including those of the African diaspora” (Adi, 2018, p. 2). In addition, it promotes emancipation and sustainability of continental Africa as the homeland for all ADP – something that can be linked back to ancient times but has much to do with the dissemination of Africans during enslavement and human trafficking (Adi, 2018).

Pan-African thought and beliefs are embedded in unity, shared, history, and common purpose (Adi, 2018). Furthermore, there is a shared understanding that their destinies and spirits are interconnected (Adi, 2018). Being Pan-African is centered around the proliferation of African Indigenous resistance and emancipation. It is both a way of being and a social and political movement that links ADP places, cultures and life across the planet (Adi, 2018; DuBois, 1910; Abraham, 1962; Nkrumah, 1961; Nkrumah et al., 1963; Warren, 1990). In fact, Rashid (2019) contends that being Pan-African includes facilitating the preservation of African history,

addressing racial conflicts, supporting political and economic cooperation, and many other tenets that are embedded in an African way of life.

Pan-African runs deep and wide. It not only follows the notions above, but it falls into two main categories: global and continental Pan-Africanism (Rashid, 2019). Kwame Nkrumah is widely considered one of the most influential in the global Pan-African movement (Rashid, 2019). Nkrumah understood that in order for Africa to truly be free, it would need to fight for freedom regardless of the strength of European colonialism (Rashid, 2019).

There were several 18th century theorists that spoke about coalescing ADP before Nkrumah. In 1797, Prince Hall, who was born in Barbados, educated Africans in the U.S. about wisdom of ancient Ethiopia and helped to inspire the Haitian Revolution (Carruthers, 1995). His ideas would lead to a framework that would provide a blueprint for 19th century African Nationalist, Pan-African Movement (Caruthers, 1995; Aptheker, 1951, p. 9). Hall's influenced key figures in Toussaint's army like Baron P. V. Vasty, who joined in 1796 (Carruthers, 1995). Prince Sanders, who left the U.S. in 1816 to join the revolution, used his writings to connect Africans to classical civilizations and encouraged Africans to migrate to Haiti (Carruthers, 1995).

In fact, in 1837, Hosea Easton published an address called "A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Conditions of the Colored Peoples of the United States" (Carruthers, 1995, p.17; Easton, 1837). In this address, he concluded that cultural (not biological forces) were responsible for racial differences (Carruthers, 1995). In 1879, Martin Delany, is the first African theorist to assert that African American people are a "nation within a nation" and that ADP in the U.S. should fight for "Africa and for the African race" (Carruthers, 1995, p. 18; Delany, 1879).

The 19th and 20th centuries birthed an even more expansive list of Pan-Africanist thinkers including Henry Highland Garnet and Edward Wilmot Blyden, the father of contemporary African nationalism (Carruthers, 1995). Others include Henry McNeal Turner, Marcus Garvey, Drucilla Dunjee Houston, and Leo Hansberry (Carruthers, 1995). These thinkers were followed up by other Pan African revolutionaries: George G. M. James; “John G. Jackson; John Henrik Clarke; Yosef ben-Jochannan;” Chancellor Williams (Carruthers, 1995); Aimé Césaire; Amilcar Cabral; Constance Cummings-John; “Nathaniel Akinremi Fadipe; Amy Ashwood Garvey; Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford; James Africanus Beale Horton; Carter G. Woodson; W. Alphaeus Hunton; C.L.R. James;” Patrice Émery Lumumba; Julius Kambarage Nyerere; Sékou Ahmed Touré; and Henry Sylvester Williams (Adi & Sherwood, 2003).

In fact, Henry Sylvester Williams convened an inaugural Pan-African Congress in 1900 in London (Adi & Sherwood, 2003). It was the first known organized conference of ADP and established the phrase and idea of Pan-Africanism (Adi & Sherwood, 2003). Williams’ supporters included Booker T. Washington (president of Tuskegee College); Professor W.S. Scarborough, president of Wilberforce University; Judge David Straker of Detroit, who was of Barbados origins; the Rev. Majola Agbebi, West Africa and the nationalist Bishop James Johnson of Nigeria; Bishop James Holly of Haiti; and Dadabhai Naoroji, Indian-born, who supported the conference financially; and W.E.B. DuBois, (Adi & Sherwood, 2003).

W.E.B. DuBois, one of the first Black social theorists in the U.S., is also considered one of the first Pan-Africanist. In 1919, DuBois hosted an additional Pan-African Congress meeting where fifty-seven delegates represented 15 countries. Several more meetings would occur over the next fifty years (Mitchell, 2010). Unlike most projects that have trouble when applied outside of a local context, the Pan-African movement has shown for centuries how socio-economic

challenges and solutions can be shared across the African world (Delany, 1859; DuBois, 1911; Abraham, 1962; Nkrumah, 1961; Nkrumah et al., 1963; Warren, 1990; Nembhard, 1999; 2008; Grammage, 2012; Ginwright, 2014). Pan-Africanism is proof that culture is also shared across ADP populations.

African-centered Education

The racial economic gap in the U.S. is reflected in median household wealth across different ethnicities. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) found that one fourth of African descent households in the U.S. “have zero or negative net worth” (Gould et al., 2013). This is twice as many as white families (Khan, 2018; Jones et al., 2018). Said differently, African descent households in the U.S. have “\$5.04 in net worth per every \$100 in a white household” (Gould et al., 2013). In 2015, the median net worth of white households was \$134,000 – while Black and Latino households were \$11,000 and \$14,000 respectively (Khan, 2018; Jones et al., 2018). Of the estimated 370,300 Chicago Public School students enrolled in the 2018-2019 school year, 77% are low-income. In addition, 36.6% are Black, 47.6% are Latino, and 10% are White. This generational wealth gap is not just monetary, it affects students’ levels of stress, trauma, mental health and social-emotional wellbeing (Moore, 2005; Guajardo et al., 2008; Ginwright, 2010; Hill et al., 2012).

The National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) reports almost 50% of children in the U.S. have experienced some childhood trauma in their lifetime (NSCH, 2017). Children and adolescents who experience poverty, violence, food insecurity, and home instability are more likely to experience mental health challenges and brain-altering stress. As a result of their socio-economic environment, many Black students are disproportionately affected by childhood trauma. Furthermore, academic performance is negatively impaired by these events. While

charter schools purport to fill some of these gaps, Black students are still adversely impacted economically, physiologically, and academically (Lee, 2008; Nembhard, 2008; King, 2014).

A 2017 study by AP News revealed that 1,300 children die from gunshots each year. In addition, violent crime adversely impacts sleep patterns of children living proximally to brutal incidents (Heissel et. al, 2018). Crime raises cortisol, the stress hormone, in the bodies of children the day after violent events occur. Disturbances to sleep and elevated cortisol levels has “a negative impact on academic performance” (Heissel et. al, 2018). In Chicago, students face grave threats of violence daily and gunshot deaths is the third major reason for death among young people under the age of seventeen (Cunningham et al., 2018).

These economic challenges are also reflected in the excuses cities use to defund and close public institutions in the communities of African decedents. In addition to navigating environmental challenges, many urban public schools often exist the poorest cities and environments and have inadequate resources to deal with these conditions. Furthermore, public schools are increasingly facing funding threats and nationwide school-closings. Over 1,000 public schools closed nationwide in the last 15 years (Brown, 2018). New Orleans began the 2014-2015 school year with only 5 public schools remaining. Chicago, Detroit and New York have all lost more than 100 public schools in recent years – 43 closings in Chicago in 2014 alone (Brown, 2018). When schools close, many families are forced to relocate, and students face grave housing and academic instability.

Additional research must investigate the link between risk factors and cultural suppression, self-doubt, fear, depression, anxiety, and other outcomes that result from inequity in the U.S. West African-based oral traditions and African-centered education works directly to shift ADC’s mentality – which in turn transforms a poverty mindset into a prosperous one. It

may also provide elders with an invaluable source of social-emotional support. If a poverty mindset is not simply a financial hardship, but the unyielding mental, socio-emotional, and structural weight that makes it nearly impossible for ADP bodies to succeed (Claro et al., 2016), then how can the process of re-Africanization move one through this weight and help them find ways to self-determine through African humanism? Whatever the link, the West-African oral tradition may be intrinsically linked to a mindset and practice that can help ADP transcend their environment.

Pan-Africanism is the backdrop for the educational efforts and theories of ADP in the U.S. For educational policy researchers, educational thought is framed in terms of Western thought and theories. However, since this is a decolonial Indigenous research intervention, it centers Africa's knowledge, thought and theories to better understand what Western theories stole and were birthed from. Thus, the intellectual thought of ADP in the U.S. and African diaspora is the major tenant in African-centered education in the U.S.

Asa Hilliard (1985), a prominent African-centered scholar, asked an extremely poignant question for American educators: "do we truly have the will to educate *all* children?" This research intervention extends his question: If we did, would it have happened already? As it stands, it has not. Since the inception of public schools in the mid-nineteenth century, the U.S. educational system fails to meet cultural needs of ADP (in particular Black children) in the U.S. (Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Wright, 1979; Hale-Benson, 1990; Lomotey, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Hopkins, 1997; Kunjufu, 2002; Hilliard, 2002; Lee, 2008).

Today, instead of receiving cultural enrichment in schools, most Black students face direct and indirect criminalization (Kunjufu, 1995; Shockley and Fredrick, 2010; Nguyen, 2014), physical and cultural disenfranchisement (Yosso, 2005; Hooks, 2010; Christian, 2014;), and an

incompatible Western culture juxtaposed against a resisting Black culture (Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Wright, 1979; Lomotey, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Lee, 2006; Rashid, 2012; King, 2014). Indeed, North America has failed to educate Black children and transform the social environment for Black people (Shockley, 2007; Nguyen, 2014; Dei, 2018).

Many scholars agree that the current lack of African-centered educational offerings in schools (and informally) is cause for innovative interventions that create holistic, “socio-cultural metamorphosis for Black children and communities” (Akua, 2020; Shujaa, 1994; Shockley, 2007; King, 2014). While many scholars of African descent assert that this cultural negligence is *the* core problem for Black students (Nobles, 1976; Staples, 1976; Wright, 1979; Hale-Benson, 1982; Akoto, 1992; Madhubuti and Madhubuti, 1994; Hilliard, 2002; Shujaa, 2003; Lee, 2008; Rashid, 2012; Dei, 2019; Akua, 2020), other education scholars continually study symptoms like achievement gaps (see Jerald & Haycock and Jerald, 2002; Williams, 2011). Nonetheless, more scholars with experience in this phenomenon increasingly agree with the critical need for a resurgence in African-centered education (Hilliard, 1985; Lomotey, 1988; 1992; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987; Ratteray, 1992; Akoto, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Lee, 2008; Carroll, 2010; Dei, 2012; King, 2014; Rickford, 2016).

African-centered education – was first articulated in the U.S. by DuBois (1906) in *Economic Future of the Negro*, where he called for ADP in the U.S. to create educational, cultural, and socioeconomic infrastructure to self-educate. At the time, DuBois named four areas of concern for ADP in the U.S. that deserved a specific African-centered response: “The relation of the Negro to city and country; The relation of the Negro to group and national economy; The influence of race prejudice; and The question of efficiency” (DuBois, 1906). These four areas are at the root of African-centered education.

As early as 1891, W.E.B. Dubois published writings that encouraged Black people to not simply self-educate but to connect self-edification to African ways of thinking and doing. While he is one of the first Black scholars to contribute to how we think about knowledge and traditions from Africa – and many continue to build on his works – he seldom receives credit and acknowledgement in the academy for his ideas and global call to action. In fact, by World War II, he published over 65 social scientific analyses on the “history, culture and experiences of African” descendants in U.S. – more than any other American at that time (Myrdal, 1944). His main message to all descendants of Africa in the U.S. – learn your African heritage and culture (DuBois, 1898; DuBois, 1932; DuBois, 1960).

Dubois argued that ADP in the U.S. need to learn from their own culture (Africa) to learn the values and philosophies in life necessary to be free (Dubois, 1910).

What the Negro needs, therefore, of the world and civilizations, he must largely teach himself; what he learns of social organization and efficiency, he must learn from his own people. His conceptions of social uplift and philanthropy must come from within his own ranks, and he must above all make and set and follow his own ideals of life and character (p. 37).

For Dubois, the most bountiful well of knowledge for descendants of Africans in the U.S. should come from African and Indigenous roots (Dubois, 1906; 1910; 1932; 1960). His interventions moved Black scholars to rethink not only how we study African knowledge and culture and how to redistribute it as an integral learning for all ADP in the U.S. (Dubois, 1906; 1910; 1932; 1960). While DuBois is often criticized for his lack of objectivity – since he is from the community he studied – that critique is no longer a viable one in the academy as many social

scientists and educators study their own communities. These “ideals of life” are African ideals of life. This “character,” is an African-centered one.

In one of his seminal studies, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899), DuBois interviewed over 5,000 Black people from Philadelphia. His ethnographic study covered everything from family and marriage to education and illiteracy. This study focused on the Negro environment and was the first and largest social-ecological assessment of Black people post-enslavement. DuBois showed how culture formed the individual, and how the individual was formed by culture. He stated that there was no one with more strength, intellect, and morals than the American Negro (DuBois, 1899). While no other scholar made these assertions during the period, his work was not accepted by American scholars at the time. In fact, it took almost 25 years later for a Swedish social scientist and winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize, Gunnar Myrdal, to assert that DuBois’ study was a model “of what a study of a Negro community should be” (Myrdal, 1944, p. 1132).

For DuBois, it is not simply about cultural education, it is also about dismantling capitalism [colonialism] (Dubois, 1907). In a speech in 1907, Dubois maintained, “we unwittingly stand at the crossroads — should we go the way of capitalism and try to become individually rich as capitalists, or should we go the way of cooperatives and economic cooperation where we and our whole community could be rich together?” (DuBois, 1907). Dubois was certain, we must use our own culture when we educate, and we need to move away from capitalism and the colonizer and back into cooperatives and collectivism. This was one of the first accounts of Black social theory on these issues – and one of the first to link theory and practice (DuBois, 1907; Rabakka, 2010). He also discusses cultural economics more extensively

in his essays *Whither Now and Why, Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?*, and *The Future and Function of the Negro College*.

In addition to Dubois, Carter G. Woodson published “The Education of the Negro,” in 1921. This book was a preface to his well-known book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. Woodson (1919) wrote extensively about how ADP in the U.S. erected schools throughout the south during and after African enslavement. He also noted over a hundred examples of ADP educators and leaders that fought for sustainable education in the mid-to late 1800s (Woodson, 1919). The Black Power Movement (1960s) further catalyzed the struggle for independent schools.

An Independent Black Institution (IBI) is a school founded with the sole purpose of educating ADP in the U.S. (Bush, 2004; Rattery, 1992; Shujaa, 1993). It is important to set the scene and backdrop of the founding of these IBIs. The Black liberation, Black studies, and the Pan-African movements all primed cultural consciousness towards an outgrowth of Black schools immediately following the Black Power Movement (Bush, 2004; Rattery, 1992; Shujaa, 1993). Several founders of these IBIs were birthed from the Black Studies Movement (Bush, 2004). Another influencing group were parents’ clashing over control of their children’s schools (Bush, 2004; Lomotey, 1992; T’Shaka, 1989; Lee, 1993; Rattery, 1993).

Traditionally, IBI’s provided routes for healing and teaching ADP’s history and culture (Lomotey, 1988/1992; Ratteray & Shujaa, 1987; Ratteray, 1992; Shujaa, 1994; Rickford, 2016). IBI’s emerged as a model of self-sufficiency from ADP in the U.S. during this time. However, efforts to sustain these historical institutions (and the culture that birthed them) is fleeting. Furthermore, these are not the schools that most African descendant youth and elders attend.

IBIs work to create a supportive culture and meaning-making climate for Black youth (Shujaa, 1994; Rickford, 2016). In this way, they are African-centered. They are examples of institutions that further African humanism. IBIs are well suited to work through these concerns with students, but they are also mitigating a number of systemic economic challenges. With over 200 across the nation, many IBIs are struggling to keep their doors open (Rickford, 2016). Low enrollment, due to a lack of funding and a rise in local charter school proliferation, creates an ongoing quagmire for these schools. Some IBIs are members of Council for Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) – a coalition of IBIs in the U.S. However, even CIBI has seen membership decline (Rickford, 2016).

Even still, Kwasi Konadu (2009) refutes these claims in his book, *A View from the East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York City*. He uses primary sources, oral histories and observations to discuss how African-centered schools provide an effective liberation movement to confront inhumane conditions and environments. In looking at Uhuru Sasa Shule, an independent IBI in New York, he asserts that schools like these offer a release and escape from the Eurocentric hegemony inside public schools in America (Konadu, 2009). Using the Kawaida philosophy, an African-centered youth development approach developed by Maulana Karenga during the same time period (Karenga, 1977), Konadu contends that Blackness becomes a “liberating consciousness” that affirms that all Black people should act in accordance with the nation and be free (Konadu, 2009, p. xv).

Today, these debates underscore the real challenges independent and public schools face. Exacerbating the matter, several schools and community educators face a scarcity of cultural pedagogy that truly engages and inspires the next generation of young Black learners across the diaspora (Lee, 2008; Nembhard, 2014; King, 2014). Even those who do wish to educate using

culturally relevant materials struggle to find adequate instructional aides. The same suppression of African-centered education in public schools that most Black educators and activists experience also disconnects them from a massive Pan-African toolbox. This stems from a lack of African-centered representation in dominant-culture institutions and instructional aides [i.e. schools, books, curricula, digital media, etc.] (Dei & Jaimungal, 2018; Dei, 2013).

Educating African descent youth and families in the U.S. is not simply about test scores and performance, it is also about healing. Generational socioeconomic disparities are front and center in the homes of ADP in the U.S. IBIs are well positioned to address the holistic needs of students and families, but more aides are needed. Proverbs, myths, epics, storytelling, and other oration practices can assist with this because they are elevating the ADP experience from a position of affirming healing and humanism – something that is desperately needed in these communities (Ford, 2000; Dei, 2013; Dei & Jaimungal, 2018).

One of the first to create a list on the conditions of African-centered education, Carol Lee (1994) provides this criterion for educating African descended children in the U.S:

1. Legitimizes African stores of knowledge;
2. Positively exploits and scaffolds productive community and cultural practices;
3. Extends and builds upon the Indigenous language;
4. Reinforces community ties and idealizes service to one's family, community, nation, race, and world;
5. Promotes positive social relationships;
6. Imparts a world view that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others; and
7. Supports cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness (Piert, 2015, p.22; Lee, 1994, p. 297).

Another scholar key to defining Afrocentricity is Ama Mazama (2002). She renders Afrocentricity as reclamation. She states that it is an “emancipatory movement” that inscribes itself with a reliance on spirituality and tradition of defiance to European oppression (Mazama, 2002). Joyce King (2014), provides a beautiful articulation of these points, stating:

Asante (2007) characterizes the Afrocentric paradigm as revolutionary (not evolutionary) in that it locates African people as subjects with agency, not objects in relation to sociopolitical, economic, and cultural processes. He credits Ama Mazama with adding a functional aspect to earlier formulations of Afrocentricity so that it now has a “doing” aspect. As a result, Mazama (2003) has expanded the Kuhnian (Kuhn, 1970) definition of paradigm beyond its cognitive and structural aspects to include the activation of consciousness, which is the functional aspect needed for mental liberation (p. 37).

Mapping processes and tools that support mental and spiritual liberation is an extremely significant feat for African-centered educators. The struggle for many ADP is largely a mental conflict.

In addition, the Afrocentric theoretical approach is a classification of “thought and praxis” entrenched worldview representations and concerns of descendants of “African ancestry” (Carroll, 2010). As McDougal (2014) explains, a few basic assumptions are:

- The best way to understand African people is first and foremost from their own perspective;
- A peoples’ worldview determines what constitutes a problem for them, and how they approach solving problems (Mazama, 2003)
- The fundamental substance of all reality is spirit, and not everything that is important is measurable (Mazama, 2003; Nobles, 2006)
- The ultimate aim of all research in Africana Studies must be to empower and liberate people of African descent (Mazama, 2003; Kershaw, 2003)
- African peoples’ experience can be used to help gain a greater understanding of the human experience (Kershaw, 1992)

One of the key assumptions here is how important spirit is in Afrocentricity and for ADP. An understanding of spirit, African spirituality spiritual work is key to these assumptions.

Cheryl Grills (2006), builds on frameworks offered by “Daudi Ajani Azibo, Theophile Obenga, Marimba Ani, Vulinden Wobogo, Cheikh Anta Diop and Wade Nobles” (Carroll, 2010). Grills adds that African psychological realities illuminate an African centering in “the

meaning of life, the world, and relationships with others and one's self' (Grills, 2006; Carroll, 2010). More importantly, Grills adds that African psychology includes an *Afrocentric* framework, a consideration that connects two parallel theoretical concepts (self and world) under one Africana ontology, the *worldview* framework (Grill, 2006, Carroll, 2010).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS: DECOLONIZING RESEARCH

Since my goal is to better understand how West-African oral tradition can create help Black youth and adults with self-healing, my research is positioned as a cultural intervention. In the spirit of Antwi A. A. Akom (2011), I situate my work through a Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR) lens. This approach asks those with cultural and proximal connection to the inquiry process not to simply pose questions but offer solutions and new ways that reposition liberatory and sustainable alternatives. I do not just want to understand what happened. Instead, I want to look at the data to see how to restore these kinds of institutions and put infrastructure in place that makes them sustainable. In this way it is participatory-action, intervention-based research focused on improving the conditions of Africans in the diaspora (Hsin-hsin & Cokre, 2010; McDough, 2014).

Sefa Dei (2018) argues that Indigenous-centered researchers must move with caution due to the delicate nature of the IKS and history of distrust and scholastic appropriation by Western research extractors. In addition, Dei asserts that any critical researcher attempting to study local knowledge should do so with an Indigenous research methodological lens as previous studies have modeled (Sefa Dei, 2018; McDough, 2014; Akom, 2011; Hsin-hsin & Cokre, 2010). I call these “critical” researchers, Indigenous-centered researchers, and attempt to take on this approach in my work.

African and Indigenous Research Methods

An indigenous research methodological approach places decolonization and local knowledge at the center. It is not simply a more moral way to study African and Indigenous cultures, it is understanding that what is gained from the research is done with the sole purpose of benefiting and sharing knowledge with African and Indigenous populations. This means that

permission is not assumed, it is granted. Respect is not promised, it is earned. And findings are not simply published, they are applied. This understanding can often be antithetical to Western research methods that create and sustain power imbalances in the name of educational research and science. Instead, an Indigenous research methodology is focused on how to bring not simply knowledge of practices into the purview, but how to use them to facilitate epistemological paradigm shifts, that restore and disseminate Indigenous ways of knowing.

Sefa Dei underscores several areas where Indigenous-centered researchers should be more mindful when investigating cultural knowledge as radical, liberatory practice. In the case of proverbs and storytelling, it is important to understand that while no one owns the content, it is a deeply sacred wisdom that is passed down by elders and Ancestors (Sefa Dei, 2018).

Furthermore, the role of this knowledge is not simply to educate about a subject matter, it is deeply rooted in the sacred understandings of relationships, culture, history, cosmogony, mind, body, and spirit. This means that it is honored and held sacrosanct in each local environment. In addition, Sefa Dei cautions us not to dismiss cultural insights because they are from other locations and traditions. Sefa Dei states that often times proverbs and stories, while in different languages and locations, can convey similar meanings and ways of thinking about the world (Sefa Dei, 2018).

This is in no way a comprehensive checklist of all the considerations that Indigenous-centered researchers should embody. This checklist is and continues to grow as more and more educators of African descent investigate local knowledge systems. However, it is a blueprint from an experienced Indigenous-centered researcher for how we must move when researching to preserve and activate African and Indigenous cultural heritage. Towards this end, Sefa Dei also identifies four main objectives of his study. For this research intervention, I have simplified those

objectives into four major components that should serve as the ground floor for an Indigenous research methodology: understanding cultural phenomenon; providing an analysis; creating an intervention; and practicing that intervention within a local context (Sefa Dei, 2018).

In order to create and facilitate work that is ethical and rooted in an African-centered lens, I have selected West-African research frameworks – *feefeemuni*, *hu hia* and *boa no* – in addition to my Indigenous-centered research model. The first Indigenous methodological approach is *feefeemuni*, an Akan concept that highlights the ethical responsibilities of the researcher. The “*feefeemuni* principle requires that researchers immerse themselves in the community that is being observed. Researchers must acquire an intimate understanding of the community’s unique norms, values, and ways of being. *Feefeemuni* is a guideline that rejects the notion of objectivity” (Gammage, 2012). This Indigenous framework affirms researchers possess cultural experience, “thus, *feefeemuni* seeks to maintain a level of authenticity when collecting and interpreting data” (Gammage, 2012). More importantly, *feefeemuni* aims to protect against disharmonies assessments in regards to the local group being researched and the researcher (Gammage, 2012).

Feefeemuni in this research context came in the form of not simply observing Asè but joining and becoming a member of Asè. As a member, I learned how meetings functioned to lift up storytellers and provide support to members. This also led to me meeting with Asè members as a member, not a researcher. I also gained knowledge about the internal struggles withing the organization and eceived a mentor so that I can continue to develop my storytelling practice. Since this research intervention is more than just a research project, I will remain a member and support the organization. One way I recently participated with Asè was in the Concert

Committee where I provided technical assistance so they could host their first virtual concert this Fall.

Becoming a member – not just a researcher – was a monumental consideration for my Afrocentric praxis and scholar-activist intervention. While I wanted my research to stand on its own, I also wanted to join (not merely study) this dynamic group of leaders and educators. This is a critical juxtaposition that many African and Indigenous researchers experience. As Sefa Dei states, “an African and Indigenous researcher cannot leave his/her “Indigeneity at the door when entering the academic world of research” (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 55; Postlethwaite, 2016, pp. 31-34). Instead, one’s positionality enhances “research whereby the unique perspective of the researcher inevitably makes a difference to the research and the authenticity of the data gathered” and thus, transforms the researchers’ “own life experiences and culture contribute[s] to the topic, methodology and the selection and application of methods and practices” (Sefa Dei, 2018, p. 55; Postlethwaite, 2016, pp. 31-34).

This is congruent with *feefeemuni*. In addition to immersing myself in the organization by joining, I also shared my dissertation with those that I interviewed so that each of the interviewees can insure I am representing them correctly and they can give me their blessings. This gesture communicates a certain level of authenticity and respect to the storytellers. Because they are older adults and elders, it is akin to an African and Indigenous practice of asking elders to speak before you speak in a room or at a gathering. This sign of respect is not something that most researchers learn, you have to be fully committed and immersed in the local community in order to understand these kinds of nuanced formalities. This was how I ensured that there were no “mistakes” in my cultural analysis.

The second methodological idea is *hu hia*, an Akan concept which elucidates the essentialness found in local group's history and experience. This concept states that a detailed exploration of the local groups's "historical experiences" be performed and incorporate any annotation in the findings (Gammage, 2012). For example, "the experiences of community members are the ultimate authority in determining what is true and, therefore, are the final arbiter of the validity of research about their lives" (Reveire, 2001). *Hu hia* demands an adequate historical context to structure a respectable analysis (Gammage, 2012).

I engaged *hu hia* by first researching the West-African oral tradition and then analyzing how African-centered educators, organizations and arts groups in the 70's and 80's led to the creation of Asè. One of the interviewees spoke extensively about the history of Chicago's art and culture climate and how storytelling practice and performance emerged from spoken word groups and spaces. In addition, I analyzed the historical significance of the national affiliate that Asè is a part of to better understand how storytellers came to know and join both the local and national organizations. Lastly, I sought to better understand each storytellers' own historical significance by recording interviews in their homes. This provided an invaluable cultural and historical lens with which to operate.

Conducting interviews as conversations and in the homes of storytellers is a way to directly apply *hu hia* Afrocentric research projects. Interviews were facilitated more like conversations and participants were able to ask questions. All participants answered questions and told stories about their life and even shared stories that they use in their storytelling praxis. This created an environment where we shared our knowledge and built knowledge together through the interview process.

One of my earliest and most impactful observations throughout this process was going into the homes of older and elder storytellers. There were so many cultural works, photos, African sculptures and masks, African garb, books, awards, and more. It was truly the highlight of the process – just being in their space and feeling their life experience through their environment. Oftentimes, asking about these items also led to stories of their own. While participants were given the option to interview in public spaces like churches or libraries, all participants chose their home or work environments. This demonstrated a level of trust and even appreciation in the goals of the research project, something that was articulated in the interviews. *Hu hia* and *feefeemuni* are both about building trust through the process.

Interviewing elders and older adults was also something that I have not done much of in my earlier research. Interviewing older and elder adults about culture was a phenomenally humble way to gain entry into this work. This is because older and elder adults treat you like family when you are in their home. This sends a message of “*akwaba*,” an Akan (Twi) term that means “welcome.” I felt truly welcomed and honored to interview this group of living legends.

Knowing the value of elders and older adults, one of the deeper goals of this research intervention was to build strong relationships with elders in the community. By becoming a member of *Asè*, it sent a signal to older and elder adults that I will not extract their knowledge, and I am looking to build with the organization for the long term. Valuing the wisdom of youth is also a major component of *hu hia* and *Asè*. As Sefa Dei (2018) reminds us, “The older brooms and the younger brooms all have value, and one should not be seen as superior to the other. Youth’s voices are equally important to health and well-being of the community; youth contribute ideas and knowledge that is very different from the Elders’, particularly with the

prominence of technology” (Dei, 2018, p. 267). This duality honoring older and younger wisdom and meaning making is consistent with *hu hia*.

Lastly, *boa no* is an Akan concept which acknowledges specific methods and considerations that guide how one “gathers/collects data” (Gammage, 2012). *Boa no* requires that “researchers utilize methods that are appropriate for collecting data from the targeted population” (Gammage, 2012). In addition, researchers must apply “multi-method research models” which assist the researcher towards internalizing a “balanced look” into community truth and community-oriented solutions (Gammage, 2012).

I applied *boa no* by observing storytellers in meetings, their homes, and during performances. By observing storytellers in different environments, I better understood the totality of their involvement within the organization and their personalities as a whole. Often, researchers simply interview participants without a full picture of who participants are when they go home. In addition, I conducted interviews and viewed videos of performances. During interviews, I referred to each storyteller as “*Mama*” or “*Baba*,” Kiswahili terms that mean mother and father respectively. This was done to communicate respect and led to a more open dialogue during data collection. One storyteller spoke to the value of being called “*Mama*” and said that she was glad that I “got it.”

Another way I applied *boa no* was by watching and observing performances. I only watched and attended performances that I had permission to watch and attend. Watching the youth performance gave me insight about how youth approach storytelling and the issues that are important to youth in the stories they created. However, what was also discovered was how young people used group poetry, drum and dance, and other techniques to engage the audience. This was congruent with adult concerts that use African rituals and practices. I also learned from

the performances that storytellers achieve another level of self when performing. They are able to channel a deep energy to deliver characters, songs and other details that ensure a moving performance. I took extreme discretion with not only how I collected data but which data I chose to share.

Lastly, my study was envisioned as a bidirectional study in that it looked at the value of storytelling from the perspective of adults (including elders) *and* youth. Most studies choose a monodirectional approach. However, due to the fact that the storytelling group has both youth and adults – and there is a need for more bidirectional studies about storytelling (Fabius, 2016) – I included both groups in my analysis. As Fabius states, she:

examined storytelling from one direction, focusing on the sharing of stories from elders to younger members of the culture. The field stands to be strengthened if research examines storytelling from a bidirectional point of view (p. 432).

Nonetheless, because of the pandemic, I was unable to collect interviews from youth to fully capture that bidirectional point of view. It is something, however, that Indigenous researchers must do to enhance the field and truly align research alongside Indigenous approaches and worldviews that are all inclusive and exist in a totality not a dichotomy.

As a Black male father, I see through many lenses and perspectives. I endeavor to use my research as a way of re-centering through the use of African-centered praxis in all spaces across the African diaspora. And this is not simply tied to what we often perceive as “African culture,” this is research where Africans can truly be African – without the onslaught of cultural and racial aggressions, violence and assault. As a West-African drummer, musician, poet, storyteller and African-centered educator myself, I have an appreciation for spaces that emphasize storytelling. In addition, because I have learned specifically about African cultural values systems and been

inculcated into local knowledge production and rituals by elders and other cultural keepers, I have a great respect for spaces that preserve the West-African and Black oral tradition.

Research Plan

My research project interviewed adults (11) in Asè: The Chicago Association of Black Storytellers (Asè). In addition, I interviewed a former Asè member whom now works with the National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS). Because my work is limited in scope, I applied purposive sampling to gain access to participants. Purposive sampling assists investigators with selecting partakers from the characteristics of the study and “can be an effective way to gather information” when resources are scarce (Patton, 2001). I also used snowball sampling, or participant involved sampling, where respondents recommended other storytellers and practitioners that should be interviewed in this research project.

Study Setting and Community

One of the major takeaways from these legendary storytellers is how learning about triumphant ADP history and impact is a life-long work. As a result, being able to share that wisdom is not just meaningful, it is monumental. In this way, storytellers become local cultural scholars charged with recapitulating ideas, mores, and social norms to African descendant families in Chicago. What makes these storytellers exceptionally unique is that they all choose to write their own stories. This means that they do even more research than most storytellers. This means that when they perform, it isn’t just cultural, it’s personal. This means it is not simply about education, it is also about being honored and lifted-up. It is an interdependent, trust and release, between the storyteller and the audience. In this spirit, it is a deeply *African-centered storytelling praxis*.

Asè in Chicago

Asè has over 30 active members. All members are Black. Most of these members are in their mid-40s and older. About 90% of the group are women. Asè meetings occurred once a month at a church on the south side of Chicago. These meetings were truly indicative of the Black and West-African culture where Asè draws its name. The meeting operates as an opportunity to build community and storytellers, and traditions. The first portion of the meeting is for guests to come and hear stories from Asè members who are practicing telling their stories to an audience – often just their peers. This part of the meeting provides the storyteller with feedback on stories that is critical for storytellers learning a new art form.

Because all meetings are held at the church, it is symbolic of the interconnectedness of the West-African and Black oral traditions that was largely born from Spirituals created and performed by enslaved and formerly enslaved Africans that were preserved in the Black church. However, there are many groups preserving oral tradition separate from the Black church, like Asè. The reason why meetings are housed at the church is because one of the members of Asè is also a member of the church. As older adults and elders, many of the members of Asè currently serve in positions of influence in the community, or they did for an extensive part of their lives.

After the open storytelling sessions, the group closes its meetings and focuses on the business of the day. This part of the meeting functions mostly like most groups except that it starts with libations, a ritual where ancestral spirits are called into a space using a plant, water, and the word ‘asè.’ Afterwards, there is an agenda, minutes, roles, and several items that the group works through. However, if there are new members, the meeting takes a truly unique turn indeed. There is a collective reading about what they storyteller can expect, how the group will support the storyteller, reciting the names of Ancestors that founded NABS and Asè, singing, drumming, and other rituals like libations. These rituals are extremely important to the very

fabric of the organization and can be a powerful experience for someone who has never experienced these kinds of collective practices in this kind of cultural setting.

At my first Asè meeting, I was a guest. I enjoyed hearing stories from storytellers. Some were intimate, others were funny, but they all had a deeper meaning. At this meeting I shared my project with the group and sought participants for the study. Since I was not a part of Asè, I left before the member portion of the meeting started. I remember feeling at home. It felt like I knew this kind of place existed, just did not know where. I experienced great relief and knew immediately this was an authentic space for my research and life's work.

At my second meeting, I paid my membership dues and became a full member of Asè. I was able to experience the rituals, acknowledgements, and challenges of managing a storytelling organization firsthand. I also better understood the way that the organization functions as a sounding block and educational space for storytellers. After the meeting, food was served, and I continued to schedule additional meetings with several Asè members. I also spoke with the head of the Asè Youth Program at this meeting.

Asè Concerts & Shows

Over the last 30 years, Asè presented shows at schools, community organizations, churches, and local colleges and universities. Currently, Asè has a relationship with the University of Chicago's Logan Center, an arts center working to serve both the university and community's needs. This annual concert allows Asè to showcase powerful stories from seasoned storytellers, raise money for Asè, and inform the larger public about the art of Black storytelling.

In addition to their annual concert, Asè performs at shows on a monthly basis for Logan Center and other venues. Schools often request one or more of the storytellers to come and perform stories – especially during Black History Month. Oftentimes storytellers also have

private or personal performances and gigs that they book outside of Asè. Although I was unable to listen to any adult performances live, I was able to bring my family to a youth performance during Black History Month.

Youth Black History Month Show

Asè Youth host a Black History Month show in February every year that showcases the stories and talents of Asè Youth. This year was no different. Hosted at the Martin Luther King Jr. Public Library, 10 youth performed at the storytelling performance. Watching the show with my children was a powerful. They witnessed young people they knew in other capacities tell stories about their life challenges, lessons and transformation. There were even three youth who presented original stories, something that Asè encourages youth to do when they are ready.

This combination of storytelling, drumming, and food made for a great family event. In addition to this event being open to the public, Asè's adult members also attend the event as well. The significance of this event being hosted in a public library named after a historical icon is also not overlooked. This library was chosen because it represents Black culture and history in the community. This event also began with libations, drumming and ended with drumming and dancing. Youth also sang a collective poem/rap and presented about two stories each. Youth also led a question and response session at the end. Stories and responses were recorded as observations and analyzed along with the adult interviews.

Storytellers: Study Participants and Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 11 Asè adult members (and 1 former Asè adult member). All of those interviewed were 50 or older and 83% of them were women. I use the terms "olders and elders" when talking about interview participants. Olders are those between 50 and 70;

elders are those above 70. Majority of the interviews were elders – only two were elders. However, in this context, elders and elders are very much interchangeable. This is because their impact in the Chicago’s Black community is similar to that of elders – powerful figures and staples that are regarded highly by their audiences and peers. As Golden explains, “as community icons and role models, elders teach children as well as young adults how to navigate in a world that does not value their ancestry, and therefore does not value them” (2016, p. 2). Elders use their wisdom to impact others. I also learned a great deal from all of them. Our conversations were not just dialogue, they were food for the soul. We didn’t simply talk about storytelling as an art, we talked about the human condition.

The Storytellers

This section offers the origin and the catalyst stories of the study participants. I also include words from their interviews. Each of the elders and elders interviewed had amazing stories to tell. They were unique. They were vulnerable. They were transformative in the ways in which they told their life story while interweaving stories that they tell children and adults. With animation most of the time. It was truly an honor listening to them share their lives. They all shared personal and intimate details; they all spoke to the value of storytelling for ADP. It felt like I was family and they all said they were so glad someone was telling their (or Asè) story. Because I am a member of Asè, some depictions come from my work with the storytellers and my observations of their stories.

Mama Yaa Asantewaa is an elder and the current president of Asè. She talked about the value of spending over 50 years working with Black youth. She shared that storytelling came from her educational practices because she wanted young people to know that they had futures that were built on the backs of their past. She recounted:

We rewrote Gwendolyn Brooks' 7-Pool Players, we rewrote that. So it said something to them, you know, they did that. They had the history. We read Black stories. We told Black stuff, you know, cause I'm always telling them something about what has happened to me or someone I know. And I was always sharing that because they need to know. Many of them don't have grandparents. And when they don't have a grandparent, they don't know they can survive.

Sharing stories that recreate truths about Black history, is an integral component of her storytelling agenda as President of Asè. She also was the founding principal of Betty Shabazz Charter School, a premier IBI in Chicago. She talked in length about the importance of research and unique resources that elders and elders bring to the storytelling practice and is currently working to bring more young people into the practice and art of storytelling.

Mama Amina came into storytelling after watching Asè perform and loving the traditional African garb that they adorned:

Someone invited me, it was this lady cause she went to my church, Trinity United Church of Christ, and we wanted to do a Kwanza program. She wanted to do a Kwanza program, and she wanted me to write the program and other programs. And I said okay, let me see what you do as a storyteller. I went to Beverly Arts center. Asè usually dresses in what I call cultural attire when we're on stage. It's all cultural attire, you don't wear anything else. And when they walked in I saw a great sense of pride both in the cultural attire they wore and the way they presented the information to this community at Beverly Arts center on 111th street. So I said, I need to join this group, cause I want to walk in with that, if for nothing but the cultural attire [laughter].

Mama Amina is the former president of Asè. She is a 75-year-old elder who has been a member with Asè for 14 years. She spoke about the importance of storytelling as healing and the spiritual component that interfaces with stories and the storyteller. She also talked about the importance of Asè being a family; something that other storytellers spoke about as well. She studied under Dr. Jacob Carruthers at the Kemetite Institute in Chicago in the 1990s. She recently retired from CPS and is looking to expand her storytelling with older populations.

Mama Kandake is a world renown storyteller. She was selected to be a storyteller at the International Peace Conference in Iraq and has traveled to South African and Ghana to tell

stories. She told a story about how a conversation with a young Black student in her classroom became the catalyst for her bringing storytelling into the classroom. She recalled:

One of the first situations that prompted me to know that I needed to do storytelling, that I needed to introduce storytelling in my therapy programs. This little boy [laughter], he's about nine years old, and so, he was, this little boy was so beautiful. He had skin that looked like smooth ebony. And he had eyes that were so big and so beautiful they just sparkled, you know. Like stars in the night sky. And his smile would make you melt. Beautiful, beautiful child. Very very Black. Very very Beautiful. He came running up to me one day, Mrs. Armstrong! I was like, what's the matter baby? He said, he said, 'I'm so Black I look like an African.' And I said, 'well baby did you say thank ya?' [pause]. And He looked at me and he said, 'huh?' [laughter] Mindset...he didn't know.

Mama Kandake is one of the founding members of Asè and an elder. She was very animated and physically and vocally acted out stories during our interview as if she was in front of an audience – it was beautiful to watch. She often performs at storytelling events and Kwanzaa celebrations. She also performs at Asè's annual storytelling concert. She spoke about storytelling can be healing because it creates understanding across cultural and ethnic backgrounds. She is interested in teaching people about the art of storytelling as a practice and not just performance.

Mama Nefertiti is also a founding member of Asè. She, along with her husband, are in charge of the youth part of Asè. She got into storytelling through a friend and she talked about how it was a natural jump from the cultural work she was already doing:

Well I should say, before I was storytelling and calling myself a storyteller, I was working with H. Mark Williams and the Cultural Messengers. And we did vignettes from Black literature as well as songs that, you know, now its, like Feelin' Fine is all over the place. But back in the day when we were singin' it, it wasn't a whole lot of people signin' feeling fine, you know what I'm sayin.' But anyway, so I met Mama Kandake, and she was telling me about storytelling. And I went to see her and I was like, I do this, I just don't call it storytelling.

In addition to running the youth division of Asè, Nefertiti also drums and works in other artistic capacities. She is an older and spoke extensively about the importance of youth storytellers. We

talked about so much that we even discussed doing additional interviews because there was too much to capture. This was a theme in other interviews as well.

Mama Moremi is also a founding member of Asè. She is an elder and one of the oldest members in Asè at 80. She first entered storytelling after an early retirement from CPS after 28 years of teaching. She shared:

But I remember I had a professor who said I should be a storyteller, which I was not familiar with, storytelling. And then once I was out of the board I decided, well what am I going to do. And I remember what he said. Cause he said I had the speaking voice and I had no knowledge that I could speak to anybody because I'm a primary teacher.

Like a few other members in Asè, Mama Moremi is also a part of the Toastmasters, and other storytelling groups in Chicago. She enjoys going to storytelling events throughout the city and is invited to feature as a storyteller wherever she goes. She not only wants more youth to participate in storytelling, they also provide inspiration for her.

Momma Nina is an elder at 79 years old. Storytelling began for her at an early age. She talked about how her early diagnosis with Polio as a child meant that her grandmother made sure that she was able to find other ways to make it. She recounted:

And then I was returned back to Mississippi to my grandmother. She was not sure I'd ever walk. So she began to have me sing all day, and draw all day, and sew, she'd give me a needle and thread, she wanted me to be able to use my hands and my voice to survive... It went on to my 20s where I began to produce shows with children always looking for the children that were not taken care of as well as some of the other children.

Momma Nina has performed many shows and does full character embodiments of Ida B. Wells, Mary McCloud Bethune, Harriet Tubman, Aunt Clara Brown, Sojourner Truth and Fannie Lou Hamer. She also works with youth who are in prison and talked about the spiritual aspect of storytelling and how we must preserve our culture through storytelling.

Mama Nandi also remembers writing and telling stories since the age of 10. She even wrote stories with other children about a town with no adults. But she recalls distinctly that they

were not ‘telling’ stories then just writing. She also talked about how she was introduced to storytelling by a mentor or Asè member. She recalled:

When I really got into storytelling, cause I was a Chicago Public School teacher, and then I become a CPS social worker. And a number of my friends were storytellers starting with Shanta Nurala. She’s the first storyteller I knew. She’s been telling stories since the 70s. Then a couple of other people I know, Mama Kandake. And she said, ‘well why don’t you come to an Asè meeting? And I’m like, girl I’m not a storyteller. And she said, ‘girl you never know just come and see.’ And so I went to a meeting and it felt wonderful.

Mama Nandi is an older. She has traveled all over the world to tell stories including to Ghana. She talked about how important it is that we connect the storytelling tradition to African roots and looks forward to cultivating the next generation of storytellers.

Mama Makeda, like so many Asè members, is a writer. She talked about how her love for words and writing led to an interest in storytelling. She shared:

And so I got to Asè, because I love words, I love reading. I wasn’t a storyteller umm as Asè was. I would tell stories, I would write stories, or I would adapt stories and then I would speak them but I always had a script. I wanted to be able to speak from my heart, but so far it's been mostly from my head trying to memorize things and that's not quite the storytelling way. So I...well, before I started doing the narrative storytelling they would always say, ”you know, that's what you need to do,” no that’s not what I want to do. And so, but I did it, and I was very good at it.

Storytelling is an essential component of Mama Makeda’s life. She is an older and the Treasurer of Asè and served as committee chair for 12 years. She performs across the city and is interested in developing both the art of storytelling, and how to make the business of storytelling more sustainable.

Baba Nkrumah also has a unique story about his entry into storytelling. He talked about how a business presentation gone bad shifted his life into a completely new direction. He recalled:

I got into storytelling because I was a public speaker, and I was hired to do an hour and you get the 3x5 cards and put all your points and everything. Well I did my hour in 8 minutes and I was like well what do I do now. So I told a story, and they loved the story.

Baba Nkrumah is an older and also works with the youth in Asè. He is married to Mama Nefertiti. Together, they have traveled the country telling stories. As a musician who plays West-African instruments, he is looking forward to watching youth grow through the storytelling program and seeing the impact that storytelling has had on youth and the community.

Mama Maathai was also in CPS when she began to develop her interest in storytelling. She talked about how she invited the same Black storyteller that inspired other Asè members, to come to her school and how she left a powerful impression. She shared:

And how that happened, brother Hall, is when I was making the decision to move on from St. Sabina, and I took the position with the Archdiocese as Schools Consultant, one of the last things I did was to have a storyteller come to St. Sabina. Cause in my time there that had never happened. So I invited this woman who came, her name was Shanta, and she by one is the first premiere African American storyteller of Chicago. So she came, I listened to her, I stood in the back, I watched how the kids were reacting, and I stood there and said that is what I'm gonna do when I grow up.

Mama Maathai is an older and currently a part of the Community Schools initiative at CPS. She started her education career as a teacher at St. Sabina. She then became the first African American ley principal at the school. Since then, she has traveled the world and performed in various events as a storyteller. She is looking forward to promoting discussions about the preservation of the art of storytelling in Chicago.

Baba Lumumba was also told that he had the “voice” for storytelling. He talked about how storytelling is interlocked with poetry and how other people acknowledging his talent really propelled him forward into spoken word and storytelling. He recounted:

There was a teacher in Santa Barbara who said, your voice, you have that voice...Kay Fulton was the Dean of Dance, an African-American woman from Chicago. Her best friend was Ellenor Flewellen, she heard my voice and said, you need to join my class, literary arts, understanding the works of African-American authors. She introduced me to

County Cullen, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Amir Baraka, even Nelson Mandela, the voice, the language, our culture. Fredrick Douglass and his speeches. Back when Black folks were not allowed to talk, and were told they had 1/3 of a brain, you know, said the dominant society. And she said to me, you have to provide your voice for their words. That started it.

Baba Lumumba originally started as a poet and spoken word artist. He hosted open mics and worked with and met Chicago greats like Sam Greenlee, Oscar Brown Jr., Margaret Burroughs, Dorothy Height, Malik Yusef, and Jay Ivy. He currently lives in Texas and works with elders and youth to tell stories and teach the arts. He is also interested in making cultural arts work more sustainable for the artists.

Mama Auset refers to herself as a “vessel.” She is also a retired educator and elder. She spoke about how her upbringing led to her being a storyteller and the value she receives telling stories to children:

I am not a storyteller; I am a vessel. We are prophets. Who learn, you change the story to fit the time.

She is a dynamic storyteller and is also a member of Toastmasters, another storytelling group in Chicago. She is captivated by how story is able to move the audience and how her original stories communicate facts about ADP history and culture.

All of the storytellers traveled unique life journeys to get to Asè. These journeys create a petri dish of cultural expression and wisdom. Even still, within these experiences, there are several themes that emerged across all storytellers. As a result, the following themes materialized from the storytellers: (a) a devotion to impacting ADP in the U.S. using African history, (b) previous engagement with storytelling as a child, and (c) experience as an educator or artist.

A devotion to impacting ADP in the U.S. using African history, is both an understanding of a collective story and a responsibility to tell that story. This is shown in how storytellers serve

as local scholars often researching historical facts to provide ADP realities that are tangible, authentic, and relatable. Mama Maathai explained:

When I joined Asè, and I started hearing the types of stories that people were telling, and the research that went behind it, I wasn't doing any kind of research. I found a story, I liked it, I learned it, I told it. But when I found out that number 1, it's important for us to tell our story, because if we don't tell it, somebody else will and they won't tell it in the right way - that was the first thing. That was critical, it's our life's work to do that. The second thing that was critical for me was, when you find a story or when you write your own story, you need to do the research behind why you're doing it.

Mama Maathai shared that this dedication to represent ADP history fairly and accurately is key.

It means that the very act of re-centering is rudimentary and transformative. They all spoke about leaving a positive legacy with ADP children in the U.S. in some form or another:

Mama Kandake: Um, many of us, became storytellers for different reasons. My main reason, for example, was to address some of the issues that I saw in my kids. Mainly, their lack of identity, yeah, mainly their lack of identity. And their inability to appreciate the beauty that they have inside.

Mama Nefertiti: Some people are pretty straight. But most Black storytellers use a lot of passion. Because, if you're telling a story you like, you know, and especially if it's a story you're tellin' because you think our kids need this story, or our adults need this story, you're gonna tell it in a way that they can feel it. And that's been the whole thing.

Baba Nkrumah: I find that story for me is very powerful because you learn your own personal stories that you want to tell...when you tell your own story, you can help people relate. And I always say from my experience as a salesperson, if they get a strong me too that they identify, and they put themselves in the story too.

Mama Nandi: So I want to tell stories for young people in particular, and everybody generally, that leaves them with something they can do something with. Cause I don't believe in art for art's sake, I think everything is a message.

The storytellers all conveyed a personal reason for wanting to do storytelling. While they all shared similar goals for what they want their storytelling to accomplish, how they became a storyteller is rooted in their life experience.

For some storytellers, they were never introduced to storytelling as a child. practice of community storytelling for ADP in Chicago did not start officially until the 60's or 70's.

However, there was a large contingency of people doing Black arts and Black power movement work during that time. So much of the storytelling that storytellers remember came from home. Several storytellers talked about how members of their families told stories and how this was one of the first introductions to storytelling:

Momma Nina: But I involve children in storytelling and the arts and performing. Probably started around 10 or 11 years old when I'd have the neighborhood children perform, and sign and tell stories.

Mama Nandi: Yeah I think there's definitely a connection. I remember my mother definitely telling me stories when I was a little girl, and unfortunately none of them were preserved, you know. But I remember her, you know, at night she would tell us stories. And she got those stories from her mother, and she probably got em' from her mother. Like this picture here [she shows me a family photo], thinking about people sitting at the feet. Cause I remember, my mother and dad and all of their sisters and brothers, you'd be around, and they'd be talkin' about stuff and about what happened in the last generation or what happened when they got in trouble at work. Or somebody who had to out of Mississippi overnight because they got into somethin' with somebody white. And then there would come a time, cause we would be sittin' there just wrapped. Then there would come a time when they would say, okay y'all need to go we gettin' ready to talk grown folk talk, you know.

Because of cultural and racial injustice, many ADP families in the U.S. shared stories as a way to be in the know about local community struggles and triumphs. The term 'word of mouth' is heavily used among ADP in the U.S. and connotes the sharing of information, news, and current events. This was a way for early ADP in the U.S. to be in the know about rapidly changing situations in their community.

The third resemblance, previous experience as an educator or artist at some point in their lives, was also the most salient. In fact, out of the 12 storytellers interviewed, all of them said that they worked as an educator or another community artist at some point. Mama Makeda expressed:

But one of my members, and I know that most of the members of Asè are former librarians and teachers, yeah. And so they were used to communicating with youth and young children.

Being an educator in CPS provides a unique experience for anyone but especially storytellers. It gives them access to the students' lives, challenges, and power. Mama Moremi talked about how teaching created a unique vantage point by allowing her to see how powerful stories and folktales were in the classroom. She shared:

Yeah cause I have to admit I really wasn't into that in teachin' I just read to the children. But I always do no matter how crazy they got. If I took a book out, and read them a story, it would always settle them down and sooth them. And to me I didn't even notice anything spectacular but I was always able to connect. And then it's just a lot of lessons to be taught with those folktales. You're just not tellin' a tale, you're teaching. It's always a kind of moral attached.

All of the storytellers desired to facilitate historic and cultural instruction beyond the limits of CPS's curriculum.

Mama Yaa Asantewaa, a founding principal of an African-centered charter school (Betty Shabazz), provided a meaningful perspective on how storytelling helps to relate to students' experiences. She described:

And so, yeah. So all of those stories and things there's just so much, you know. There's just so much overlap in what the students are going through. And if you have 5 kids telling you something within the span of a week you know that it's something you know that it's something that you need to address. And you know I had a lot of my colleagues just say, girl you not a therapist, this is when I was still a teacher, you not a therapist you can't deal with that you not the babysitter. And I'm like, no, we have to deal with this because it's not going away, you know. And it's a part of who they are and their educational experience. And if they're comin' to school with some stuff in front of them that keeps them from participatin' in my lesson, I need to deal with it, you know.

The ability to recognize the pain and learning that young people experience is key. Mama Maathai, was also a principal and currently works with CPS within their Community Schools Initiative, talked about how she was looking for something other than education after her principalship but instead became a community educator through storytelling. She recalled:

When you step into that school that's that principal school, but if they truly want what's best for that school and that community then they are not gonna mind sharing leadership.

But it takes trust. And building and making those mistakes, and being humbled by figuring it out, and problem solving all over again. I always thought that once I stopped being principal, I was gonna do less and sew (inaudible), and it's not gonna be with education. But, the powers that be never let that happen, he kept me in some form or fashion with education.

This vast amount of experience inside schools and across school districts and communities creates a unique inner-wisdom that helps her relate intimately with youth and their needs.

Others also spoke to the value of being an educator and how that influenced their lives and the ways in which they approach storytelling with youth and adults. They explained:

Mama Amina: Okay I'ma tell you what people have told me not people in Asè. I do a lot more work than a lot of people do. One lady told me once, 'girl it's no way I'm ever going to do that much work.' But I do it because I love it...[pause]. I did lesson plans. And then you had to show how you were going to use this information. But like I said, the um, I feel like I can keep telling stories for a long time and never have to repeat them because I keep myself current and have resources other than like I said, other than what is given to me by the normal channels. Because I'm a researcher.

Mama Kandake: I was just asked like three days ago to teach a sign-language class at Chicago State. I'm like, so when does the class start? They're like, Saturday. I'm like, in two days [laughter]. But it worked out well. And the timing was interesting cause I said I was going to brush up on my signs anyway. And that's another thing about storytelling, I do incorporate sometimes, signing in my story. For one thing, I talk with my hands I guess as you see. I talk with my hands and sometimes I'm signing and I don't even realize it. But when I know that they're people in the audience who are hearing impaired, and sometimes I've done entire audiences that were deaf and or hard of hearing. So it is wonderful to be able to do storytelling and that kind of thing with them in sign-language.

Mama Nandi: But that's right, that's what we have to do because WE are a family. I said its U.S. against everything that's outside of that classroom. And I would let them know, if somebody comes to me and tells me you did something, I'm going to back you personally. But when you go out of this classroom and you embarrass all of us, I'ma deal with you one-on-one. I will back you in public, but I'ma deal wit chu one-on-one. And they felt that. They felt that they knew that I cared about who they were as individuals.

My oldest students that I had are turning 42 this year, and I'm still in touch with them, I had them in 5th grade, you know. I'm in touch with about 10 of my former students and it's wonderful, because they talk about different stuff. I've been to graduations, baby showers, and their children's graduations, and that's just wonderful. And I know it's because of the bond we built then, because they knew I was concerned about who they are as individuals. Cause I wanted as much from them, as I hope teachers wanted from my own children when they were in school, you know. So yeah, I miss it. I miss it a lot.

These descriptions show how prior experience with education – formal and informal – provides a solid source of wisdom for storytellers looking to respect and honor ADP' culture, identity, and experiences. Being concerned for someone's livelihood and future is an integral ingredient to why these storytellers do the work they do.

Table 1.2 Summary table of Storytellers

Name	Age Group	Location
Mama Yaa Asantewaa	Elder	Chicago
Mama Amina	Elder	Chicago
Mama Kandake	Elder	Chicago
Mama Nefertiti	Older	Chicago
Mama Moremi	Elder	Chicago
Mama Maathai	Older	Chicago
Mama Nandi	Older	Chicago
Mama Nina	Elder	Chicago
Mama Auset	Elder	Chicago
Mama Makada	Older	Chicago
Baba Nkrumah	Older	Chicago
Baba Lumumba	Elder	Houston

Data Collection

The performance style of the storytellers and this research intervention required that I apply a verity of data collection methods and African and Indigenous research approaches to honor storytellers, respect their environments and not create additional hinderances for

storytellers while conducting research. In addition, I used various coding strategies after data was collected mostly to guarantee the data provided adequate and accurate analysis that was reflective of storytellers and their experiences.

My plan was to conduct these interviews in two rounds. First, I wanted to interview adult storytellers from Asè in Chicago, IL. Second, I planned to attend storytelling performances and watch footage of previous performances. Lastly, I wanted to re-interview the same adult participants. These final interviews were to examine questions raised in the first round and feature questions about current interventions, policy, and next steps for storytelling in Black communities across the country - especially those associated with NABS.

I used observations from meetings, conversations, videos, and other online media to support the interviews that were conducted in the first round. In addition, I restructured my research questions and approach to focus solely on adults. While I did observe a youth performance, I did not interview any youth for this project.

The plan was to attend storytelling performances of Asè members that I interviewed. I was scheduled to observe shows. I was also supposed to get dozens of shows and previous performances from an Asè members. However, I adjusted this plan to reflect the needs of the storytellers and due to the large amount of video footage available online. As a result, I worked with video footage from storytellers I interviewed. I also have several other videos from members that were sent to me directly. These videos were also coded, and themes were pulled from these videos.

In the first round of interviews, I started with Asè to contextualize and locate my research with a population in Chicago that works to provide African-centered storytelling. I was curious as why this service was provided and what they have learned in providing this service in a city

like Chicago. In addition, I wanted to hear from young storytellers to better understand why they are members with Asè and learn about any value they get from meeting monthly to tell and hear stories. This first round of interviews allowed storytellers to identify if there were any self-healing themes and attributes that emerged from the work they do and the stories they share. I also asked participants to recommend additional storytellers and initiatives that I should investigate in my work. The research site for the first round was conducted at storyteller's residences and Asè meetings at Christ the Mediator Church in Chicago.

In addition, I asked participants to speak to the value of storytelling and proverbs in schools, classrooms, and other community education projects. This was extremely important because it showed the breadth and depth of how this practice is being used and identified notable cultural interventions across the country. Connecting this work to other cities and spaces is critical to showing how it is being used throughout the African world. In subsequent works, I may revisit interview participants so they can elaborate on key themes in the first round.

I made sure to protect the confidentiality of every participant. Participation in this study were kept confidential. An alias was assigned immediately after the interviews. I recorded each conversation and then transcribed each interview. Only audio recordings were collected in this research. Participants were notified of the audio recording on the consent form.

Table 1.3 Data Collection

Data Collected	Method	Location	Guiding Questions
Asè Meetings	Observations	In-person & virtual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What takes place during an Asè Meeting? 2. What cultural practices and rituals are being used to build community? 3. Is this a healing and nurturing space for storytellers?

Interviews	Interviews	In-person & virtual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you become a storyteller? 2. What impact does storytelling have on the storyteller? 3. What value does Asè provide for youth and older/elder storytellers? 4. What impact does storytelling have on the audience? 5. How do Asè performances provide culture and healing?
Asè Youth Concert	Observations	In-person	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What value does storytelling have for youth storytellers? 2. How do they organize their concerts? 3. What kind of stories do youth tell?
Videos of Performances	Document/media analysis	Online videos and a virtual concert	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How are concerts organized and performed? 2. What role does culture have in these concerts? 3. How do storytellers perform stories? 4. What impact do these concerts have on the audience?

Data Analysis

In the first round of interviews, I coded for certain words and phrases that built on and illuminated unique themes. I then decompartmentalized the themes, words and phrases to see if patterns emerge in the data across locations, content and techniques. I looked for repetition within interviews and across participants. I also coded for terms and phrases that were colloquial and intended for a certain African-centered audience. In addition, I highlighted if particular content (e.g. stories about heroes, stories about sacrifice, etc.) and specific practices (e.g. teaching proverbs, teaching storytelling, etc.) arose from the interviews.

In addition, I coded and contextualized how participants arrived at many of the phrases and themes. I looked for their ability to provide context, and themes that they may not have even known they were providing. I looked for both responses that added to my original thinking on

this issue, and content that may have contradicted previous thoughts and stances. I wanted to communicate both what I expected to hear, what was heard, and how what was shared changed my thinking on the subject. This is an example of *feefeemuni* and *boa no* in that you are not simply concerned with the kind of data you collect you are also cognizant of whether you are honoring the community in how you represent and share that data with others.

Since *feefeemuni* is about sincerity and authenticity, I am uninvested in articulating data in a silo, instead, I am responsible for communicating how the data changed my understanding and perspective. For instance, I originally thought that storytelling was healing mostly because of the content of the stories themselves. However, once I developed deeper understandings of the African oral and eldership traditions, I saw that healing was also happening due to how Asè supports its members and the rituals built into Asè culture and performances. When storytellers explained how Asè works with storytellers by providing feedback on stories (which I observed extensively as a member), it changed my perspective on how healing functions both for the storytellers and the audience. Thus, I assessed how cultural groups function and support older adults which presented new ideas and stretched my work even further.

It is important to articulate what was expected because it places researchers and participants on the same knowledge plane. This also creates a level of authenticity and transparency that is not found in all research approaches. The Indigenous research approaches (*feefeemuni*, *hu hia* and *boa no*) requires the interviewer to humble themselves to the worldview and sacredness of the group and then requires that same humility when sharing how they as a researcher have been transformed throughout the process. Embracing transformation for both participants *and* researchers are unique to Afrocentric research approaches looking to further ADP.

Limitations

Covid-19 and the global pandemic created specific limitations. Although I interviewed storytellers before the quarantine was enacted, I did have to make adjustments. As a result of the lockdown, I changed some of my plans of attending and observing performances in-person to viewing online content instead. Nonetheless, I was able to glean much from the stories that were shared in the interviews and in the videos online. I used stories posted online and stories that storytellers shared to piece together story content and performance reception.

Conclusion

This research intervention was designed not simply to gather information, but to honor cultural keepers in the process. I assessed my interviews based on the participants' ability to open-up in dialogue and the level of comfort and excitement that they had when sharing their work. In addition, I also evaluated how well I inserted follow-up questions that led to deeper discoveries. I then used that initial assessment to improve how I was observing participants after the interviews. Finally, I also assessed interviews based on the amount of details and examples that participants were able to offer in the interviews. Collecting a rich assortment of examples, models, and tools in the first round led to a more rigorous investigation of the impact these practices had on the collective as a whole.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS & ANALYSIS: PERSONHOOD, SPIRIT AND HEALING

The Art of African-centered Storytelling Praxis

African-centered storytelling praxis is both the theory behind why storytellers use African history and cultural knowing for self-determination and a practice for preserving the art of African oral tradition through storytelling. The findings section outlines how observations and interviews from the data collection process led to the term, African-centered storytelling praxis. Because storytellers are also educators, the term “praxis” is used to emphasize how youth, older adults and elders are using African-centered pedagogical tools in their storytelling.

African-centered storytelling praxis is the congealing of the art of African storytelling traditions in conjunction with African-centered educational pedagogy. Since storytelling is education (Dei, 2020/2019; Pouille, 2019; Tuwe, 2016; Mireku-Gyimaih, 2016), it is important to clarify what kind of education we want it to be for future generations. African-centered storytelling praxis is the synthesis of ADP oral tradition and decades scholarship on African-centered educational pedagogy and is the desire to use African history and nation building as pedagogical tools for self-determination. From the interviews, an African-centered storytelling praxis is one that focuses on: (1) *developing the moral personhood of the storyteller* (2) *personifying and mastering the art of African storytelling*; (2.1) *safekeeping of spirit and self-determination*; (2.2) *reclaiming African memory and culture*; and (2.3) *self-advocating through intergenerational relationship building*.

Storytelling develops the moral personhood of the storyteller

Storytellers are unique in that they are willing to provide us with an intimate entry into their minds, hearts, and ideas about what they have learned and experienced. Many storytellers talked in their interviews about the process and practice of storytelling as a sacred art. It is not

entertainment. Nonetheless, storytellers go above and beyond to put their whole body and being into the stories they create. This level of dedication is often able to animate the inanimate and lift up that which has been lost.

The interviews revealed that the impact on the storyteller's personhood was the most significant of all the themes. This is largely because it honors the attitudes of the storyteller and speaks to the essence of storytelling. The impact on personhood focuses on the ideas of purpose, self-determination, relationship building with youth storytellers and the audience. In this way, storytellers spoke to a unique inter-accountability. These concepts of self-determination, self-edification, and personal personhood development are interconnected.

Storytellers felt overwhelmingly that storytelling improved their sense of self and ability to connect with not just a personhood, but an African personhood. They shared a feeling of renewed interest in themselves, their families and their communities due to learning and expressing familial stories and those that centered their Ancestors. They also spoke with a sense of pride as they shared stories, experiences and occasions where family and Ancestors persevered through oppression, enslavement, and racism. They spoke with joy as they recounted how they would listen to great grandparents talk about living as ADP in the U.S. and struggling for freedom and respect. Furthermore, storytellers talked about how engaging in an education process to know more about the accomplishments of these ADP in the U.S. during enslavement increased their feelings of self-pride and self-edification.

Educating by teaching life lessons

Teaching life lessons are also an essential part of Asè's mission. The storytellers continually emphasized their desire to impart lessons and develop personhood through their stories. Morals, values, lessons are taken very seriously and are key attributes of Akan

storytelling (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016; 2011). Storytellers should teach from shared experiences and address morals and lessons that apply to the social, political, historical, and spiritual condition (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016). Their ability to pull from their own experience is essential. They also pulled content from the diaspora. Content that is, “old such as the past historical events or new such as topical issues of the current times” makes for compelling and powerful stories (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016, p. 174).

Using one’s own personal experiences is key to developing one’s personhood. In the Akan tradition, “an individual can be a human being without being a person” (Gyekye, 2004). This is a critical distinction in the Akan tradition. It shows that one’s humanity is never taken away from someone simply because of their life and moral struggles. Additionally, this idea also signifies the pretense of specific essential mores, aspirations and moral virtues that a human being should have the capacity to conform and display, if they are a person (Gyekye, 2004). An individual is judged based on how their actions align with and fall short of the aims and principles of personhood (Gyekye, 2004). Regardless, even those that are morally “not a person” do not lose their rights as a human being or as a citizen. In addition, the community should not end their moral compassion or discontinue their expressions of acceptable moral norms (Gyekye, 2004).

The Akan moral personhood framework is keen here because storytellers must first help young children see that yes, ‘you are a person too.’ This is similar to the Akan concept *oye onipa* which means “he is a person” (Gyekye, 2004). In a sense, Gyekye speaks of the *normative* form of judgement where “he is a person” is understood as “he has a good character,’ ‘he is plenteous,’ he is calm,’ ‘he is humble,’ he has respect for others” (Gyekye, 2004). Due to the conditions for ADP in the U.S., it is also important to add, ‘I have respect for myself’ – a concept

not all African descendant cultures have to teach because the self is not disconnected from the culture. In fact, Gyekye (2004) explains:

When you add Akan oral orature and oral literature – as the modes and means for children to achieve moral personhood, you really have a blueprint for teaching children how to be ethically humane human beings.

Framing children as beings in the process of obtaining personhood, is very unique. It frames how morals are used in Akan language, thoughts, and daily practices (Gyekye, 2004). Since ADP in the U.S. do not have the accompanying African language and daily practices, stories and other African-centered tools may exist as the only cultural inculcation of ADP culture and morality.

Once storytellers have developed a deep connection to African history it helps to contextualize ADP history in the U.S. Knowing that our history did not begin here is an essential educational opportunity for African-centered storytelling praxis and making those connections. It informs how we think about character and behavior over time. Mama Nandi sums this up perfectly:

And so I think it's important to tell stories of our Ancestors who went through that experience because in a lot of ways that explains some of our situation now. Now I'm not saying we need to go back 300-400 year and say, you know, okay that's why I don't have a job because of that. I ain't talkin' that kind of craziness. But when you have, ah, 2,3,4,5,6 generations of people who were not allowed to marry, and men who were not allowed to take care of the families. And women who had to teach their sons to bow their heads and not look in the eyes of a white man or white anybody. And you had, young men whose lives were threatened by the mistress, you know, who wanted him to come to her bed when the masta was gone but he knew he was riskin' his life either way.

If he said no he was riskin' his life, and if he did it and got caught he was riskin' his life. That kind of pathology does not go away. Some of it is cellular. And we need to be willing to do the work, the psychological work, the spiritual work, to dig into that and then bring it up and expose it and work through it, you know, so we can destroy it once and for all. And create some new stuff cause we're a brand-new people. We are 400 years old, you know. We are not like folk who have never left the continent of Africa and we are not like folk who sprang up here and have always had American Ancestors.

We are a brand-new people and we gotta decide what kind of people we're gonna be. We gotta create that, and it's up to us. Like Karenga said, to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves, and not lettin' other people do it. So I think that's our task. And I think it's the job of Black storytellers to do so in a way that. Like I say, not hit people over the head, but kinda like...brings it in gently, you know, a lesson. Where you don't necessarily know you've been taught something. But you've got something lingering in your mind that you can come back to later and say, aw yeah that's what she said, you know. So yeah, I think that's our role as storytellers.

Ensuring that ADP in the U.S. produce cultural narratives is at the heart of what storytellers shared. The uniqueness of their collective story must flow through the mechanisms that can be preserved through time and space.

Storytelling teaches living memory

The way that memory is unearthed and packaged into neat digestible stories (factual historical narratives) is unique in Asè. Not all storytelling organization are making attempts to personalize history in this way. This is an essential component of reclaiming memory.

When we speak of African tradition or history we mean oral tradition; and no attempt at penetrating the history and spirit of the African peoples is valid unless it relies on that heritage of knowledge of every kind patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, from master to disciple, down through the ages. This heritage is not yet lost, but lies there in the memory of the last generation of great depositories, of whom it can be said: 'they are the living memory of Africa (Ba, 1981, p. 165).

This 'living memory' is found in these living stories. Storytellers make historical figures, ideas, concepts, eras, movements, theories, topics, units, and other curricula come alive in their stories. They both use information that is factual and present the information in a way that is alive and in line with a deeper lineage of oral tradition. This is at the crux of African-centered storytelling

praxis – using community space to teach history and bring history alive through rituals and the antiquitous art of storytelling.

The storytellers are cultural keepers. They are living libraries of information, experiences, artifacts, and carry a respect for the craft of keeping stories. They are also living legends in that they are able to connect people to both an ADP history in the U.S. *and* African history. This is something that cannot be said for many continental Africans. We must honor them while they are here and not only when they become Ancestors. Writing a dissertation about them is one way to honor them – but the ultimate way to honor them is to better understand how their work makes us better people. This is reflected in our African personhood.

Receiving and delivering moral personhood development

This impact on the storytellers manifested into several transformations and changes in moral personhood for the participants, as explained in reflections on storytelling as a cradle of self-worth, healing, strength, empathy, connection, courage, and critical thinking:

So, we've always made an impact on the world, but we've not been allowed to see that glory, or to see that value. So those of us who finally learn to see it, we need to shed a light on it to other people. Because it's only through healing our psyches, not just healing our hearts, but healing our psyches...losing those shackles from our minds. That's the kind of healing that we need to do, that's going to really, really allow us to rise up. And when we started the youth program, Mama Nefertiti and Baba Nkrumah are running for Asè, and so we've got these wonderful children, who I mean, some of the stories that they choose to tell, are really quite phenomenal. And their writing more stories and what have you.

Mama Kandake explains how storytellers experience collective challenges and use story as a vehicle to gain strength, heal, and move through that pain – while sharing their own personal transformations. Furthermore, healing must occur holistically and include the mind, body, heart, and soul.

Participants also talked about how storytelling helped them release stress they received from their lived experiences and careers. Storytelling provides a natural release for cultural keepers and former educators because they get to craft the story theme, contents and audience. While many volunteer, some use storytelling as a source of income. Having control over the material is a very liberating experience for educators and former educators who are used to teaching from a standard curriculum. This creates a new realm of possibilities for cultural keepers. Mama Maathai shared:

And so one of my outlets to, um, cause stress does come with these jobs. One of the outlets for me was becoming a storyteller. Because there I found I could tell stories that were, um, true. But I can tell fictitious stories. I could tell biblical tales. I could tell biographical tales. It was an opportunity for me to teach still, but in a different kind of arena.

Releasing through stories is something that was a common theme throughout the interviews.

Many others talked about how they have been healed through the process and act of telling stories, and the reception they received. In fact, while it is mostly understood that you are coming for a transformative experience when you choose to attend most Black storytelling events, it is not as widely understood what those events do for the storytellers themselves. The interviews revealed that storytellers experience a deep sense of healing, gratitude, and joy from using rituals and voice to connect with their audience.

Storytelling also allows storytellers to address different topics and current events as they happen. This means that storytelling is always current and relevant. Cultural keepers talked about discussing topics like ADP history, political regimes and leaders, freedom fighters, racism, self-love, and many other cultural topics. Participants discussed how this kind of information is largely absent in school curricula, and how the media distorts depictions of ADP sending inaccurate representations to the minds and hearts of our youth.

This impact is not simply summed up in one or two words; it does not come from one or two stories. It is a kind of gradual affinity for the value of storytelling and that gets stronger with time. One of the statements that really summed up the duality of both the impact that storytellers receive from telling stories and the response they intend to receive from their storytelling practice, came from Mama Kandake. She expressed that storytelling helps you connect with yourself and heal from the past. She recalled:

Tarzan, that one production all by itself, did more damage to the psyche of Black people than almost anything else. Because it not only poised our own psyche against ourselves, it poisoned the psyche of others against us as well. So the potential for somebody to want to connect with us wasn't there. We didn't even want to connect with ourselves...that's a pickle. When you don't want to connect with yourself, that's a pickle. It's time healing to take place. And once you know the story of...the wonders that you are, you can't help but heal, you know.

If healing means, which by my definition, healing is a process that brings you to a space of balance and wellbeing. And that can apply to so many things. So if by knowing your own story, you can better get to that space. If by being willing to learn the stories of other people, it can inspire a sense of empathy and connection and understanding, then maybe we can get somewhere. Just maybe we can get somewhere.

Storytelling pedagogy was revealed by the storytellers in two unique ways: the intentional praxis that storytellers apply before the story is shared and the public sharing of the story. All of the storytellers spoke to the amount of research and preparation that goes into crafting their stories - this will be discussed more in the art of storytelling theme. In addition, being connected to Asè, an ADP in the U.S. group that focuses on original stories, enhances the level of rigor that is involved in story crafting. Each of the storytellers support one another, and they learn how to not simply deliver the content, but how to ensure that it is accurate as well. Their praxis provides an immense amount of appreciation, transformation and needed respite for the storytellers – and thus a constantly evolving personhood.

One of the most powerful observations for me, an aspiring storyteller, was watching each storyteller demonstrate their storytelling style and technique during our interviews. Mama Kandake and Mama Yaa Asantewaa each moved seamlessly from conversation to story, usually with animation and vocal changes (it was a pleasure to witness). Mama Amina, Mama Maathai and Mama Auset told stories but did not embody the characters in the interview. And Momma Nina and Baba Lumumba both shared folk poetry. Regardless, all shared stories based on the conversation and talked about memorable experiences when the audience was deeply impacted by what they shared.

It was clear, all the storytellers use the performance venue and space to share their research in intimate settings for all to hear. These sentiments from the storytellers, that storytelling is therapeutic, and a certain reverence being able to share and have people appreciate their attempts to educate, illuminates the honor they feel in being able to serve the community in this way. This sense of pride in their mission is similar to that of a teacher and pastor; it is also what separates African personhood from non-ADP personhood.

The storytellers also highlighted how their efforts are centered in representing what is the best and most desirable for ADP across the diaspora. In this way, they teach the morals and values that they feel African descendant youth and adults in the U.S. should strive towards. This requires careful thought, planning, research, and coordination of the story theme and delivery. At the heart of their work is a calling to let people know that regardless of the oppression, segregation, police brutality, and misinformation, we still remain because our stories still remain.

These findings, based off of the interviews from the storytellers, affirm, and further the conclusions of other scholars who have inquired about ADP storytelling in the U.S. Concretely, this research confirms and transmutes the colorful research about the “undreamed geniuses” that

make up ADP storytelling in the U.S. (Hurstons, 1995; Ogunleye, 1997; Edwards, 2009). More importantly, this study also supports the healing component of storytelling (Fabius, 2016; Edwards, 2009; Black & Rubinstein, 2009; Daniels & Sandy, 2000; Simpkinson, 1993) – providing a roadmap for the healing practice of African-centered storytelling praxis.

This research also aligns with other research that speaks to the community-building aspect of storytelling (Fabius, 2016; Edwards, 2009; Banks-Wallace, 2002) and how local connections are created and sustained through preservation of ADP culture, history and artistry. Community-building can lead to nation building for African-centered storytellers in the U.S. The specific amplification by cultural keepers of their desire to facilitate African-centered personhood development and education enlarges upon research by Carruthers (2006) and Banks-Wallace (2002) that storytelling is a critical way forward for these kinds of endeavors.

Going into the study, I was humbled by the number of matriarchs (10 of 12) that were interviewed. While we often see more women in education, I did not expect to see that in the storytelling community. And while research has shown a gap between the storytelling of women and men (Edwards, 2009), there was not that wide of a gap in the findings. In fact, both women and men talked about personal narratives that came from family stories and the resilience to persevere through adversity. Members of both gender groups talked about how grandmothers were often the ones telling the story. However, Baba Lumumba and Mama Kandake made comments about fathers, grandfathers and other male community leaders that told them stories and supported their storytelling pursuits.

The paramount offering of the findings in this study is how intergenerational storytelling uses history and rituals to provide an environment to birth, sustain and further an African ethical

revolution (Ojo, 2020). This is a unique radical empathy and it is healing in the way it develops the personhood of the storytellers *and* the audience.

This is congruent with themes identified by Dei (2020; 2019), Tuwe (2016), Okpewho (2003), all who stress the self-recreation or self-development that happens to the storyteller and how storytelling can function as a way to heal and cope. Self-recreation is the “process of learning about culture” and sharing it with those around you. This creates a transformative self-edification practice and leads to the potential for a renewed self. Self-recreation builds personhood. Storytellers recited how they were able to heal from stress, trauma, and loss. In addition, storytelling serves as a medicinal form of oral healing that has the potential to move people from systemic and shared oppression and cultural and psychological enslavement. In fact, coping was often a process of perseverance or responding to and resisting current inaccurate representations of ADP in the U.S.

Storytellers have an “ADP” identity that impacts their personhood. As shown early by Gyekye (2004) and others (Dei, 2020; Gyimah, 2014; Asante, 1998), an African social ethic is built on the idea that Africans have a humanistic morality and common good. As a result, human beings have a social ethic rather than an ethic of individualism (Gyekye, 2004). In the Akan oral tradition, *tiboa*, means conscience, moral sense - and is about how one’s inner desire creates a sense of guilt in the individual and reprimands him or her of wrong actions (Gyekye, 2004). It is through *tiboa* that we get the idea of self-governing as a private and intimate act. The natural phenomenon of *tiboa* helps one move from moral neutrality at birth to moral achievement, and thus, moral personhood (Gyekye, 2004). Storytellers shared in the interviews about how storytelling furthers and heightens *tiboa* for ADP storytellers and their audience.

The impact on personhood is rooted in identity, radical empathy, epic memory (Vansina, 1981), a deep morality, and interdependent relationship with ADP history and the audience. It is also about a desire to spur an ethical revolution (Temidayo Ojo, 2019). In the Akan storytelling tradition, storytelling is a remembrance of yesterday, today, and what must be carried out tomorrow (Mireku-Gyimah, 2016). Storytellers discussed past, present and future goals for themselves and the larger ADP community; this is their resistance to colonial cultural warfare. Because African storytelling is intrinsically linked to African humanistic philosophy, it serves as social, cultural, mental, and emotional edification (Chinowa, 2000; Tuwe, 2016). Using storytelling to provide counter narratives to the myriad of inaccurate, incorrect, inconsiderate, inhumane, inconceivable, incessant social-cultural assaults from Eurocentric media and educational institutions, is one of the strands that flowed through all the interviews – and one of the ways African-centered storytelling praxis impacts personhood.

Storytellers also communicated a shift in their self-doubt, fear and overall improvement in self-perception as a consequence of learning and disseminating etiological stories about Ancestors and family members that persisted regardless of racism, enslavement, and cultural warfare. Participants shared how storytelling facilitated traveling which helped to develop an African (and sometimes Pan-African) worldview. This ultimately matured their African-centered storytelling praxis and increased their understanding of a collective “we” within the context of a larger continuum of oral expression that lives throughout the diaspora.

All of the interviews revealed a sense of emotional appreciation for the storytelling experience. Storytellers felt an immense sense of joy and accomplishment due to being in a position to influence younger generations with culture – especially as an older adult or elder.

Mama Kandake shared how she could not describe how it feels to be needed and valued through the storytelling experiences. She shared:

And I knew that that had to do with imparting the history onto them. And not only just their history, but expanding out, you know. So that they get multicultural perspectives as well. So that subsequently, when I do presentations, and I see that happening, and I feel the connection, I can see that they got it...[pause]...there are no words...There are no words, you know, for what that does for me. It helps me... I think most of us... want to feel like...it matters that we're here... That somehow we make a difference. And, um...that's one of the things that it does for me. It helps me feel like, oh, it's a good thing that you were born in this particular day and age, you know. You had a chance to do a little somethin' something.' [laughter]. And that gives me a great sense of joy.

Feeling like 'it matters that we are here' is consistent with others who have shown that storytelling impacts elders in unique ways (Cun et. al, 2020; Fabius, 2016; Banks-Wallace, 2002). In addition to providing positive impact, it helps elders find meaning in their life (Cun, et al, 2020). However, it is the sharing with the younger ADP generation and that truly facilitates the impact on the storyteller's personhood. As Cun et. al (2020) describe, "Stories told by the elderly [elders]... have a 'recuperative role' for individuals, relationships and societies and therefore becomes a moral act (p. 154). This moral act has an immense shift on personhood.

The fact that Mama Kandake is able to be helpful and feels needed increases her sense of self and her understanding that she is fulfilling her cultural 'obligations.' It is a dual obligation to herself and to future generations. Since an African social ethic acknowledges the significance of mutual help, goodwill, and reciprocity, this ethic can oppose a lack of human self-reliance and help manifest one's basic needs or personhood (Gyekye, 2004).

Internalizing an African social ethic leads to nation building. This is because caring for your [African] personhood means caring for the [African] nation. As Lomotey (1992) explains, nation building, or revolutionary Pan-African Nationalism, is key to personal and cultural sovereignty.

Pan-African Nationalism is part of a new system of education to replace the existing ‘mainstream system’ that is inappropriate for African Americans, provide[s] a means by which African Americans can identify with Africans around the world, and acknowledges the view that African Americans make up a nation within a nation.

Revolutionary nation building must first start with the storyteller. It is first from the person internalizing that they are a part of a nation that they can then go out and share stories that connect people to the nation. This is the same in African-centered education.

Mainstream school systems struggle to get educators to internalize an African and ADP experience in the U.S. that is foreign to most White teachers (Asante, 2017; King, 2014; 2015). Asante (2017) calls this kind of praxis that centers the African self-revolutionary pedagogy. He argues that revolutionary pedagogy is when educators are guided by some kind of “superior knowledge” (Asante, 2017, p.104). Engaging in cultural remembrance conversations that honor Ancestors and spirit, respect for elders, and preserving communal values consistent with African societies are all essential components of revolutionary nation building and pedagogy (Asante, 2017; Lomotey, 1992).

Every storyteller highlighted how they reveal their authentic selves in their stories. This also meant creating new stories (making new meaning) in order to add collective knowledge to the collective memory of the village (nation). Mama Auset affirmed:

I think that is important to me because my voice is my authentic self. And I can’t be anybody else. I can only be me. And my directive was to tell our story. Don’t let them forget us. So at the time I was thinking about Ancestors like the ancient ones. But, there came an event in Asè and we had to tell stories about hope. And we related it to children. And I was really struggling because I wanted to perform, and I couldn’t think of anything. And these three boys kept coming to me. And I was like, okay, let me sit down and think about this. And those three boys were Emmett Till, Tamir Rice, and Jordan Davis.

And I thought about those three boys and I said wait a minute, they were just doing things that boys do. Playing their music, playing with a toy gun, and whistling - or allegedly whistling we don't know what he was doing but that was the story. But I said each one of them were murdered by adult men just because they were boys doing what boys do. So each one of them came to me and it was like, "tell our story." So I created a story around that. I created an entire piece around that.

Many storytellers talked about how they had to allow Spirit (i.e. God, the Ancestors, etc.) to send them the stories and cultural biographies that they should turn into stories. This is discussed more in the subsequent theme, safekeeping of spirit and self-determination.

Oftentimes, sharing their authentic voice led to a deeper connection with their own personhood development work. For example, Mama Amina shared how storytelling helped her deal with her own inner-child challenges, her own inner-personhood. She shared:

There is a little child inside of all of us. And I tell the story of the little child and me. That I was having a debate with a friend, and how I'm driving back home and I'm going into a crisis. And I realize that the little child is coming out in me. And I pull over on the side of the road and call my friend. And my friend says, that's your little child. I said oh my God that little child is such a brat. She says, no child is such a brat. She says right now what I want you to do...the name of the story is Let the Woman do the Driving and the Little Child will be Protected...and she says what I want you to do is tell the little child to sit on your lap. And you take the wheel.

As a matter of fact if you can, tell the little child that you're gonna put that child in the back seat and the woman's gonna do the driving. She said, when you get home and you're feeling a lot better, I want you to visualize what that little child looks like. I said I know what it looks like, the child is an absolute brat. And then I did, during a period of meditation, I said, that little child looks like any of those pictures you would of starving children in Africa. My little child doesn't have flesh and bones and a bright sparkle in her eyes. She said, 'that we can fix.' 'That we can fix through the stories and telling.'

As Mama Amina expressed, storytelling helped her move from a personal challenge that she was facing – struggling with her little child – to a collective edification moment for others who are experiencing similar challenges. In the theme, impact on the audience, Mama Amina shares how her story helped others acknowledge and address their "starving little child" as well.

In this way, African-centered storytelling praxis is about using one's authentic voice to shift actions at the personal, communal, structural, institutional, and societal level. As Okpewho (2003) explains, when a narrator offers a critical self-analysis in storytelling, "performance becomes the right setting for such an act because it facilitates the transfer of ordinary experience to a larger metaphorical level of signification, within the canons of representation recognized by the culture" (p. 225). Storyteller interviews revealed an organic "cultural transfer" in terms of how storytelling transcends current and historical trauma through personal and collective healing.

Mama Moremi's openness about the impact storytelling has had on her own personhood is very captivating. As one of the oldest storytellers in the group, her admission of the restoration that she gained from multiple decades of storytelling is instructive. She voiced:

It's been very therapeutic for me...it has been a very healing process for me. They say we storytellers heal other people, but it may be just the other way around. The storytellers are in the process of healing themselves. And just look at the children and see how they respond. And like those kids in Tuscan, when I would go to the school they would say, 'hey grandma!' I became everybody's grandmama at the school. I automatically connected with them.

Her discussion of storytelling is not as a behavior or a one-off act, it is a "healing process." This a powerful offering because it adds nuances to what we think about healing and the kind of influence it may have on storytellers. She also reverses the common misconception that storytelling solely has a healing impact on the audience – something that is beginning to expand to include storytellers as well. Fabius (2016) makes the same conclusion stating that storytelling creates a conclusive improvement on wellness and well-being.

A few storytellers also talked about how sharing after loss had a positive impact on them and audience members who have experienced loss as well. Mama Auset shared:

Sharing stories allows us to share common experiences and heal from that sharing. It is a powerful space...one story I did was the story of the last night my husband and I was together. The following day he died...ah, and we never got to have any kind of conversation or any connection, you know, because he was at work, he had a heart attack, and that was the end of the story. The book, chapter, closed forever. So that story, telling that story was very cathartic for me. It's still painful when I think about it...when I try to tell it. I don't think I've been able to successfully tell it without getting very emotional, but I knew it helped me. And whenever anyone tells any kind of a story or shares any part of themselves, somebody will be affected... (long pause).

Sharing in public about a loss is a powerful and courageous act. It is not something that everyone learns because loss is a very private experience. However, in storytelling, the emphasis is on an oral truth and a preservation of ADP realities. In this way, storytellers create an intimate and sacred space where they can share, the audience can receive and vice versa.

Mama Mekeda also talked about loss and how she was able to use the storytelling platform as a way to honor her son's transition. Mama Mekeda also shared:

When I first started, I did a lot of stories. My life started to change. My son became very ill, and so I did not tell a story when he became sick. I just did not have that focus. So the next time I told a story was the day after he made his transition. You know, and it was um, very impromptu of a peaceful warrior. So, I did that.

This act of sharing in the midst of immense pain and trauma is the kind of radical healing that Ginwright (2010) discusses. It is one that transcends the emotional response and moves to a higher articulation of humanness. In this way, it is extremely cathartic. This kind of sharing facilitates a deeper emotional regulation and connection to the community as well (Chinyowa, 2001). In the African-centered storytelling praxis, the audience is seen as kin and family. In this way, you are not speaking to strangers about a death, you are letting them know that an Ancestor has been received in the spirit world (Fabius, 2016).

Often, we perceive storytelling, writing, and cultural expression as a one-way process. We experience what the writer offers us and are appreciative for what the writer shares with us. However, these interviews show that there is a deeper spiritual process that moves them to

stories and to share, that guide them through their practice. As Achebe (1987) said, “the story is our escort; without it we are blind...it is the story that owns us and directs us” (Tuwe, 2016). This was especially true in the interviews with the storytellers.

Story as an escort is something that all storytellers expressed in one way or another. Many storytellers talked about how they would choose stories based on how they felt or how the audience felt. Some storytellers even said explicitly that they didn’t choose stories, stories chose them. Momma Nina reflects on this and how her ability to “channel” Ancestors puts her in the ultimate process of humility, honor, and gratitude. Storytelling impacted her in such profound ways. She recalled:

It’s just...I don’t know if I can put into words how it’s so beautiful for me to even be able to channel these women. And I feel so powerful and grateful and thankful. You know. And then, because I love Black people so fiercely, I want to always try to bring ‘em up. And the children. You know I look at some of these Black boys and I cry, because they don’t have a clue. And they are so endangered, and they are the ones they are trying to kill off. And they have no place to be somebody. Did you ever see that play, No Place to be Somebody? It was about us. They’re talented, they can do everything, but they’re not allowed to do anything.

Mama Kandake explains how beautiful it is for her to build her storytelling praxis in a way that allows her to channel spirit. But it is her ‘fierce’ love for Black people [ADP] that also places her storytelling praxis in the context of real world cultural and physical violence. Her use of ‘endangered’ shows just how serious it is for young African descendants in the U.S.

Stovall (2016) calls this current state of affairs that facilitates this ‘endangerment’ a ‘retrenchment’ in the treatment of ADP in the U.S.

Retrenchment denotes a return to policies centered in the overt subjugation of Black life (e.g., the Dred Scott decision of 1859, Anti-miscegenation legislation, Jim Crow poll tax laws, etc.), one could argue that we continue to exist in a state of affairs where Black people (along with First Nations peoples, Latino/as, Arab-descended, East, Central, South

Asian, and Pacific Islander) have no rights that Whites (read mainstream society) are bound to respect (p. 276).

It is this lack of respect that worries Mama Kandake and brings her to tears. However, instead of giving up hope, she uses her storytelling to self-determine and intensify the decolonization process (Kuokkanen, 2000; Tuwe, 2016).

Storytelling is able to provide emotional respite, spiritual sustenance, and full-body release for the participants in this study. They found a home in their stories, and their stories found a home in them. This also deepened and furthered their relationship with themselves and their personal goals of leaving a legacy and positive impression on future generations – a critical precursor to nation building. The desire to move oneself to ensure a future for the next generation. This oral power is profound because it facilitates a feeling that is nurturing, loving, compassionate, and healing. This shift in behavior shifts the storyteller's ADP personhood; this shift in ADP personhood shifts the nation.

Personifying cultural proficiency in the art of storytelling

All of the storytellers related to storytelling as an art. Some storytellers have spent decades crafting their practice. A few started out as poets, spoken word artists, actors, and cultural arts practitioners. Others left education and continue to make educational contributions to the ADP community in Chicago – a select few did both. Several expressed stage fright and a fear of performing when they first began. Asè became a sacred learning space where they could grow into themselves and the storytelling tradition. In addition, they learned about the culture from storytellers around the diaspora. This example is germane to how the art of storytelling functions for ADP in the U.S.

Asè also provides storytellers with tools so that they can enhance their pedagogical cannon and offer the best experience for their community. In many ways, storytellers are the first group of people that children see practicing this style of storytelling. Being a member of Asè extends an interdependent relationship where the storyteller must learn the art form and sharpen their skills because they are needed in the cultural education battle in their communities.

But beyond simply the art of storytelling for ADP in the U.S., these storytellers extend their storytelling praxis to African storytelling. This means that they honor certain rules, rituals, responsibilities, and obligations to the storytelling craft and community. This is a special kind of caveat and pulls on how elders in Africa work to preserve the oral and storytelling traditions of Global Africa. Storytellers spoke to the importance of gaining the necessary skills, researching accurate and critical information, and benefiting from storyteller development from Asè.

Mama Maathai talked about how her storytelling praxis includes a built-in connection to culture and the art of African oral tradition of storytelling:

When they [Asè youth members] have a show, I'm there. So, hearing them learn that oral tradition number 1, that is cultural. That is something that we almost lost. Because it wasn't a practice that you saw happening. So Asè and all of us who are members of it, that is one of our call to arms, is to make sure that we're keeping the art of storytelling alive. In the oral tradition. So these youth, now, are learning to use something that is of their culture, number one.

Paramount is instilling that youth in Asè know that African oral history is fundamental to understanding how to be a storyteller. This is not simply something that she desires and enjoys, this is her 'call to arms' – suggesting that she feels a duty to see that this is so. A major component of this duty is making sure that young storytellers are proficient in African storytelling and not simply reciting stories.

Mama Amina also highlights cultural proficiency. In her stories, she makes sure that her storytelling praxis leads to the creation of factual stories. She then even makes a point to have

discussion with children about the factual content in her stories so that she is extending their learning:

So that's why I'm a storyteller. That's why I enjoy it. That's why, you know, I can be selective. That's why I have a thing that I'm always going to tell a story, and somehow bring in the Motherland. I'm gonna to distinguish fact from fiction for you. You gonna have fun, but you're gonna know that you need to always as children, is that fantasy? Fantasy is fun, but this is a fact.

The performance of factual stories by ADP in the U.S. is a mostly unstudied phenomenon. Most of the research discusses folktales or personal narratives. Asè teaches storytellers how to write their own stories and teaches writing stories as a central component of African storytelling practice. When those written stories are stories that seek to ensure nation building and develop personhood in the ways mentioned, they become African-centered.

Stories could be written about any variety of topics and themes. However, since Asè adult and youth members purposefully engage in writing stories that are solely about the uplifting and ethical nurturing of ADP, that is African-centered storytelling praxis. This is their activism. James (1993) coined the term activist praxis to honor how education occurring in community through writing. Dillard (2008) extended this activism to include how we engage with our African diaspora as well.

While James and Dillard were mainly talking about teachers, this applies to all educators of all forms, and in all spaces. Dillard (2008) adds:

Thus, activist praxis on behalf of freedom, and with particular regard for education is not a luxury from an African worldview: It is essential. It is a way to be in solidarity with versus separate from one's students, one's practice, and one's experiences with others.

And writing, particularly in cross cultural or international contexts and encounters, is one

tool for recognizing the changes in one's perspectives, beliefs, and actions, to see activist praxis as the way your spirituality [becomes] your methodology (p. 83).

Storytelling activism leads to nation building. What extends this concept even further is how storytellers learn their praxis. They go to workshops, trainings, and have a mentor when they first become members of Asè. In addition, storytellers are given time at the monthly membership meetings to share stories that are a work in progress. They then receive critical feedback about how to improve their stories. Asè creates a community of storytelling proficiency, and teaches others how to practice that same storytelling proficiency.

Mama Maathai again:

And that's when there was a shift, there was a paradigm shift for me. And that paradigm shift was, the oral art of storytelling is not reading. So when people say, oh I love to hear you read a story. Or, yeah I want to come and hear you read the story. Me and several others who are in Asè, well we don't read the stories, we tell the stories.

Mama Moremi continued this focus on the art of storytelling as well:

Cause you always need that music. See I've paid people. Matter fact I was supposed to have a job tomorrow, but they messed me up. But I've asked my cousin Cause he does the drums. Cause you know how, African children, we need that music, that's a part of it, that comes from the culture. So, he was gon' come and play the drums, but they took the job away from me. But I've had him to go with me sometime. And I've had different people to sing cause I can't sing. You've got to have a little singin' cause Black folks got to have a little singin.' I think it's just a part of our heritage.

Storytelling is able to transfix the audience into a learning environment without being in a learning environment. It is also teaching what the 'mainstream' learning environment refuses to teach. This is critically important for youth who due to their socioeconomic conditions may or may not have access to the information, books, online resources, or community space to receive the kind of education being offered through storytelling.

This form of education is distinctly different from contemporary neoliberal calls for "character" education – one that polices and dehumanizes Black bodies in order to circumscribe

Blackness into Whiteness (Nguyen, 2014). That form of schooling is rooted in deficit assumptions of Black youth. African-centered storytelling praxis is rooted in a legacy of ADP excellence inside and outside the U.S. While it is classified as informal education (i.e. traditional education, Indigenous education, storytelling and histories, art expression, spirituality, etc.), it helps African and Indigenous communities make meaning from their belief systems across the African world. Very little of this self-affirming education exists for African descendants in the U.S. (DuBois, 1960; Nobles, 1976; Wright, 1979; Lomotey, 1992; Shujaa, 2003; Nembhard, 2008; Carroll, 2010; Dei, 2012; Emeagwali, 2014; Sefa Dei, 2018).

Mama Amina speaks to this point exactly. She talked about her praxis and how her goal is to educate and do some in a way that also honors and personifies the African oral tradition:

So with teenagers, I want them to be a part of the creative process as to what I'm going to tell cause I really can tell you whatever you want to know. I want to know your questions so that I can bring those elements in. Because to educate is my mission. To empower you with knowledge, or to...instruct you in the story, as to the ways you can be. I call it process learning. I'm not, and this is me, I'm not trying to just convey knowledge to you but how do you process that knowledge. How do you go back? How do you go to first hand references for knowledge? Where do you get your knowledge from?

But I always make sure that for young children, I start my stories in the motherland. And they say why do you call it the motherland. I said the motherland gives birth, and given birth to me, and to people who believe like me, is why it's called the motherland. They'll say, where is the Motherland, and we go ahead with a child story. But it's important that we empower children with that knowledge that what they hear here is not the only thing. And what I believe Africa is and why I often just say Motherland, and I do consider that, the Motherland. And I think it's important that that be given.

...there's a difference between memorization and telling. I said, when you get to telling the story of the people, you must tell. You must talk. It has to be heart to heart; mind to mind. And then you tell the story. She [another Asè member] said, but I want it exactly word for word. I said, but our Ancestors did not go word for word. They went from heart to heart. I said if you can't do heart to heart, then why don't you, if you want to go word for word, do poetry. Poetry is compact storytelling where every word means something and then it's left to the hearer to unpack your poetry. Poetry is, here you go word for word. If you want to, you can incorporate poetry into your story. I said it depends on whether you want, and I did say this, whether you want ego satisfaction or you want to educate.

Conventional storytelling practices can miss these nuances that are being highlighted here. Connecting with the actual process of creating the story and encouraging their mental and emotional development is essential. Furthermore, having a back and forth with the audience and opening the space to ask questions is key. So too is teaching about the motherland and making sure that the audience is locked into the story from the beginning.

This prioritization of African culture and oral tradition provides an important cultural proficiency that is largely missing from education in the 21st century. Stories about the earliest educational systems and warrior traditions in the African diaspora should be sage cultural birthright tales for all ADP in the U.S. However, the majority of this history has been omitted from history books (Hilliard, 1997; Carruthers, 1995). Sharing about and teaching the importance of the motherland and protecting the cultural values of the motherland is Pan-African education. Delivering cultural proficiency through storytelling is centered around the proliferation of African Indigenous resistance and sovereignty.

Self-advocating through intergenerational relationship building

Storytellers all mentioned how important it was that they were able to learn from one another, teach young storytellers, and benefit from being a member of NABS. Storytellers found that they were able to advocate for themselves better because of their involvement with Asè and NABS. Each storyteller talked about how they felt more value and influential watching young storytellers perform. They also talked about how they were inspired by their performances and involvement with storytelling.

NABS works with storytellers to make sure they are learning the oral tradition art form and advocating for themselves in their local cities. This is explained by storytellers and had a big

impact on how they became to know storytelling and other storytellers across the U.S.

Storytellers were then tasked with promoting their work, booking shows, and sustaining the art form. This heightens the level of accountability, seriousness, effectiveness, and self and collective advocacy. This also provides storytellers with tools so that they can enhance their pedagogical cannon and offer the best experience for their community.

In addition, NABS has an annual storytelling conference for African descent storytellers in the U.S. This conference facilitates intergenerational education, cultural transfer, storytelling pedagogical instruction, and deep learning about culture. It also affirms each of the storytellers work and pushes them to self-advocate for themselves in other capacities at the national level. This network of storytellers is an essential tenant of how storytellers learn and develop their storytelling genius. The annual concert is a communal gathering that all storytellers mentioned as a monumental yearly experience.

Hilliard (1995) argued that a great educator training program necessitates that educators have a broad-based appreciation for African descent students in the U.S. In addition, educators should have intimate examples of successful edification of African descent students in the U.S. while simultaneously building a strong network that develops the educator (Hilliard, 1995). Lastly, educators should use a professional network or organization to build best practices for students and their families (Hilliard, 1995). This is exactly what NABS is for African-centered storytellers.

Baba Nkrumah spoke to this concept of helping young storytellers self-advocate and mature into the young adults that they are becoming. He talked about the role of elders being essential in this process. He stated:

But if you look at this world it's like we're elders, and it's like, how do we help them to

become elders, to go that far. And have the wisdom with them. Because a lot of it is not being taught.

Eldership is not a birthright, it is earned. The path towards eldership is not as understood or clear for youth. However, younger generations learn what they are supposed to know and how they are supposed to be from elders (Dei, 2020; Golden, 2015). This African tradition provides for the unwavering instruction and guidance from elders as they navigate life, relationships, and socioeconomic challenges (Dei, 2020; Golden, 2015). This kind of instruction is not found in most mainstream school systems (Akua, 2020; Piert, 2015). This guidance helps young people learn how to self-advocate and see to it that they too become an elder one day.

We often hear about how elders influence youth, but we do not have as much research about how youth influence elders. The value of Asè is that it is both youth and elders influencing one another. When this happens, storytellers are full of self-advocacy because it brings them closer to their goals of personhood development. Mama Maathai shared:

And it's important that people feel comfortable telling you the truth. Because you've broken down barriers. Because for elders who haven't known the story, or don't connect to the culture to say, I wanna learn how to do this...I want to leave the world better than it was before I came into it using the creative process of my mind. And everybody has the capacity to do that when they're awake.

Being 'awakened' is a part of the process of African-centered storytelling praxis. Personifying a tradition where youth *and* elders can receive tools that assist with awakening is a powerful achievement. This is especially true for elders and adult learners because they do not have as many "spaces" of education. Asè creates that space for learning to occur regardless of the venue or location. African-centered storytelling praxis can happen inside or outside of schools.

In an African context, the process of training someone to be an elder begins during childhood when children are given the responsibility to tend to younger children (Dei, 2020; Golden, 2015). Eldering is a practice of being kind, compassionate, and supportive to younger

generations (Dei, 2020; Golden, 2015). While terms like generativity are used to describe eldership, eldering is a centuries-old African tradition that ADP carried with them and sustained (Dei, 2020; Golden, 2015).

In the heart of this tradition is elders' ability to facilitate critical learning spaces and traditions with youth (Dei, 2020; Golden, 2015). Asè is the space where youth can learn from elders, elders can educate one another, and elders can even be inspired and informed by young people. Mama Amina does a lot of performances for elders. She talked about the importance of elders self-advocating for themselves and for the practice of eldership:

I try to make sure that the power of storytelling, which is the oral history of our people that was told around campfires in this way. Where the children sat with the grandfathers. Where the elders came in and they told the story. I'm not your elders, but you can call them here and let them here. For me it's a true belief in it. It's a true belief that that's a power that if you can get the people in the room with you, they'll do it. And, if it's a group of Native American people will do it very easily too. It's not a thing that is just with African American people. Any people who are Indigenous to an area, who have a respect for history, can pull and grow out of that history.

Teaching principles about how elders conduct themselves and engage in storytelling is an important part of eldering. Fundamental to understanding the educative role that storytellers have is understanding the cultural wisdom that they provide for others. Much of one's self-edification comes from those who have already become local cultural custodians or cultural keepers. Not every person that has risen in age is an elder. However, older adults can work to become elders just like youth; and Asè is a space where this education takes place.

In many cases, stories, proverbs, riddles, folktales, and other local and IK rituals and cultural utterances are shared by elders (Dei, 2020/2019). However, it is often up to youth, adults, and older adults to "take the embedded meanings of these and apply these teachings to match the lessons one wants a listener to take away" (Dei, 2019, p. 48). Asè creates the stage for

storytellers to be guides in this process by first helping cultural keepers self-actualize, and then by supporting them to do the same for others.

NABS is also one of the central spaces where learning and self-edification occurs. All of the storytellers talked about the importance of NABS and the power of being at a NABS annual concert. Mama Yaa Asantewaa:

And then I find out they have a National Black Storytellers. So then I put my pennies together, and I join and then I go, oh my God...I would go to conferences a lot. And about the second day you are like...You want to do this and that, you wanna go, YES! This is four days and we used to get there a day early. I've never left. I don't even leave the hotel. There are vendors there, yes, but it's too rich. You got the workshops, you're talkin' to people, I'm talkin' to somebody and I'm crying. And then they cryin.' Oh sis, when we gon'...I don't know...oh you my sis, oh yeah you are mine too, all of that. You could walk up on a veteran storyteller and say listen I want to tell a story and I don't know how. Okay, do this, try that...okay. Just...WHAM! Like that. Just so full.

This is the only national storytelling concert for ADP storytellers in the U.S. that prioritizes African culture, spirituality, rituals, customs, and traditions. At the concert, elder storytellers pour libations to begin the concert and all storytellers acknowledge storytellers that have made their transition in the last year. In addition, everyone is dressed in African cultural attire or African garb or regalia.

Mama Maathai compared the significance of the NABS concert experience with that of going to the African continent. She shared:

But then, when I realized that I can't be calling myself a griot was when I went to NABS. My first NABS visit was like being baptized into the African American oral tradition. To see all of us in this regalia. The pride. The strength. The men and women together, it was powerful, I was not the same. It had the same effect on me as it did when I went to Ghana. When I came back from Ghana, I felt my spirit be a different kind of spirit. NABS does that to me every time I go.

And I haven't had an opportunity to go in the last couple of years because of the work, but next year, I'm going! Let me tell you. Let me tell you how serious I am about that. I became a Silver Life Member of NABS. So I bit the bullet and paid that money, so that I could become a Silver Life Member. [Long pause] Cause that's how important...you know how important it was for them to build the National African American History

Museum in D.C., as a Smithsonian, that's how important NABS is. That's how important. The foundation of that is critical to our lives.

The comparison of NABS not just to Ghana, but to the National African American History Museum, is a monumental comparison. It speaks volumes to the impact that NABS has on storytellers. The concert is where storytellers come to seek information and be affirmed. This affirmation or "baptizing" speaks to the importance of eldership and eldering for ADP. There is also a great deal of pride, confidence, and self-actualizing that takes place at the concert. There are workshops, trainings, vendors, and even stories and cultural items that people can purchase. Certain parts of the concert are open to the public, others are for membership only. Being a part of a network that prioritizes the African experience is like having a living and breathing Africa and library in your back pocket.

What is key to African-centered storytelling praxis is centering ADP as the central component of their history (Akua, 2020; Piert, 2015). The practices of Asè and NABS are African-centered because they are looking for ways to create African-centered pathways towards improving cultural edification of African descent children in the U.S. (Akua, 2020; Piert, 2015). In fact, whether inside a school, or outside, both communal and familial stability is dependent on sufficient eldering in African descent communities in the U.S. (Akua, 2020; Piert, 2015).

In addition to self-advocating and teaching eldership, storytellers also talked about being inspired and influenced by youth. Several storytellers talked about how youth storytellers inspire them to be better at what they do and help them to improve their craft. Mama Maathai explained:

I had heard about this woman and I wanted to write a story about her but I felt intimidated about being able to pull it all together. And then one day I heard a student from our [Asè's] youth group tell a story about Wangari Maathai. And listening to that youngin' tell this story about Wangari gave me the courage that I needed to be able to pull that information together. It was that youngin' who told that story, I said my lord, I need to do it.

...number two, they begin to be able to see another side of themselves that they didn't know they had. They began to see that they can take, um, their own character and their own way of doing things and put that in a story. And when I see that kind of thing happening, it makes me work harder as a storyteller. I can't let them outdo me, I'm just kidding {laughing}. I love it! They give me energy.

So, um, watching them develop and grow, gives me hope and inspiration that this tradition won't die. Because growing up, I never seen a storyteller. Maybe I didn't realize what it was if it was on TV or whatever. But I don't remember growing up, going to a place and hearing somebody tell a story. But this is something that our youth group has an opportunity to not only see, but be a part of.

This inspiration is the result of intergenerational educational spaces are for ADP in U.S.

Learning is not simply mono-directional, it is multi-directional. In this way, elders are asked to provide wisdom and a path into eldership for youth, and youth provide inspiration and fulfilment for elders. This is an important kind of self-advocacy because then they must go and perform and promote the selves they are cultivating in public spaces. This makes the learning both private and public – something that does not happen often in mainstream educational settings.

The storytellers spoke about the power of this self-actualization in several aspects of the interviews. They also discussed their appreciation for how this platform instills a sense of self and how they have to take that self and share it with the world. That is a proud experience for storytellers. It gives them not simply something on their resume, it gives them hope. They then advocate for themselves and in their work.

Storytelling fosters Safekeeping of spirit and self-determination

There are two types of safekeeping that storytellers expressed: story realms and spiritual realities; and the capacity to self-determine. One of the often-overlooked values of storytelling is how performance can transport you to real and imagined realms. This movement is fascinating because when done well, storytellers are able to move from one scene to the next; from one time period to the next – without missing a beat. In many ways, the storyteller takes you on a journey

and in that journey transports you into realities that you may or may not know about – but are already connected to. This also requires that both the teller and the audience are open to being transported.

In addition to the first type of transport, storytelling also transmutes your relationship with Spirit and your Ancestors. In my own experience as a West-African drummer, and as was repeatedly shared in the interviews, storytelling connects you to your own spirituality and a deeper divinity that makes everything possible. Many storytellers talked about humility. Humility allows “Spirit” to use them and speak through them. In fact, several storytellers talked about how they are conduits of Spirit and how God, a divine being, Spirit, source, the Ancestors speak through them and tell them to write certain stories or speak about certain Ancestors. From Momma Nina:

Yeah, we’re connected, we’re totally connected. When I was in Africa and I want in the slave dungeon...I met Nina Simone in Africa also, that was awesome. Because I knew there was no way that I could love somebody as much as I love her and never meet her. So when I was in Africa in 86 and somebody said there’s Nina Simone, it was all over. It was all over. I went with her and stayed with her for three days. And of course, the people I was traveling with said I was crazy, and you know, that was a whole different other thing. It’s like when you step outside of the box, you’re crazy. To me you’re crazy when you fit into the box, that’s insanity. But you know, people don’t see it like that. But ah, she was awesome. She was very ill mentally, you know. She was mentally ill. But she said, don’t call em slave castles, they’re not castles they’re forts. And so I don’t call em castles any more.

(Dungeons) Dungeons, but when I went down in there...(long pause) that was something. To be in that space, and feel that power, and that, that um...pain in all of that. That doesn’t mean everybody gon’ feel that, you know. Because people are not open. My spirit is kind of raw, and I feel all kind of stuff. And when people come to me, even more recent people who have passed away come. I know when my mother’s last husband came he was a very good man, when he came and he said, can I come? I said of course. Come on. You know, cause they don’t know if you’re afraid. Cause some people are terribly afraid cause white people have told us about ghost. Black people don’t have ghost, we have spirits. And the spirits are not gonna hurt us. The spirits watch over us and protect us. And they protect us more if we’re open to them.

As ADP, they are able to channel spiritual beings because interacting with spiritual beings in the spiritual world is a part of African heritage. In Akan philosophical thought, spiritual beings are “insensible” and “intangible” but can be felt in the physical world (Gyekye, 1987). These temporary manifestations occur when spirits enter a person’s body and vanish soon after (Gyekye, 1987). Mbiti (1970) acknowledged that, “spirits are invisible, but may make themselves visible to human beings” (p. 102; Gyekye, 1987). This is not simply a part of the concept of the Akan concept of person or spirituality, this is a sacred ancestral tradition. When someone transitions (dies) in the material world, their *ōkra* (soul) and their *suunsum* (spirit) survives after death (Gyekye, 1987, p. 98). The spirit is still alive and thus can be invoked through the storytelling experience.

Sometimes this is referred to as being “taken” or “mounted.” In this study, it is referred to as part of the energy that assists with *transporting* individuals into a realm and experience – and transporting spiritual energies into the material world. Another way this is done is through the pouring of libations. This is an African practice that involves using pouring water with a plant in a ceremonial way to honor Ancestors. This occurs at Asè meetings and performances. The goal of this oral ritual is to pay homage to both familial Ancestors and those beyond your lineage that have fought towards the liberation of ADP throughout the diaspora. This is also something that storytellers talked about in their interviews – calling in Ancestors to get closer with the audience and transport the very space itself into a more receptive environment before starting their performance.

This kind of intimate relationship with Spirit, transport, and imagination is essential to the survival of ADP, especially those residing within foreign social-political environments that posits daily attempts of cultural erasure (Stovall, 2016; Carruthers, 1995). Mama Makeda spoke

to this kind of inner mental and spiritual movement that takes place, especially for youth. She shared:

So, in terms of the youth, it's very important that they move away from the things that take them away from, we're not even talking about critical thinking, just thinking beyond what I can see.

This movement is essentially about surviving and thriving beyond what exists, often poverty, crime, violence, and miseducation. Imagination is not simply a creative arts exercise; it is about traveling to a home (nation) that is waiting for them that they don't even know they have. She continued:

My feeling is, oftentimes we will speak on something, whether in a story or whether it's giving feedback or advice, we may speak from experience not just from observation. So if I'm telling a story, I'm transported and I want you to really think that, I'm in that story. You know, and I want you to be in that story. But I want something that is going to console, that's gonna teach, besides just transport. I don't want to transport you down the rabbit hole and you come face to face with Alice right, I want it to mean something. And hopefully, one thing that I say, you'll say, well, dag nabbit, I can dig that, I can dig that, cause that's me, or I felt it, or that's what I was feeling and didn't know how to articulate it.

Transport in this sense is taking someone to the reality that you are speaking about. It is about being situated in a story so deeply that it takes you to places outside of what one thinks is possible.

Mama Yaa Asantewaa also spoke about this movement. She, however, uses the word Sankofa, an Adinkra symbol from Ghana, which translates to recover history from your past in order to know where you are going. She called it a 'back and forthness.' She elaborated:

Everyone needs a Sankofa moment. The name of my company is Sankofa Lessons. And that's very true, you need that. You need to know, back here, what's happened, right now, so you can do something in the future. When you don't have that, back and forthness, you don't know nothin. And, when lions don't tell their stories, the hunters become the heroes... (pause). And right now that's what's happening. No, they ain't a hero.

Knowing about history – without knowing how to use that knowledge in a today’s current context – is not the kind of knowledge these storytellers seek. Instead, they are tasked with not simply providing collective memory, but modeling the practice of the remembering and resisting.

The way she speaks about ‘back and forthness’ is a critical component of various African oral cultures. In the Kiswahili, Lingala, and Luganda, language traditions, there is no word for “time” in the way it is conceived in English – nor do they have conceptions for past, present, and future (Kokole, 1994). Instead, oral cultures operate in a way where dates are not as essential. The elder tradition is preserved because old age is associated with wisdom, and they tend to be more past-focused than future-focused (Kokole, 1994). For oral cultures, “the history of the community was often passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth, this tended to strengthen factual memories” (Kokole, 1994).

Transcending time and space limitations of the time space continuum is an intrinsically African cultural way of being and (Fu-Kiau, 1994; Kokole, 1994). Moving through time effectively is also an essential component of African storytelling (Tuwe, 2016; Fabius, 2016; Kunene, 2012). This is because it is both the information *and* the tools that are key. As Tuwe (2016) states, “African storytelling has been used to interpret the universe, resolve natural and physical phenomena, teach morals, maintain cultural values, pass on methods of survival, and to praise God” (Tuwe, 2016). In this time of increased assault on ADP in the U.S., making sure youth have strategies to resist is essential. African-centered storytelling praxis is both a pedagogy (in that it is a practice that can convey complex information to children) and a source (in that it provides wisdom to anyone who is willing to listen).

This goal of re-centering young people in their African epistemologies and selves is one that all storytellers shared. Sometimes this was as simple as sharing stories that challenge assumptions about culture, religion, society, and values. As Mama Makeda again:

I like stories that transport. Let's, let's have a little respite. Let's connect from all of the stuff that's going on right now and just take a little trip. Who says that? Is that Minnie Riperton? Take a little trip...yeah, [laughter]. And um, so those that were stories inside of themselves, were from our people. Like um, what is that story with the indigo bottles hanging up in the tree that would ward away bad spirits...so, it's not taking away from Christianity, but Christianity is not the only um...I'm trying not to say religion. But we come from an ancestral base that was lost. And however you have worship now, um, it still doesn't take away how we first got there, you know.

Here we see transport as a way to move from colonial frameworks to African and Indigenous origins. This point is an extremely poignant one because ADP conditions in the U.S. historically and the impact Christianity has had on ADP throughout the diaspora. Mama Makeda's position is not one of replacing, but of complementing.

In terms of the second type of transport, many storytellers talked about their ability to channel Spirit and Ancestors. This is not simply what storytellers do, it is something that is developed over time. In fact, the Manding people (a division of the Mandinka) of West Africa, use the word *nyama* to describe this divine creative power. It controls nature and is the sculpture of the universe (Bastian, 1997). The *nyamakalaw* (handlers of *nyama*) can shape it and use oral tradition to pass on the magic from generation to generation (Bastian, 1997). Storytelling is a place where Spirit meets the material and they both live in harmony. Mama Auset talked about how her trip to Ghana helped her understand her purpose. She revealed:

When I was in the dungeon in Elmina, I heard the Ancestors speak to me. They said, 'you have to tell our stories.' So, that's something that keeps coming back to me, and I just have to sit down and let them enter so I can tell the story using what they want me to do.

Momma Nina also shared a similar story about allowing Ancestors and spiritual entities to enter and being a conduit. She commented:

It's kinda like my mission. My storytelling is my mission. And I don't really call it storytelling. I joined Asè for lack of a better word. Storytelling was the closest word I could get to what I do, I call it a calling of the spirit. Because these women come and I channel them and they come through me. And I joined Asè because I thought I could teach something and I could learn something. I guess I did.

Both storytellers intentionally embrace Spirit and ancestral energy and wisdom. This kind of respect and honoring of Ancestors is something that is taught in African spiritual traditions (Asante, 2017). In addition, this is the kind of re-Africanization that Carruthers (1999) speaks about – where ADP take back their roots, spiritual practices, and epistemologies. For the storytellers, there is no distaste for how Spirit shows up in their lives because they have unlearned Western ideas of spirit as a ghost or demonic force. This is important, however, Ancestors are always with you in AIK (Dei, 2016). They have been spiritually liberated. This liberation also gives them the appreciation and storytelling allows them to share all of those concepts, ideas, and methods of resistance with their audience.

Spirit is an especially important guidance for those who write their own stories. Storytellers are able to use this information and interweave it into their narratives, talkbacks, introductions, character plots, and so much more. When they are visited by Ancestors, it is not just a powerful moment, it is often a direction. Mama Auset talked about this explicitly. She stated:

She [Sarah Baartman] was called the last American Queen and it was the Queen of Hawaii before Hawaii was stolen by the Dole Foundation and company and she was dethroned and anglicized. And those two came to me because these were both women who were victimized. Tragically victimized. Being made to think that something else was going to come of their lives if they took advantage of whatever was being offered to them. In the case of “Venus Hot in Tot” as she was often called, she thought she was going to perform in Europe. The Queen thought that she was still going to maintain her kingdom in spite of the way things had been done. But she still felt like well at least I am still this, only to discover it was all a lie. And everything was taken away from these women. Everything. But their stories remain. So, that's something that keeps coming back to me, and I just have to sit down and let them enter so I can tell the story using what they want me to do.

The way that Mama Auset approaches this is with an extreme amount of humility and grace. All of the storytellers spoke about Ancestors and respecting Ancestors in their work. This kind of spiritual maturity is one that takes years to cultivate.

Momma Nina spoke directly to the process she went through to develop her appreciation for spirit and ancestral energy. She describes a childhood where she was not initially afraid and spoke to a certain kind of fearlessness as a key ingredient for her practice. She offered:

I never told my parents this, you know. I couldn't tell anybody, I just experienced it and as I got older I wasn't as afraid of it as I was as a child. But I think that if someone had nurtured that, it would have grown much stronger than it did. But when I start doing these women, I could be in a book and become in that place. And feel the spirit of these people and so I tell people sometimes, they help me write the script. Because like, I would be writing, I'd write the script in English and then I would go back and do it in dialect. And ah, it's like, Harriet would come and say, I couldn't say that word like that, say it like this.

So it's like, they live in my house. And they're here with me and it's beautiful. And it's like once they come out. Like, I just did Fannie Lou Hammer in January. And I would tell my daughter, oh lord she rode me all night. She was so happy to get out because I hadn't done her for so long that she rode me all night. She kept talkin' and singin,' I said "get out and let me go to sleep (laugh), and leave me alone." And they asked me Saturday, I just performed at DuSable, and they asked me which character was my favorite? And I said, oh I can't have a favorite spirit (laughter)...I cannot do that. The audience most often like Harriet Tubman the best. Of course then when they hear Fannie Lou Hamer they like Fannie Lou Hamer the best so I don't know. But I cannot choose a spirit (laughter).

One of the nuances in this excerpt is how her ability to connect and embrace spirit was not nurtured as a child. This is true for most African descendant families in the U.S. The same is true about storytelling practice. All storytellers talked about wanting to make the practice more known so that they can have more time to develop the craft. It is also a great example of how storytelling cultivates a respect and demystification of Spirit and uses the guidance of Spirit for historical accuracy and authentication.

Spirit also shows up during the performances as well. Mama Amina talks about how she is very in-tune with energy and Spirit. She can read the energy of an audience and their ability to receive what she is about to share. Depending on the energy, that is what she shares. This is critical because storytellers engage in heavy subject matters (i.e. the loss of loved ones, racism, sexism, African enslavement, ancestral traditions, etc.). They also perform libations, use song, partner with drummers and dancers, and even implore call and response to make sure that the audience is connected and ready to take the journey with them.

This is another way of transporting. Mama Amina explained:

And when I ask people to call out a name of someone you love. Call out a name of a women you knew. Call out a name and tell me that name cause we're gonna fill this room with the spirits of the Ancestors and the spirits of the people that got us here [Getting louder]. And this one man said, I knew you had us when my wife turned around and she called out her grandmamma's name, it was all over then. He said, y'all shut up, cause my grandmama's here. I said...but, but people, older people do the same thing. Cause my mother said, I said sometimes with the libations or other times when I need to feel the room, I said there are voids and vacancies, there is cold air here we need to fill the rooms.

We need to fill the rooms of those shoulders that we stand on. So help me fill the room with your favorite people in the room. You gotta call 'em, call 'em, call 'em, till this whole room is grounded and protected. That the light of the Ancestors come in. And I do a story where I say, when I look to the right, I see the Ancestors. When I look to the left, I see my elders and the elders will draw on the Ancestors. And the Ancestors will draw on spirit. And we will all be in power.

Ancestral power fuels personal power and personal power heals the collective. This ritualizing of the storytelling arena and venue is also an extremely important transport for people to witness. Some people have never heard about ancestral energy, African ethics, Akan folktales, libations, saging, African drumming and dancing or many of the other hundreds of ways that storytellers' practice and omit African culture.

In this way, a storyteller must curate their performance space in the same ways that they curate their altar (a place for ancestral appreciation) or shrine at home. Ba (1981) supports this

and states, “if it is considered as having the power to act on spirits, that is because its harmony creates movements, movements which generate forces, those forces are then acting on spirits which themselves are powers for action” (p. 172). This spirit-acting (acting-spirit) is at the heart of AIK and African-centered storytelling praxis. The magic and power of the word is rooted in the magic and power in African ancestral spirit (Ba, 1981).

Spiritual power is of deep value in AIK (Dei, 2016). From the Akan metaphysics, a human being is not simply what you see (body), it is also what you cannot see (Gyekye, 1987). The Akan do not use the laws of physics to explain inanimate things; their world cannot simply be relegated to Western laws or ways of being (Gyekye, 1987). As a result, healing occurs outside of the material world. Gyekye continues, “the fact that traditional healers, operating at both the physical and the psychical levels, cope successfully with such disease does seem to suggest a close relationship between body and soul (p.103). This is an important link between storytelling and healing. As Banks-Wallace (2002) articulates, “major functions of folklore and storytelling include nurturing a harmonious African American community, sustaining a unique cultural identity, and undergirding the struggle for spiritual and material freedom” (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Cannon, 1995; Stewart, 1997).

Mama Kandake expressed how this goal of transport is also reflected in how community is built through storytelling. Being able to enrapture your audience with cultural practice, rituals, and traditions creates memorable experiences for everyone involved. Mama Kandake was able to summarize these two types of transport. She shared:

And so because Asè has offered this medium of storytelling to the general public, so that now we’re doing, um, many of our concerts at the Logan Center. We’re doing ‘em down at Gwen’s church. And we’ve connected a couple of times at the Black Ensemble Theater. We were doing a couple of things on a regular basis with ETA Theater, you know for a number of years. And so, we’re likely to show up just about anywhere as a collective. But then we as individuals are also out there doing the work.

Although several members in Asè are not professional storytellers, have no intention of becoming professional storytellers, but love the power of story. They love hearing a good story. And they just want to be in that place where the stories are told. And that can be a healing thing. Because you never know why a person comes to a storytelling event. And uh, sometimes it's just to be in the presence of make believe. Like, take me somewhere else, my life has been really, really rough lately. Take me somewhere else. Let me deal with somebody else's story for a while.

So sometimes a story can be an escape from whatever it is that we presently have to deal with. Sometimes it can, it can be an encouragement. Sometimes it provides education and awareness of things that you never knew. When it provides information about ourselves, oh my goodness, you know, how powerful that is. So that you can see that you do have value.

This “work” that she speaks of in the first section is critical to understanding how personhood edification and Spirit are intertwined. The spiritual work is the personal work that all ADP must do to get closer and more familiar with AIK. There is also the work a storyteller must do to be ready to create these kinds of spaces and honor the storytelling tradition. This work is discussed further in the art of storytelling theme.

In addition, Mama Kandake talks about the power of story and the healing from the stories that are told. That power is one that is a holistic transference and engages the mind, body and soul. And when she shares about providing self-knowledge and reflection, it provides a power unlike many of the other cultural expressions because it demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between storyteller and audience.

There are many ways to internalize this power. As Omonzejele (2008) argues, “good health for the African consists of mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional stability [of oneself, family members, and community]; this integrated view of health is based on the African unitary view of reality.” (Omonzejele, 2008, p. 120; White, 2015). In this way, the storytellers’ ability to transport and help others do the same is good for the overall well-being of ADP in the U.S.

The theme of transport and captivating audiences with cultural rituals and acts is a sacred practice stored within the storytelling tradition. All of the storytellers spoke about their desire to tell stories that engage the audience in ways that provide transformative experiences. A key element in African-centered storytelling praxis is being open to Spirit so that it too can help you achieve personhood development goals. This framing sets up the structure that the remaining themes function within.

Reclaiming African memory and culture

There are many storytellers and stories. Some are folktales about the ADP experience in the U.S., and others are tales about individuals, animals, and or nature. For this theme, focus is given to storytellers that highlighted experiences, ideas, practices, travel, and connections that went beyond the basic cultural cannon of storytelling content. Because these storytellers write their own stories, this included much of the content that they write. But more importantly, content that emphasizes AIK – and how storytellers gained that knowledge – is prioritized as deep culture.

In addition, this theme is about showing how being exposed to AIK can improve one's desire to be a storyteller and the kind of stories that they tell. A consistent theme throughout the interviews was that storytellers did not have formal training as children. Nonetheless, they did learn from other sources and that is how oral tradition is passed to the next generation. However, with our elders lacking opportunities to teach in formal institutions, much of the work of preparing the next generation of storytellers will rely on our ability to prioritize storytelling.

Western science recently acknowledged that trauma can be stored and passed on to children through DNA (Bowers and Yehuda, 2016), yet AIKS have known that collective memory is stored in the DNA of ADP people for generations (Fu-Kiau, 1994; Kokole, 1994).

Oral cultures pass on this information through small networks. These cultures enjoy intimate face-to-face exchanges and community building (Kokole, 1994). This is facilitated through a deep value with relationships with family, the extended family, and other local support structures (Kokole, 1994). In addition, “oral cultures generally developed a strong genealogical memory” centered in “ancestral veneration” (Kokole, 1994, p. 39). These relationships form the basis for teaching life lessons, culture, history, and other important customs and traditions.

Several storytellers underscored the significance of improving collective memory or genealogical memory (Kokole, 1994). This epic memory (Vanisa, 1981) is essential to the Akan storytelling tradition (Mireku-Gymiah, 2016). Beyond mere memorization (which will be discussed in the art of storytelling theme), epic memory is about a deep respect for the cultural practice and heritage of oral tradition itself. As Vanisa (1971) explains, “an oral society recognizes speech not only as a means of everyday communication but also as a means of preserving the wisdom of Ancestors enshrined in what one might call key utterances, that is to say, oral tradition” (p. 143). While ADP people do not live in an oral society, they are descendants of one.

All of the storytellers in this study have undergone various levels of learning the traditions of AIK. Whether through books, research, mentors, or travel, each has found their way to the culture, and the culture has found their way to them. Traveling to a different country can have a deep impact on how people see the world. In a lot of ways, traveling works against much of the misinformation that we have been taught about ADP across the African world (specifically continental Africa). One of two Asè members that works specifically with youth storytellers, Mama Nefertiti spoke to this exactly. She expressed:

To me, Nana Yaa Asantewaa...when I was in Ghana and I heard about her I thought, this woman was bad. I gotta tell her story because we don't think...what do they have?

Wonder woman. They have a wonder woman right? But she was a wonder woman, you know what I'm saying. She was a real wonder woman who said, no, you're not going to... And the fact that they were never able to totally subjugate Ghana because the Ashanti people kept the Ashanti stool out of their hands, and they knew that they'll never stop fighting as long as they have that stool because they believed that as long as they had that stool they could never be defeated.

And they tried to get that stool, and she made sure that they didn't. And she ended up dying in England, but they never got that stool, cause she made a fake stool and turned it over. But everybody else knew that that was a fake, you know. So I just...knowing that these people...because our history has not been told to us. And I tell people all the time our history did not start in this country. And so we need to go back and get those epic stories. Nzinga. Sundiata.

Those epic stories, you know. Cause every culture has their epic stories. We have them too, but we're not saying, this is an epic story. And that's what we have to do as storytellers when we tell that story, this is one of those epic stories from our culture. And tell them the story. And make them proud, that we are descendants from this type of person, you know.

Mama Nefertiti's fascination with Queen Nana Yaa Asantewaa's story is instructive. It shows that she is able to not simply learn about deep culture, she is also instinctively making connections between that history and ADP experience in the U.S. Storytellers also highlight their ability to draw connections between stories as key to unearthing a deeper collective memory for ADP in the U.S.

In addition, Mama Nefertiti acknowledges epic stories and says, "we have them too." This expression of the plural we is in reference to ADP in the U.S. Asè members take these tasks personally. They seek out these epic stories – those that they consider "theirs," and they rewrite them for different audiences. This is oral cultural production. In fact, in the Akan tradition, storytelling is both entertainment and instruction (Mireku-Gyimah, 2016). While an Asè performance may be memorable, members have made it clear, they are here for education, not simply entertainment.

What is shared among the storytellers is that they all have undergone some degree of re-Africanization (Carruthers, 1995) or re-education related to AIK and African antiquity.

Carruthers (1999) talked about the intellectual warfare we must go through in order to be able to truly liberate ourselves as African people. He argued, “in the domain of culture, our artist must paint, sculpt, write, sing, and dance the themes of Africa with a greater emphasis on antiquity” (p. 17). This is especially critical right now as a new virtual era both provides a threat and vehicle for this re-Africanization and personhood development. Vanisa (1981) agrees, “The historian must learn how the oral society thinks before he can interpret its traditions” (p. 143).

Dr. Carruthers, a prominent African-centered scholar and beloved ancestor, lived and taught in Chicago during much of his tenure. The Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies, a satellite institution of Northeastern University, was founded in 1966 (Worrill, 2014). Dr. Donald Smith, a Black professor and the Center’s first Director, helped to establish the center with overwhelming support from the community. Leaders like Dr. Barbara Sizemore, Dr. Anderson Thompson, and grassroots residents provided the support needed for Dr. Smith to pressure the university to start the center (Worrill, 2014). The Center has been integral in providing education on Kemetic studies and over 50 years of curricula and social experience from an African-centered perspective (Worrill, 2014). It is an ‘academic goldmine’ (Worrill, 2014).

Mama Amina provided great insight into what it was like to learn from Dr. Carruthers at the center and travels with him to Africa with him as a guide. She shared:

I’m a Delta, one of my sorority sisters, she didn’t understand why when she told me she was going to Africa with National Geographic with an Egyptologist. I said your experience is going to be totally different than mine with a Kemetologist. I said I’ve experienced both, it’s not because I’m not aware of what National Geographic does or what Egyptologist do. That’s why at the University of Chicago, the key information about African Americans is in the Oriental Institute. Why is it there? Because it takes it

out of Africa. I said any time you bring that to me, I already know where you're coming from. I said when you go it's fine, but be aware of where your information is coming from. The minute that you said National Geographic, the minute you said Egyptologist, you're gonna get a slanted view of who you are. That's okay, as long as you are aware. When I was at the Center for Inner-Cities Studies...

Mama Amina's emphasis on separating critical information about African antiquity and the ADP experience from mainstream accounts is key. Many storytellers spoke about the importance of getting their information from critical ADP sources. We continued:

Interviewer: ...Were you there when Dr. Carruthers was there?

Mama Amina: Mhmm. Dr. Carruthers was one of my teachers. Jake, yeah. Because they're cousins. Asa [Hilliard] and Jake are first cousins. Yes, I studied under him. I think I had two or three classes. Main reason, when my daughter was in college, I became a full time student there so that she could get more money on her financial aid. So I was sitting in central office when I said oh I'll just go to the Center for Inner City Studies. I'll take all the classes. Jake had a reading group and I joined that for a year. You could just...see... because I had the book, the *Destruction of Black Civilization*. Okay, we took a whole year reading that book. So not only did I go there and study, I went to his reading groups and we would study pieces of historical documents that were significant for our understanding.

So when I tell stories I come from a well-informed background let's just put it that way [laughter]. It's not, um, and I do the same thing. The money, my money from writing, my money from storytelling does feed into each other in order to make it something that I can do and I can be elective as to how I do it. But I totally believe that children need to know One: That Africa is not a Tarzan. And need to debunk that. And you can only do that when you're out there with the people. Because they may or may not read my books [Big laughter]. And I know that I can bolster the dialogue. And I love it.

Mama Amina spoke of how students learned and read, *Destruction of Black Civilization*, a book by Chancellor Williams (1971) as a prerequisite for their entry into the study of ADP history and experiences. Her deep study of African antiquity is a strength in Asè. Since education is the intent, there are considerations that should be made with how African-centered storytellers learn, educate and teach. African-centered storytellers must comprehend African history, processes, rituals, and ideas in "education and socialization" (Hilliard, 1997). In addition,

African descendant scholars must be well-versed in African pedagogical approaches and inculturation customs from the African world (Hilliard, 1997).

Additionally, African-centered storytellers must learn African deep thought, the knowledge and wisdom that comes from African antiquity [i.e. ancient Egypt, ancient Nubia, ancient Kush, ancient Mali, etc.] (Hilliard, 1997). More importantly, African scholars, African-centered storytellers, and educators must study the “larger process of human transformation” and becoming more like the divine (Hilliard, 1997). This is at the heart of personhood development and exactly what we see with storytellers in Asè.

Many of the storytellers spoke about incorporating a deep history into the stories that they write. Mama Maathai explained that once she learned about black eyed peas, she had to write a story about it:

So, original pieces that I have written, for this example, the Black Eyed Peas, I had to research on how the black eyed peas came to the United States. We carried those peas over on the slave ships. It made it over here. So in that story I’m talking about not only is that a meal that sustains us, that that was sometimes all that we could get to eat. But, look where it came from. And now it’s still one of the delicacies of today. So that story yes. So in the story I talk about other foods that were carried over. I mean some of that stuff, I didn’t even know about until I did the research.

The message of memory recollection is present in the way information is used. Each of the storytellers interviewed has a desire to learn about the connection to the continent and how they can take bits and pieces of information and turn them into compelling stories.

Asè provides the platform for storytellers to have a sacred space for education and memory recollection. Mama Nefertiti is concerned with learning, sharing, and making youth proud of their history while supporting them in learning the cultural keeping practice. Her wisdom also speaks to reclaiming memory (Hilliard, 1997). We are experiencing a temporary loss of memory and our job as ADP educators and storytellers is to reclaim it (Hilliard, 1997).

African captives were not uneducated, untrained, illiterate, unenlightened, primitive, untamed, or pagan. Many could read, write, recited the Quran from memory, write in indigenous scripts, and some had already made it to America prior to Columbus (Hilliard, 1997; Ba, 1981). Hilliard (1997) concludes, “all were highly educated and profoundly spiritual, sharing in a complex culture which had granted survival for thousands of years” (p. 43).

Mama Auset also spoke to this kind of pursuit and the honoring of African history and practices directly. She explained how spending time in Nigeria and West Africa provided her with a unique entry into AIK and culture. She added:

Well let us look at stories and storytelling in the African tradition. In the years I spent in Nigeria, I lived in Nigeria for 10 years, and we do know that stories, as we look at them and listen to them hear, are a little different than stories that are told around the fireside. In Nigeria, there was a show that came on “Tales by Moonlight,” and the whole family would watch that. And it would always start, “once upon a time” or “back in the day” or “this is what happened when.”

So storytelling is still a great part of life and culture in Africa, and that goes across the continent, wherever. But what was being taught was lessons for life. And they were presented in a fashion that was palatable for children. So if we talk about Anansi or we talk about Brer Rabbit, and these other “characters,” we’re really talking about life lessons wrapped around in a way that children can understand them, love them, and put them into practice.

This information is the kind of information that you mostly get when visiting and living on the continent. What is also extremely valuable from this example is that she speaks to the entire family unit listening, watching, and learning stories together. This is also true with the Akan storytelling tradition. The “Tales by Moonlight” shows in Nigeria were called “Fireside Chats” in Ghana. This intergenerational style of storytelling is how Asè presents many of their community events. This way, the family can participate together and parents and children can dialogue about what was learned.

The storytellers in this research aim to express love, self-respect, self-esteem, and self-knowledge. For African descendent children growing up in inner-city environments, expressions of these kinds are paramount.

Embodying personhood and impacting others

Storytellers also conveyed how their storytelling impacted others. Many of them shared the feedback that they received from others. Sometimes this feedback happened during a performance or after a performance. Storytellers facilitate questions after telling stories. These talkbacks provide a lot of information on what audience members gained from their stories. While no audience participants are a part of this data, stories that storytellers shared about audience members are important because they remember the ones that had a significant impact.

Storytellers talked about audience members experiencing personal connections, a better understanding of familial connections, wanting to learn more about their heritage and lineage, empathy, healing, and personal transformation. In addition, cultural keepers expressed that audiences began to build a sense of community. The annual Asè storytelling concert provides the backdrop for elders, youth, and family to build shared knowledge. As a result, storytellers talked about how this space also creates a family-like environment for those who attend the shows.

In Ayi Kwei Armah's non-fiction text *The Healers*, he commentates on the "social power" involved when healers are in environments with others. He also talked about how this social power is used to transform those that keep coming back and are open to healing:

There's power in healing work. But it isn't personal power. It cannot satisfy an individual's craving for self-importance. It's a real power that has nothing to do with our small, selfish dreams. It's the power to help life create itself (p. 120).

Community building furthers the creation of life itself. When relationships are built and sustained, the community learns to expect a prolonged safe space for learning and growth. Beyond just their own learning and healing, storytellers are concerned with generating an audience that is willing to learn and ready to internalize their own history, cultural knowledge and self-worth.

Mama Kandake spoke to the environment that storytellers look to create at their concerts and why curating that environment and is so important:

But also, because I am a percussionist, I know a lot of people who are musicians and percussionists and things like that. And because I tend to be rather eclectic, in that especially, well I should say, I'm a Pan-Africanist, okay. And I wouldn't normally label myself, but I do have Pan-African ideology. And um, I see us all as cousins, you know. We're just cousins that got dropped off on different ports. And so I invited some of the brothers that I knew who were Puerto Rican and Cuban, and what have you, and some of the brothers from Muntu, and what not to come and process us in, for our first concert. And, so we had all these brothers from Trinidad, all these different cultures, coming in to process us in. And it was wonderful. And so now, you know we have these different concerts throughout the year, that our people...I can go someplace now.

Self-identifying as a Pan-Africanist directly connects Mama Kandake to the nation building mentioned before. Extending that self-identification, she then talks about how it is the reason why she embraces other cultures and how the storytelling tradition and concerts facilitate the sharing of culture styles and forms.

In addition, she talks about the value of the audience being able to “go someplace” and arrive in a culturally enriched environment through storytelling. This happens through rituals. The performance ritualizes drumming, dancing, singing and libations. Each of these specific rituals help to transport ADP into important cultural ways of being. When combined, they are even more powerful. She continued:

And so there's several people, who have said that they look forward to our concerts, they come every year. They come for different things. They come looking for different things.

They enjoy different things. Because Some of us tell mostly only folktales. Some of us tell only personal stories. Some people like me tell both folktales and personal stories. And when we can tell a personal story, that can connect with somebody in the audience, that says to that person or those people in the audience, I see you. And I can feel you, and we got a bond. Let's take this journey together, it's...it's a healing thing in and of itself. Because nobody wants to feel alone. And so if you can present a story in a way that welcomes people in, to your heart, into your space, it can be a very powerful thing. It can be a very powerful thing. And even with the folktales. Because we know that our folktales are steeped in wisdom. And so to be able to tell a folktale so that they get it, you know.

Rituals in this environment allows both the storyteller and the audience members to be seen. This is critically important to ADP in the U.S. because they are often not seen in 'mainstream' institutions, spaces, workplaces, and schools. It is especially significant for ADP people in Chicago because there are specific cultural events where the community gets together to be seen: Kwanza and Black History Month. Asè is actively working to increase the opportunity for ADP in Chicago to be seen, heard, felt, and cared for.

In addition, she talks about the healing that comes from personal connection. Extending personal connections is a critical component of the impact of African-centered storytelling praxis. It moves people to go deeper into their personal emotional, spiritual and intellectual selves and share those selves through performance. This is also a concept recognized by the Bantu people in Africa. Fu-Kiau (2001) states that it is a form of self-healing and balance preservation when an individual safe-guards their self-healing power mentally, physically, spiritually, and genetically. These spaces are spaces of self-healing and self-preservation.

Adi argues extensively about the link between Pan-African ideas and Black (ADP) power in the U.S. In fact, getting people to self-identify as Pan-Africanist is a critical part of the work of African-centered educators (Adi, 2018). Adi states:

What is clear is that Pan-Africanism – the striving for the unity and liberation of Africa and Africans – still has some relevance because many consider that Africa and Africans are not completely free or united (p. 221).

Operationalizing Pan-Africanism and its applications for ADP in Chicago is a big part of what is happening through Asè.

Storytellers also talked about how telling personal stories about family, loss and connecting to their heritage impacted audience and family members. Mama Auset spoke about two separate incidents where stories impacted members of the audience:

As I was telling that story to an audience, I noticed there was a lady in the room, a white lady older than me, and she kept dabbing her eye. And after I told my story she, as well as two other people, came to thank me for that story because she had recently become a widow herself. So my story really impacted her. I think the reason we tell stories is because somebody needs to hear what we've been blessed to be able to say or put out.

This first example shows how sharing loss helped three audience members to the point where they shared that they were impacted by the story. The amount of personhood work required to share stories of loss is immense. She described another time where she was able to impact others:

There was another story I did about connecting with my family in Cameroon which I had come to know of through DNA testing. That too impacted someone. There was a woman in the audience who was adopted. And me talking about doing the DNA and connecting with family made her want to do that same thing to see if perhaps she could find family members that she didn't know based on her DNA. So, I would say each time I've told stories, someone in the audience has connected. And connected in a way that was impactful for them, but they were also able to share with me what my story did for them.

These reflections on the impact that storytelling has on the audience is a testament to the value power of stories. People are moved so much that they come and share that with others. In addition, storytelling is able to bring people to a sense of collective pain and triumph. In this way, it does more than other pedagogical tools where learners may simply read about death or

watch something on a screen. Storytelling relives these important moments in history and then shares how people overcome them.

Mama Maathai also talked about how children sharing what they learned after a storytelling event was impactful for her:

And when you have a child come up to you and give you a hug and say, I really loved your story, I know I've done well. Cause adults, you know, they don't say it, but you know they may not always say it. But a child, when they tell you something, out of the mouth of [babes?], you know you're on the right path. And I can tell you how many times that had happened. And it just gave me the inspiration that I needed to continue.

Fundamental to the work of cultural keepers is their ability not to simply be vulnerable in sharing their story, but also be open to hearing feedback about how it was received. Sometimes children can be the harshest critics. This story speaks to the value of receiving positive affirmation from children after stories were shared. It is an emotional reception and feeds storytellers the substance they need to continue doing their spiritual work. All of these experiences enhance community building.

Robinson (1988), talks about this extensively:

Cooperation and response have been key operatives in traditional African-American storytelling. These two major elements have been instrumental in holding community of people of African heritage together when so many opposing elements challenged their physical, spiritual, and intellectual survival. Stories taught African Americans how to respond to their abilities (that is, responsibilities) even if this was no more than utilizing their gift for memory and innate understanding of the situations that confronted them.

Creating a sacred environment to “hold space and community” is an essential element of storytelling. It is an invaluable need for ADP in Chicago because they do not have a lot of their own spaces where they can hold community.

Earlier, I mentioned Mana Amina's story about her inner child. This is an emotional and revealing story and one where she said she will not even tell it depending on the audience and how she feels in the moment. She later shared how that story was able to impact the audience:

Told this story, that's the bones of the story, lady walked up to me who was grey haired and older. She said, I have a little child in me, and I've never looked in the mirror to tell my little child a[the] story but will start. I said, I'm about to get ready to cry...The thing about it is, she was an elderly lady. And she said, I've never told my little child a story. That little child is just as young and just as starving as yours was. And so I know that really was a true story, that is not a lie. But, the healing started the minute she realized she is not alone. Now that absolutely floored me. I did not think that I was telling a story that would impact older people who have denied their heritage for so long. But that story really does.

This story really highlights how storytelling impacts the audience and the storytellers. Even retelling this story during the interview brought up emotions for Mama Amina's story. Even this impact – the verbalizations of how storytellers impact audience members, impacts the storyteller.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION:
GUIDING YOUTH INTO AFRICAN AND INDIGENOUS ELDERSHIP:
PAN-AFRICAN HUMANISM AND ELDER ENERGY IN THE DIASPORA

Rituals decolonize and indigenize community spaces and educational praxis. Asè creates a space where caring for one another is as ritualized as elderying itself. Key to preserving this practice and environment is a collective narrative memory. Narrative memory is the prerequisite for narrative healing. Built deep into the narratives and orality of Africaness is in honoring the power of oral articulations and expressions to retell and re-heal unconditionally. Africans who have been colonized – and for ADP in the U.S. who have lost connection with their spiritual heritage – oral tradition realigns the mind, heart and body with central sacred tenants of cultural power. This happens through an unwavering African humanism that is preserved and guided by older adults and elders.

Traveling to Ghana taught me so much about how this oral tradition and oral energy is still alive and well. While in Ghana in 2019, I observed how elementary students use stories to impact their lives and what messages and lessons they take from fables and tales. Children (ages 6-10) recounted Anansi tales and other stories that conveyed Akan values and principles. Even more, these children were able to tell these stories by memory. From the heart, they recalled the stories, the characters, the main plot, and the African humanism buried deep inside. It was then that I understood that it is through these stories that we can not only teach youth but hold adults accountable as well.

The African descendant community in Chicago has an extensive list of cultural traditions. From the Chosen Few Block Party every summer, the African Festival of the Arts (the largest African festival in Chicago), to a plethora of cultural and artistic offerings during Black history month, the community has deep roots and practices of celebration. None of those traditions is as

strong as the celebration of Kwanza. Kwanza is a rich tradition uses Kiswahili phrases over a 7-day period to help ADP in the U.S. connect to their African roots and plan for their collective sovereignty (Karenga, 1988). During this 7-day holiday, families are encouraged to focus on keys to life and harmony for the individual and the collective using the “*nguzo saba*” or “the seven principles (unity [*umoja*], self-determination [*kujichagulia*], collective work and responsibility [*ujima*], cooperative economics [*ujamaa*], purpose [*nia*], creativity [*kuumba*], and faith [*imani*])” (Karenga, 1988).

However, this should not be the only time where we honor those who workday in and day out to preserve our cultural practices and traditions – and most of the honoring during these times is of our Ancestors. Storytelling is one of the few ways to honor cultural keepers (e.g. cultural warriors) because it is a living platform for healers, artists and educators to input wisdom into both young and older audiences. It both offers wisdom in the form of stories – and it is a medium that is more accessible. But what is different about this role versus a traditional educator is that both the character in the story and the storyteller themselves are seen as cultural warriors. They are seen as sacred. And their verbal expression is revolutionary. It is through them that this rite still lives and can influence ADP beyond their deepest imaginations.

The following are a few areas in the scholarship and interviews where more local Indigenous research is needed. These sections represent discussions around the emerging opportunities for impact and interventions across activist-scholarship and African-centered praxis throughout the diaspora. Lastly, this section reflects the kind of research trajectory and transformation that I would like my work to strive towards.

Restoring and Preserving Elderhood

Kemet and Maatian education mirrors nature. Kemet was able to operate as a Maatian society because it understood that all people needed to have a deep comprehension of Maatian order (Rkhty, 1988). They did not exclude people because of their status or leave people to fend for themselves until they learned the lessons they needed to learn – they used Maat to teach those lessons from birth so people did not end up in those situations to begin with. If we are to move ourselves to a higher level, then we must do so with this Maatian energy. An energy that dictates our code of conduct. Thus, it is not solely spiritual and cultural traditions that must connect us and keep us looking after one another, it is elder energy.

Elder Energy

DuBois (1937) coined the term “social energy” to acknowledge the seen, unseen and energetic forces that assist ADP people in achieving their desired results. He described various forms of non-monetary energy in cooperative economics that is necessary to provide a framework for ongoing land-based and solidarity economy for ADP in the U.S. This can be described as the following African-centered solution that: actualizes and sustains:

- 1) social ownership; 2) strong family and group ties; 3) consumer unions; 4) economic planning; 5) socialized medicine; 6) cooperative organization of Black professionals for social service; 7) the elimination of private profit; 8) a Black controlled educational system; and 9) the essentiality of collective self-reliance (Christian, 2014; Dubois, 1937).

Elder Energy is how we align ourselves, our work, and our responsibility to serve our community in alignment with African traditional eldership and culture, and our collective social energy. If our traditions are truly not owned as Dei (2019) describes, then how are we ensuring that all ADP throughout the diaspora feel at home within African oral traditions and praxis? This

concept was also shared by the some of the storytellers. While they are keeping the tradition alive, some still do not feel as if they are worthy or African enough to call themselves *jelis* or griots. Mama Maathai elaborates:

So, they were holding all different types of events for me to come and do storytelling during Kwanza, during family night, during this that and the other. I was doing all that on my own for like 10 years or so before I found out about Asè. I don't really know how I initially found out, but it was Mama Kandake who ended up bringing me in. I went to a storytelling concert that they had, and when I heard the types of stories and when I started going to the meeting, I said I can't be calling myself a griot, I can't. Because what I learned is that in Africa, that tradition is, its family. And so, you're born into that. And then that is handed down to one generation to the next to be the griot. So I said, well I can't be calling myself griot, I don't have that. So I stopped calling myself griot, and I just became the storyteller.

This is an insightful offering from Mama Maathai. It shows that she is so dedicated to the tradition and practice of African storytelling that she feels she should not be called a griot or *jeli* because that term should be reserved for people in Africa who inherit that as a birthright. In addition, she raises the question, who does determine who is a griot or *jeli*, and what does it take to receive that kind of honor? This is why engaging words, phrases and frameworks around the value of elder energy in all we do could be value in this kind of conversation.

In Ghana, I learned that there are not groups like Asè – children simply learn storytelling from elders, parents and other family members. In addition, because storytelling and oral culture is so alive and well, it is not something that requires teaching – because it is always being taught. Furthermore, storytelling occurs in the schools. And while there are plenty of critiques to be offered about the Ghanaian public-school system (especially since it has many Western standards), many schoolchildren grow up telling, experiencing and loving stories.

This is why storytellers who are promoting African oral tradition should feel at home in the tradition. Momma Nina spoke to this sentiment:

Well, as far as I know what I am told, we are storytellers. That's how we carry on our tradition. Cause a lot of times we were not writing things down we were instilling it in the babies. And the older people, to me the most important people in the society are the babies and the elders. And the ones in the middle are just there to bring the babies foreword. And the elders are there to teach them what they know. So, I think that's just a part of who we are, storytellers, griots.

This difference in identity, especially within an organization like Asè, is striking and reveals the contrast between both storytellers. Storytellers should not have to guess whether they are *jelis*, they should know. There should be a process for this kind of global recognition.

In Sefa Dei's (2020) work, *Restoring and Preserving Elderhood*, Sefa Dei expounds on the tremendous value and power that is built into African eldership tradition and our collective duty to protect those that use storytelling as decolonization work. Sefa Dei explains:

There is much to learn from our Elders about African Indigenous knowledges. The links of African Indigeneity and education can be explored further by looking at the ways local communities utilize Elders' cultural knowledge in the socialization of youth. Within these communities, it is widely assumed that Elders possess specific knowledge acquired on the basis of their long-term occupancy of the place/Land, and by experiencing the daily intricate interactions or nexus of society, culture, and Nature. Elders' knowledge as embodied wisdom can be and have been engaged to inform schooling and education in mutually beneficial ways to young learners and adults. Elders' specific teachings relating to Land, environment, youth leadership, community, responsibility, respect, and mutual interdependence have been deployed in communities to ensure youth's educational and social success (see also Dei and McDermott 2018). The Elder status is very much related to one's identity. By framing "Elders," as educators' local communities have traditionally passed on relevant knowledge inter-generationally to reflect communities' histories, cultural, and spiritual memories, as well as social identities.

For Sefa Dei (2020), Elders are essential to the community because they provide purpose, decolonization curricula, and African-centered praxis. When elders use storytelling as their means of oral resistance, these are political resistance narratives. Providing metaphysical understandings is resistance. Offering spiritual and moral guidance is resistance. Telling stories about land is resistance. Sharing how elders use their agency to dissent is resistance.

Ultimately, African-centered storytelling, as a resistance apparatus, must be preserved. But more importantly, ADP elderhood (and life-force energy), must be protected by any means necessary. Storytellers spoke to navigating eldership in Chicago. They explain:

Mama Asantewaa: I kinda go with the 60s and up, cause that's kind of what we grew up with. But um I don't know...[long pause]...I think with us, elder has to be more than just old, more than just age. Cause I was in the presence of a woman who was almost 70, and she was actin a complete fool. I would not call her an elder cause I don't think she's earned the title. So I would say 60ish and up with a certain level of wisdom that they are willing to share and learn from. I guess that's what I would call an elder.

Baba Lumumba: Man, you just opened up so much stuff that I don't realize I possess. I'm an elder now, you know. So, it makes me even more [getting emotional]...feeling significant because I'm a link to them, and they are a link to our history. See we're connected. It's so much more important that we understand that we are connected. We each have our roles, you just gotta calm yourself, you know. Do what God says. You gotta calm yourself. You're not in charge of nothin,' you know. That was the message for me.

Baba Nkrumah: Well one thing is that, when you start teaching the more traditional things. Things like, getting the permission of the elders before you speak, you know. Knowing that we've got to love each other.

From these selections, it is clear that storytellers deeply value their role as elders and respect the African eldership tradition. They see elderhood as a positive and resourceful added benefit and value to themselves and the community. Even more, they set parameters around elderhood that guide the way elderhood should look, feel, and sound in the community. They also see being an elder as a birthright that all ADP and children should be able to experience with the right support and tutelage.

Storytellers see storytelling as the path towards eldership and culturally aligning members in the community to see elderhood as they do. Storytelling concerts have rituals that assist with their vision of what adults and youth should aspire towards. As Mazama (2020) illustrates, these performances and their rituals can provide mental healing:

Indeed, practicing African rituals is specifically designed to foster a sense of being African and proud of it, as well as a sense of belonging in an African community. What is affirmed is a communal identity, which is quite consistent with the African cosmology according to which we only exist as a part of a social and cosmic network. Rituals obviously have many functions. However, one of their primary effects is to provide mental structuring. As a matter of fact, it could be argued that one of our problems as African people is that we have been destructured in large part due to our participation in alien rituals. The organization of rituals whose objective is to re-Africanize Black children is therefore a critical component of Afrocentric education in action. Through the affirmation of a common African identity a pan-African outlook is also fostered (p. 8).

Rituals decolonize community spaces and educational praxis. Simply having consistent concerts that honor traditional African culture is a kind of ritual. Some participants see, for the very first time, rituals and customs that storytellers use to teach and educate families and their peers. In addition, elders have certain rituals as well. Asè creates a space where caring for one another is as ritualized as eldering itself.

This was revealed to me during one of Asè's committee meetings during the pandemic. During the conference call, members are checking on another members' health. They ask questions about how people are feeling and whether or not people are in good health. During this call, members asked about another member that was recently hospitalized. Members talked about

supporting that member and making sure that they were finding ways to do so outside of just phone calls. This kind of ritual – checking-in on one another – is elder energy in practice and largely absent in some communities.

However, Asè provides a family-like culture (through the practice of eldership even with one another), that permeates all. This is why eldership is so important for certain members and why it is important that ADP in the U.S. spend time crafting, growing, nurturing, and protecting elders at all costs. A few additional responses from storytellers speak to this tension and cultural imperative. They share:

Mama Maathai: So I, so this is [very long pause]... I wanna see how I'm gonna say this...[even longer pause and deep breath]...I think that is something [pause] that we're struggling with, um [pause]. And unless its taught in the home, [pause] it's gonna be lost. Um [pause], I got a real appreciation for what it meant to be an elder when I went to NABS because I was hearing over and over and over again through the stories and through um, libation, and through the way libation was being done that you have to ask permission. This is a grown man and he's asking permission...it became a real awakening for me how critical that was.

Mama Moremi: It means a lot. We have a lot of information although we don't always think our children are listening to us. Yeah, we done got away from that a lot. In fact, years ago, here in America, older people had the last say. You know the grandmothers...But see what's happening now the grandmothers are coming young and they don't really. But years ago, the oldest person had the last, had the say so.

Mama Yaa Asantewaa: I'll never forget going to buy some food for my mother. I would always get her slices of cheese or something from the Jews Deli. And the young man he could not have been older than 21 or 22. And I said, oh yeah, this is for my mother, she's 90. Oh...I hope I live that long...(pause). I'm shocked. You don't have a wherewithal to know that you're gonna live to be 30 or 35...(pause). It just took my breath away. and I said, yes you can, yes you can. You may not be 90, but can. Plan for that. Plan for that. But when they don't have that...(pause)...

Mama Kandake: Oh...okay. One of, I can leave you with one of my favorite quotes is...um...Each generation from relative obscurity, must recognize its mission and fulfill it. Um, and that's um, that is by um, um, Frantz Fanon. A psychologist, author of *Wretched of the Earth*, philosopher, from the Caribbean I think its Martinique. And that's the essence of the quote. I love the way he phrases it saying that each generation out of relative obscurity. Because that's what it has been, you know. We have been obscured;

our history has been obscured. So out of that relative obscurity, you have to recognize what your mission is and fulfill it or betray it.

NABS models how eldering should function in communities and demonstrates the level of seriousness that storytellers should afford to eldership and community education. There is a lot of work to be done if we are to see this cultural imperative through. Furthermore, our identities, roles, and support networks have been obscured and we must refashion them based on our traditional African culture.

Policy Implications

From Sefa Dei (2020), we know that elders are invaluable educators “that use non-dominant” praxis, “such as oral traditions,” to disseminate cultural knowings with communities. Policy should follow that requires school districts to partner with elders to provide African and Indigenous orature and storytelling. In addition, schools should be guided in how they work with community-based organizations. Instead of allowing schools to choose at random, economic incentives should be given to schools that chose to work with organizations that provide African and indigenous education.

Lastly, there is a deep need for African descended elders in North America to connect with a larger Pan-African movement. This could mean a Pan-African Circle of Elders (PACE) or something similar, that connects elders of African descent in the U.S. to elder mentors throughout the diaspora. It seems elders from the continent and beyond could essentially provide answers and guidance for elders elsewhere – especially ADE in the U.S. In terms of policy, ADE in the U.S. should receive some kind of financial restitution for the work they do and lives they’ve lived. As cultural custodians, many of them work for free and are not guaranteed income, especially in this new virtual economy.

Youth-Led African-centered Storytelling Praxis: Traditional African group healing

There are currently various forms of restorative justice projects happening across the diaspora. These projects infuse restorative justice frameworks into community praxis and activism. These efforts also look to create school cultures that reject harsh discipline policies steeped in punishment and penalization. Many of these practices operate separate from African-centered storytelling praxis and communities can benefit from fusing these approaches into one.

There are not many places or interventions that work with youth to tell political resistance narratives in the U.S. NABS allowing youth members within their storytelling network is important, especially because they did not twenty years prior. In addition, narratives that counter hegemonic culture and oppression are sorely needed in schools and communities – especially as the mental and emotional health of youth is being put on notice as suicide rates increase across the country. Indeed, an organization that teaches youth how to merge African-centered storytelling praxis with African traditional healing and restorative justice frameworks, could provide a unique and sacred transformative space for African descent youth in the U.S.

In addition, there are works that discuss the decolonization of global mental health practices (Singh, et al., 2020; Dei, 2020; Lewis, et. Al.,2018). Across the African world, this means changing how people see mental health, the cause, and the process of preventative collective solutions. It is not simply about using group-centered and traditional healing strategies, it is about restructuring how we understand what mental health is and how we connect our approach to mental health with our analysis of race, colonization and gender-based issues. In this way, decolonizing mental health is about creating safe spaces for youth, women, and older adults to share, express their concerns, and receive the support they need from community – without being judged or labeled as insane.

Storytelling as a Response to African & Indigenous Mental Health

While I did not get to speak to young people directly, many storytellers talked about the value of having youth as members of Asè. They also described the impact that storytelling has had on young people and what they envision for youth and Asè in the future. While youth and adult concerts and membership meetings are separate, adult members spoke very highly of young people and what they were able to gain through their membership and experience with Asè.

Storytellers spoke about their experiences working with youth. They shared:

Mama Nefertiti: This year, everybody wants to do folktales because folktales are fun and you can get into them and really make them come alive. And so what we are telling them is I hope you know a little background on your folktale like where is it from? If it's an Anansi tale, what's the significance of Anansi tales and the spider? It was satirical originally, but anyway, I don't go into all of that with them because what they can pull out on their own is what we want them to do. And then we'll do a group piece because it's always good to have a group piece because we go from such young to old. Our youngest is six, and she was like five when she started this. And our oldest is 17 now. So, um, the good thing about that is, as they get older, and their more confident with their stories, then they can help us teach.

Mama Kandake: So, it's like the storytelling and being among a collective of storytellers offers them the opportunity to expand into other areas of the arts also. Because many of us are interested in other things. And by talking to the children, it's like, you don't have to stop here, you can check this out, and you can check that out. So helping them to see that they have the opportunity to develop other dimensions of themselves and who they are. And that will help to release the shackles from their minds too once they see, the power that they have. The intelligence that they have. The artistry that they have, and the potential that they have to do all kinds of great things.

Baba Nkrumah: But Garvey, his mother, what she tells us is that Asè storytelling just brought him to a whole 'nother level, you know. He's so involved in different things. I think he's starting to become a lawyer. And storytelling has helped him so much. He's a lot more open, he expresses, he MCs for our kids when we have our programs, he's just, you know, just on fire, you know. And just a great young man. It's like, what's that whole saying it takes a village, it takes a village, and he is just amazing, you know. When he writes stuff, it is so powerful. It's like, wow. You know, he keeps his nose clean, he's on track, and he just turned 17. I would also say um, with Kofi, I think he was 12 when he started, he was ah, very shy the first time. Very kind of laid back. But he's developed so that he's now winning oratory contest, first place. We've recommended him several times. Three of our youth have won the awards that the National Association of Black Storytellers' gives. It's a wonderful award.

Storytellers spoke about the power of storytelling for youth. They admired how young people approached the tradition of storytelling and all the work that goes into building a great story. They also revealed that the skills and confidence that youth gain through storytelling shows up in other parts of young people's lives. This is an extremely significant contribution and realization for storytellers because as elders, they see their work is to enhance the lives of youth and their families. Storytellers found great joy in watching their protégées grow into adolescent cultural keepers.

These excerpts and others speak to how youth can be impacted by storytelling on multiple levels. In this way, storytelling is making a holistic imprint on both the older adults and youth. This holistic imprint helps to recenter the one's emotional, physical, cultural, mental, and spiritual selves. This happens in various ways but mainly because Asè affirms the identities of youth, their culture, their wisdom, and their pain. From there, a restorative culture is built that allows youth and adults to liberate themselves from their ailments and afflictions. Hence, a visceral release occurs and paves the way for other areas of expression and healing.

One of the other core reasons elders spoke so highly of youth and storytelling is because of the relationship building that occurs at Asè. Building relationships is a key component of African-centered storytelling praxis. It takes courage and a bold heart to promote African and Indigenous cultural knowings that are meant to disrupt the status quo. This cannot be done without relationships and the relationships that are built last a long time. In addition, it is not simply youth or adults that are members of Asè, the entire family is a member; the entire village. Thus, Asè helps youth and elders create positive relationships that affirm, and honor all who take up the mantle.

This is what African traditional healing strategies are all about. As Bojuwoye and M. Moletsane-Kekae (2018) express:

Just as in existential counselling, basic therapeutic technique of African traditional healing is good social networks, not only of fellow humans but also of Ancestors and deities (higher powers). A common element of all successful therapies is positive interpersonal relationships which is positively related to therapeutic outcomes (Garfield 1995). The central vehicle for delivering care is the relationship between therapists and clients (Hannigan et al. 1997). Epp (1998) also notes that interpersonal relationship is the most potent therapeutic factor in existential counseling. Consistent with the principle of providing care within broad psycho-social framework, most African traditional healing practices are conducted in groups which bring people together for human interactions to procure health (p. 92).

African-centered storytelling praxis is a gateway both to good social networks with people and Ancestors. This is because you learn about your Ancestors and how to tell their stories and are pleasing Ancestors by doing work that is fulfilling your purpose. In addition, the group-natured feel of Asè is already in alignment with the African traditional healing strategies. Youth and adults feel supported because they have human interactions that are healthy and uplifting in the face of negativity and self-doubt. This kind of “group-based counseling” is also seen in restorative justice spaces.

Peace circles are used throughout restorative justice spaces to provide a more holistic and non-oppressive conflict resolution space. These circles are usually led by trained facilitators who learn how to allot time for each person in the circle to speak when it is their turn to speak (Singh et al., 2020). In addition, circle keepers often place alter objects (i.e. photos, stones, sage, etc.) in

the middle of the circle to bring ancestral energy into the conflict resolution space. This ritualizes both the group-centeredness and the spiritualism deeply embedded in African and Indigenous traditions. However, many of the circle keepers do not know about this kind of political resistance storytelling.

Both of these spaces provide group-centered healing for youth, adults and elders. Social activities are great intervention strategies used in African traditional healing (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). This stems from an understanding around the human need to self-actualize towards “development, exercise and enforcement of their healing power” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 93). Furthermore, not all intervention strategies are considered equal. Certain strategies like song, stories, chanting, drumming and dancing and others, offer even more healing power.

Storytelling is unique because in one performance you can whiteness all of these different kind of healing interventions. At the Youth Black History Concert, youth began with a drumming, then entered with a group poem, then each storyteller told various stories, then the concert ended with a group song. While youth may not have known that these various forms are imbued with healing, they are definitely feeling the result. Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae explain:

Group activities, like ritual ceremonies and cultural festivals, offer people opportunities, to come together, for psycho-education in cultural belief systems regarding health promotion, the development of skills, attitudes and values in problem-sharing, problem-solving, decision making, resources sharing and better ways of coping. Group healing facilitates mutual emotional support and enhances self-esteem leading to people feeling empowered or being in control of themselves and functioning more effectively (2018, p.

93). Perhaps a major factor in the potency of African traditional healing is its high energy characteristic. High energy level activities of healing include dancing, singing and praying. Therapies which provide vigorous activities and interpersonal interactions are perceived to be more effective than those which fail to engage the body actively to generate healing energy (p. 83).

The integration of African and Indigenous traditional healing into storytelling and peace circle spaces create positive interpersonal relationships and high energy placemaking that engenders energetic and guttural release for ADP in the U.S. This is why Asè has drummers and music at their performances; elders know the power of music. Many storytellers also have stories where children and adults can dance, sing along and engage in the full power of orality.

Momma Nina highlighted this point exactly when she talked about how she uses song in her performances. She explained:

Another thing that they gave me was um, I sing my grandmother's songs all through the pieces. And one of the special songs that they always requested of her was, "Get Right Church and Let's Go Home." I changed it to [begins to sing what sounds like a enslaved African spiritual while beating the table] *I'm goin' free on the monin train...I'm goin' free on the monin traaaaaaainnniin...*

So, one day I was at a boy scout camp in Michigan. And it was pitch black and they had a big bon fire and they had me come out and do Harriet Tubman. And as I was singing that song the children start saying *choo choo choo choo choo choo choo*.. And then some of them was sayin' *whoot whoot*. And I said, aw that is so wonderful and so powerful. So now, when if I'm saying ah...*Big parcel, middle parcel, itty bitty parcel* that's what we were called, I say, come on help me now *choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo*. And I ah, you know. And then the audience helps me [repeats]. It's really nice to have audience participation. It's very important for our children to know these stories cause they don't know um.

Music activates African traditional healing. It "triggers dance and singing" and that elevates "the spirits of patients" which stimulates "emotional arousal" and a fortified desire towards uncanny moral and successful outcomes (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 83).

Music facilitates the curative process and “affects muscle tone, body rhythms, feelings, heartbeat, digestive peristalses, and brain waves [which] become synchronized” (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p.83). Music also unites the community and manifest a “joyful and therapeutic” feeling of togetherness (Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018; Vontress, 2003).

In addition, Vontress (1999) states that:

Music acts as a healing function for individual and the group. A remedy for human imbalance, it facilitates communication with the ancestral spirits and Creator. It harmonizes forces of the visible and invisible worlds...captures the movements of the human body, its sensations and nature itself...the sound [of music] is the force of change...music triggers dance and dance is magnetic. They are both contagious and important ingredients for healing (Vontress, 1999, p. 33; Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018, p. 83).

Asè is a connection for storytellers and their audience to ancestral spirits and the Creator. Ritualizing music into stories and performance provides a dynamic energy in African-centered storytelling praxis. Practitioners are able to fuse traditional African healing principles with cultural knowings and political-resistance wisdom through oral narratives. As more youth get exposed to these traditions, it will be powerful to see even younger generations better understanding and honoring the culture and their responsibility to keep it.

Finally, storytellers also talked about what they did not want to see Asè move into in the future. Some expressed that while Asè has been around for several decades, it has yet to make the impact that it can make in the community. Mama Maathai was very clear about what she does and does not want Asè to be moving forward. She shared:

Well, I'll tell you what I don't want to happen. We're all into this world of technology. And getting on the computer, and getting on laptops, and googling things, and looking

things up, and looking at YouTube. What I don't want to happen is that the art of oral storytelling dying. I want to continue to see families coming together and groups coming together to hear story. Nothing can take the place of that. Because what is it doing? Its building relationships. Its connecting people together. One way to build a relationship is around food, right? I think storytelling is like food. So, I just wanna see us continue to um, keep it going. I want us, our group especially to bring in younger people into the organization. Because if we don't, our group is going to become extinct because we're all getting up to that certain age. I want us to continue working with youth so that they can, even if they just do it in that short time. Train up a child in the way that they should go, and they will not depart from that. Eventually, they gon come back to that. That's what I want. That's what I want.

Whatever the future of Asè is, it is clear that they are on to something very powerful. The pandemic, however, is forcing Asè to make adjustments. Their annual concert was virtual for the first time ever. Nonetheless, it will still began with libations, African singing and drumming.

Policy Implications

African-centered storytelling praxis uses African traditional healing interventions to impact ADP by addressing mental, physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual afflictions and ill-health (Akua, 2020; Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). In addition, there are efforts to decolonize mental health work across the world due to the largely Eurocentric nature of therapeutic practices (Singh et al., 2020). School districts should create policy that mandates that all counselors are trained in approaches centered in collective wellness and healing. In addition, schools should have to mandate that all African descent students engage in group-based healing interventions that fuse music and African-centered storytelling. Lastly, community-based organizations should work together to certify youth and adults in said practices. These certifications can then be used at the district and local levels.

Expanding the Pan-African Education & Storytelling Movement

Storytellers are dynamic human beings. Many of them are extremely well-read and have backgrounds in education and the arts. They also share a love for learning and using the idea of eldership to impact future generations. This work is not simply local, it is Pan-African in that it covers African and Indigenous oral traditions and history from across the diaspora. It is movement work. It is resistance work. And as we move deeper into the pandemic and fears of more biological and physical warfare, it is work that begs the question, what will become of this work and our efforts to unify across time and space? And how will travel factor into our traditional African healing praxis for ADP?

Returning home and homeschooling in the age of global pandemics

Storytellers related to one another in regards to the amount of travel storytellers were able to do in their lifetimes. Several storytellers spoke about how travel – specifically to continental Africa – was an extremely invaluable experience. While I was able to highlight some of these examples, there were others that I did not include and would like to include now as a way to question the future of travel and these cross-cultural knowledge exchanges post-Covid-19. As I am writing this, we have yet to see the exact kind of restrictions, if any, that will be placed on travel, or what kind of documentation you will need to travel, but we are already seeing travel impacted as U.S. passports are no longer accepted in all but about 20 countries across the world.

Several storytellers talked about traveling to Africa; even more discussed how much they enjoyed traveling to West Africa in particular. Storytellers learned a great deal about everyday life, food, culture, music, spirituality, and of course, storytelling. These trips had a profound impact on storytellers. Mama Kandake shared:

I think the same year that I was in Ghana with the storytellers, it was 2015, I think it's that year, doesn't really matter, we went to a village where for the first time since before

colonization, they were going to have a rites of passage ceremony. Because they had been discontinued. They were told that all you needed was Jesus. And so, there it came to be accepted, that, we don't need our traditions anymore. But among those traditions were the Rites of Passage. Trainings, where a man was taught what it means to be a man; these are your responsibilities. These are the things you need to do for your family and your community. Where a girl was taught, this is what it means to be a woman.

And all of that was discontinued. So, largely, due to the influence of African Americans, going to places like Ghana, now more people in Ghana are starting to see, oh wow. Because they didn't value what they had, cause nobody else seemed to. And they didn't understand just how powerful it was. And so, but if all these folks are coming from the United States, and saying teach us, this was wonderful, what do you mean you don't do it anymore? What's wrong with ya'll? [laughter]. So, I think eventually they started to see, well maybe there is something here.

Cross cultural exchanges are extremely valuable – especially for ADP in the U.S. that get an opportunity to travel to West Africa. Ghana has a particularly layered past seeing that it participated in enslavement and many ADP may be from that part of the continent. Talking to Ghanaians about how valuable their traditional culture is for ADP in the U.S. is a fascinating discussion. These conversations help to underscore the value of storytelling and sharing these kinds of experiences with local communities.

Mama Nandi also talked about her experience in Ghana. She recounted that she took issue with what she learned on the trip and shared how this informed her African-centered storytelling praxis. She added:

I had the opportunity to go to Ghana a few years ago. And we were, um, visiting one of the slave, they call them castles, we call them dungeons. And so, they were giving us this tutorial on stuff. And I was like, they had one of the headmasters or whatever they called them, of the slave dungeon. They had them in tombs, him and his wife. And I'm like why are these people here? He said, well you know it's a part of the history. I said, it's a part of their history. I said, ya'll need to, you know me being an arrogant American, I said ya'll need to dig these bodies up and take 'em out there on the sand and set 'em on fire. Because they don't, they don't deserve a place of honor. A place to be remembered.

And then when I was telling that story somebody else who's been to Ghana several times and know more about the history, he said, that's your American arrogance, you know. And I said, you know what, it is. And she said, so there lookin' at things very differently because, and I learned that they don't even teach the Slave experience. You don't get that

till you go to college, if you seek it out [upset]. And for me that's like, crazy. But for them, that's not their history. That' ended, you know. When they left, that ended their experience with that, you know. So, why we gon teach that, that's ya'll that ain't us. But I think it's important for anybody who knows to tell stories of truth and of uplift. We must.

Ghana's acceptance of the remains of enslavers on what Mama Nandi considered sacred ground is profound insight to both the way Ghana understands enslavement and the way she gained new knowledge from the trip itself. It is clear that she is going to use this new knowledge and share it with others. What is less clear is whether or not, as she said, Ghana would move to tell more of their side of the story. And whether, as Kandake said, Ghana would be influenced by ADP from the U.S. coming to Ghana and pressing them to be more forthcoming about their history.

In addition, these trips also help to re-position and re-center African descendants and their Africaness. Ghana has a way of reminding cultural keepers, healers, cultural custodians, and African-centered educators, yes, you matter and your work matters. It is because of this, that more travel needs to happen to Ghana with these kinds of cultural warriors, not less. This is because there are conversations that have still not been had with people in Ghana – on a national and a peace and reconciliatory level – and this is key for moving forward.

Mama Amina speaks to this imperative. She recounts her trip to Ghana and talks about how children are not being taught the complete history – similarly with children here in the U.S. She argues ADP in the U.S. and diaspora to go back to Ghana and share their stories. She points out that:

The other thing was that when I did go to Ghana, we kept asking about our story in their history. In the book there, so we were told, my friend another Asè member and I who were there, was that they didn't know what happened. Nobody came back, so they told them all kinds of stories about what happened to people who were enslaved. This was in Ghana. And we actually went to a university and its less than two lines in the history. And they said that's because no one ever came back to tell the story. And there was no

dialogue. And this was a dialogue, that hadn't been had between the motherland and the United States, and this was in 2015.

This one man who was our escorts in one of the places, he said his mother used to say, if you're bad, you're gonna get sent to America. That was the punishment, because some people felt it was the rogue people or those who were not good for the continent, that were sent away or taken away on ships. And they said you never came back and you never let us know what happened. And we said, we couldn't come back; we didn't know that either. So that's one of the reasons I want to tell the stories.

Coming back to tell their story is a critical part of Pan-African education. Mama Amina even shares that this inspired her to want to tell stories. When I was in Ghana, I was also surprised at how much Ghanaians did not know about their history *and* our history. However, it makes sense when we think about colonization and why efforts of decolonization are necessary on the continent.

The other striking idea in this selection is how in the absence of a story, one will be made up. This reminds me of the proverb, "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter," a proverb Mama Amina often recites during Asè functions. This proverb translates to in the absence of stories from those that are deeply impacted by trauma and travesty – in this case African enslavement – stories will be created that ignore certain parts of history. However, we must tell the complete story and not allow misinformation and a lack of education to colonize the minds of young Ghanaians and Africans throughout the African world.

Sefa Dei (2020) discusses this very point and argues that:

Africanization has not been fully pursued in African schools and the educational system in general. The process of Africanization is beyond the curriculum (see Gumbo 2016; Mporu et al. 2014; Odora-Hoppers 2001). It touches on a critical examination of the environment, climate, culture, and the social-organizational lives of schools (see also

Abdi 2005, 2015). Clearly, the construction of a decolonial, Africanized curriculum is about power, context, and knowledge use. An African schooling curriculum informed by Indigenous perspectives is an important starting point. Knowledge is power and with such knowledge we are able to define and set our own educational agenda as African peoples. An authentic read of Africanization must seek the integration of African-centered perspectives, eschewing the centrality of Africa, its cultures and social values, as well as the African human agency. It is not about a return to a nostalgic past (p. 288).

Internalizing Africanization in all African, Indigenous and ADP spaces is key. This should be an unapologetic internalization, and cross-cultural exchanges facilitate this kind of re-Africanization. However, with travel coming to a halt, African-centered storytelling praxis may become even more important as the need to facilitate African-centered homeschooling rises to an even greater need for African descendants' families throughout the diaspora.

Mazama and Musumunu (2014) wrote *African Americans and Homeschooling* to discuss this particular point. African-centered homeschooling also responds to an education system that divides families and cultures while providing a morally and deficient culture (Mazama and Musumunu, 2014). They assert that African-centered homeschooling centers around the search for knowledge and Africanization through the traditions of our Ancestors (Mazama and Musumunu, 2014). Furthermore, an increasingly significant amount of cultural socialization occurs and helps children deal with negative messages by focusing on historically relevant knowledge for African children. And as important as African-centered homeschool has been, it is going to become even more important moving forward.

The scholars argue that there are certain roles that the Kiswahili terms *mwaliimu* (teacher/educator/parent) and *mwanafunzi* (student) are essential to sustaining African-centered instruction abodes.

The *mwaliimu* is the essential conduit and nexus between tradition and the potential of the nation. The *mwaliimu* can only be effective in fulfilling that task if he or she is an active participant in that working collective that is devoted to the cultural, political, and economic development of the Afrikan community. The *mwaliimu* must bring enthusiasm, conviction, ideological clarity, moral integrity, and courage, as well as knowledge, to the teaching/learning environment. The enthusiasm and conviction must occasion a profound sense of structure and order. The latent messages and information shared by the *mwaliimu* through physical nuance, voice pattern and tone, hairstyle, dress, and character are as important to the effective teaching/learning environment as the structured lessons. If The effective Afrikan-centered teaching/learning environment includes the immediate relationship of *mwaliimu* and *mwanafunzi*, teacher and student, respectively (Akoto, 2020, p. 133).

Prioritizing how the learning environment is structured is sage advice for African-centered homeschoolers. In addition, they speak about the order and seriousness that one should approach when taking on any *mwaliimu* role. He also uses the Interactive Circle (Diallo & Hall, 1989, p. 98) to describe Social Placement of Learning/Teaching Encounter and how the community (storytellers) and family work together to support the *mwaliimu*.

However, there are some challenges as well. The authors highlight four concerns that should be addressed. The challenge noted are “systemic issues, lifestyle changes, logistical issues, and home educator praxis” (Akoto, 2020, p. 133). The first three challenges are

challenges that cannot be directly addressed by African-centered storytelling praxis. However, the last challenge, ‘home educator praxis’ is something that storytellers can influence. This challenge is also related to a lack of curricular materials for those that are new to African-centeredness and homeschooling. This is one of the areas that my organization, African and Indigenous Knowledge Institute (AIKI) will assist with.

AIKI is a member organization that provides access to African and Indigenous cultural knowledges while connecting people and resources throughout the diaspora. Currently, there are numerous organizations for the betterment of Global Africa on the continent and in the Caribbean that most people in the U.S. do not know about. And conversely, several organizations exist in the U.S. that have not been connected with folks on the ground and on the continent. Additionally, there are African-centered curriculums that exist and that need to be created for our homes *and* our schools. AIKI will work to create listings of these resources for members so that they can access this information and other projects and efforts connected to re-Africanization, Pan-Africanism, relocation, reparations, and other projects.

In addition, AIKI will work to co-host storytelling healing shares that center traditional African healing practices (i.e. group counseling) and allow ADP in the U.S. to share stories and receive stories across cultural and familial lines. Lastly, there is a need to redirect how children are able to access African-centered storytelling. I am currently working with Asè so it can offer more virtual storytelling options for youth and families across the diaspora.

The impact of storytelling is clear but how that impact will continue to be made is laced with uncertainty in this moment. However, as Mama Kandake explains, we must continue to push for these cross-cultural exchanges because we see what they are doing to our elders and elders and the impact they have on families in general. She shares:

So that when we're together in that way, and you get a chance to hear each other stories, it offers the opportunity for understanding, empathy, and a sense of connection. And it's often only after we feel a sense of connection that we come to care. So, that's one of the ways that the storytelling has healing properties because sometimes there will be people from different cultures, countries, temperaments, or ideologies that cannot seem to see eye-to-eye and kind of maybe become combatant with each other. And if they had the opportunity to sit down and talk, there is a potential for healing.

The healing potential embedded in African-centered storytelling praxis is powerful.

Currently, there have not been efforts to even engage Africans in the African world with ADP in the U.S. through storytelling – this is one of the areas that AIKI would like to work with Asè to improve.

Mama Nandi speaks to the critical necessity for us to use storytelling to transcend our differences and come together in the name of Africanization and African liberation for all. She adds:

So much of that stuff we have in common, and if we share those stories it can bring us together and begin to build bonds between us, you know. And let us know that we have much more in common than we do that divides us and separates us, you know. Cause I think that's the key, we gotta make connections with each other, you know. We gotta make connections with each other, and we as a group have to make connections with other folks [throughout the diaspora], and share our perspectives cause that's the only way things are gonna change and get better.

To openly and honestly share how we're feelin.' And so yeah there is absolutely a connection [between Black storytelling and west-African oral tradition] and I would really like to spend some time with folk back on the continent who are doing that, you know. Cause we need it. We need that.

Policy Implications

Homeschooling provides ADP with the tools and African-centered praxis to combat mental health, cultural violence, and racial fatigue that students endure in American public schools (Mazama and Musumunu, 2014). In addition, storytelling reconnects people to their cultural heritage and uses group-counseling methods that are in line with African traditional healing (Dei, 2020; Bojuwoye and Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). As a result, policy should require

that local colleges and universities contribute a percentage of their endowments to an African Retribution Fund that funds trips and projects aimed at restoring cultural ties across the African diaspora.

In addition, during the pandemic and virtual schooling, school districts should be mandated to use field trip budget to pay for cultural edification programs that teach African and Indigenous history and healing. Schools must only choose from an approved list and that list will only include organizations that use African-centered praxis.

Conclusion

The offering presented here is in no way exhaustive of the totality of work African-centered educators must undertake. It is indeed a subset of the many possibilities and challenges that interface with movement work and African resistance. It is also a snapshot into the lives of cultural warriors on the frontlines of intellectual warfare and cultural restoration. It is a testament to their work and an honoring of the oral tradition, the eldership tradition, and the need for more local, national, and diasporic innovations that foster re-Africanization.

Storytellers taught me about the importance of not simply orality, but of using your voice to honor your Ancestors and history. We see African orature making strides in praise poetry, poetry, hip-hop, church sermons, and other spaces that are predominately ADP in the U.S. These art forms are an extension of the African oral tradition, but many artist and projects have lost their connection to source. This connection to source is extremely important and cannot be misused or manipulated. In fact, it is not simply about connecting to spirituality in any form, it is about the prioritization and elevation of African traditional spirituality and healing – in all forms.

In this way, African humanism becomes an everyday practice that you learn from and revere in your elders. Many of us do not have elders in our families that can teach these

traditions. In fact, many of us do not even have parents that can demonstrate African traditional culture, spirituality and elderhood. So, organizations like Asè and NABS that groom and prepare elders for this kind of work is critical to our ability to see ourselves in elders and elders that are not ourselves. We also must then teach our families, parents, and organizations how to relearn and be in solidarity with us – this is no easy feat. But it is possible, and storytelling can help with this effort as well.

It is comforting that we are seeing a national response to protecting ADP eldership in the U.S. during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are seeing people care for older populations, prioritizing home visits, and parents looking to find ways to educate their children – for the first time for many of them – from their homes. This also has included bringing grandparents and elders into the house (if they are not there already) to provide support in these challenging times. This kind of shift in what households look like and need could provide a monumental shift for ADP across the diaspora. However, it will take a concerted and organized effort where we are providing structured resources and tools (often for less than they are worth) for families for this particular moment in time.

This also means that we are cognizant of how we are interfacing with our brothers and sisters throughout the diaspora. There are people in Ghana who need African-centered curricula and learning resources. And while we are beginning to see promising exchanges across cultures, more is needed in the social media and digital space to push our work forward even with the restrictions we are facing. There are not enough hashtags, not enough agreed upon strategies, at this time. While there is a girth of information, there is not a similar girth of tools and strategy online – and this does not bode well for the younger generations.

But we will not be measured on what does not exist; we will be measured on what we build for this moment, from this moment. We will be asked; how did we respond? I am extremely interested in how we can break down the formalities and impediments and focus on simply daily tasks that can move people into Africanization one day at a time. This is what African orature does. It moves you into Africanization one sentence at a time. It forces you to hear truths that you may not be ready to hear. It places knowledge and wisdom that may have previously been inaccessible in your lap. Even still, we have to push further and make sure that it is also facilitating spiritual connection and healing.

This last imperative is not easy. Many people have been told that spirituality, antiquitous Africa, Gods and Goddesses, divination, deities, alters, rituals, libation, offerings, sacrifices, and other sacred traditional methods are evil and unnecessary for our survival and success as ADP in the U.S. Indeed, it does not help that there are successful ADP in the U.S. whom have not promoted these practices and thus give the impression that success does not go through these traditions. Even worse, we have consciously and subconsciously learned that practicing these traditions in these ways is backwards.

However, this too is changing. Homeschooling is rising across the nation (Mazama & Musumunu, 2014). As more people take their own edification and family learning into their own hands, dormant truths will fly free. At the same time, people will still need existential group counseling that helps them navigate their re-introduction and restoration of their spiritual and familial relationships. Traditional healers in the U.S. are doing some of this work. However, as the demand for healing work expands, so too will the spaces that allow people to learn these traditions.

Lastly, learning about storytelling has also taught me about how we preserve and sustain traditions as ADP in the U.S. Oral tradition is something that is sacred and learned and passed down generation after generation. It is important to protect the tradition and those cultural custodians that embody it. However, it cannot solely be hidden or so sacred and secret that we are missing out on the opportunity to move the tradition forward with the next generation. The rites of storytelling – and rites of passage spaces – should find ways to work as one. We are at war. We cannot simply follow the traditions as they are and were practiced in traditional Africa. Instead, we must arm as many ADP as we can so we can rise and secure our liberation, in this of all moments.

In conclusion, I leave you with two poems from the storytellers. The first is from Momma Nina, and the second is from Baba Lumumba:

Slavery Still

*Handcuffs you say, get out my way you know dem shackle chains
You cain clean dis up, it de same ol stuff, we see'd it in slavery day
Billy club nightstick see, tryin' to play a trick.
Thank we don kno, de same blood flow, sam's when you used de whip
Blue uniform, now dat de one, what really get my goat.
Dats what cha got when you traded in, yah long white klu klux coat
Yah build em high, yah build em wide, yah steal my children to put inside.
Penal institute you say, seem same to me as slavery day
Now how you thank yah gwine fool an ole sage soul like me
I see it plain, feel de same pain, we felt in slavery.
My children stole, put on de role, dat say dey felon for life
You still in charge, still livin large, my folks yet stelin' strife.
But one fine day, dis I say, you gonna havta pay
Through all our pain, what did you gain, you still are quite insane.*

We're Connected

*The Ancestors started to play my drum.
Play for you this African sound.
Find a rhythm to clap your hands.
We're connected through the elements.
The Ancestors say that I should try to get you to raise our voice up high.
Find the message in this song, this is how we'll get along.*

*Connected, like leaves to a tree.
Connected, like sand to the beach.
Connected, like stars in the sky.
Connected, yes you and I are connected.
Like heat to the sun.
Connected, a hand on a drum.
All birds with wings.
Yes, everything.
Connected, like ice in a glass.
Connected, like now to our pass.
Like grass to the ground
Black white, and brown.
Like clouds to the rain
All joy and pain
Connected.
The Ancestors said, play my drum.*

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VITA

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DEGREES

PhD in Policy Studies in Urban Education (ABD)	Graduating DEC 2020
University of Illinois at Chicago	
MA in Organizational Development	2013
Antioch University	
BA in Sociology and Anthropology	2007
Carleton College	

RESEARCH & PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOCUS

- Participatory action research and storytelling for empowering local systems and policy development
- Community building through strategic planning and African-centered education
- Racial equity, youth development, diversity and inclusion, cultural archiving, urban planning, social entrepreneurship, operations management, and community wellness
- Co-creating digital and social media to build equitable dialogue, systems, and institutions

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant	Spring 2018
Chicago Public Schools: Equity Research Project, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Worked with UIC's school of public health to provide Chicago Public Schools (CPS) with information about racism across the district.● Compiled and aggregated video interviews, surveys, and other sensitive data into short stories that reflect how a racial equity lens is needed in Chicago Public Schools.	
Research Assistant	2015-2016
Office of Recruitment and Retention, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Worked to retain undergraduate students of color by providing student-centered programming, academic monitoring, and one-on-one mentorship.● Proposed a participatory action research project on how cultural capital enhances outcomes for college students of color.	
Youth Organizer & Community Researcher	2007-2010
Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE), Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Managed retreats and restorative justice workshops, through a participatory action	

- research project about high school dropout rates and student achievement.
- Trained over 200 youth and adults in participatory action research methods, leadership development strategies and political education models related to high school attainment.
- Worked with youth and political officials (locally and nationally) to produce a documentary for the project and developed equitable education policies that addressed dropout rates, student supports, and school funding.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Faculty, Entrepreneurship **2020 – Present** African Development Universalis

- Curating and teaching an online course so students can analyze how the African Union Goal 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are impacting African innovation.
- Planning and incorporating industry-based best practices into existing business models and ethical social intervention development.
- Expanding students' knowledge in business formation using the Social Business Canvass Model, local partners, mentorship, and digital marketing through social media.

Social Entrepreneurship Education Program Instructor **2019 – Present** Center for Literacy, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)

- Designs and manages operations for the Social Entrepreneurship Education Program (SEEP), a 5-month financial literacy program that assist adult learners with starting social businesses that impact the community.
- Manages over 75 students and staff at locations on the south and west sides of Chicago
- Coordinates the SEEP Pitch Contest, a culminating community event where students pitch social business and are awarded monetary prizes (\$500, \$350, and \$250).

Lead Instructional Coach **2018 –2019** Center for Literacy, University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)

- Coordinated curriculum and instruction for over 100 G.E.D. students on the south and west sides of Chicago.
- Supervised 15 staff members, lesson plan development, staff protocols and procedures, class schedules, budget allocations, and supports for students' social-emotional needs.
- Implemented a restorative justice framework and served as a student support specialist tasked with resolving student and staff conflicts and violence prevention.

Healing Arts Educator **2017 – 2020** Chicago Commons, Chicago, IL

- Designed a 6-week, mindfulness program for Black and Spanish-speaking, pre-k students,

that included weekly meditation and yoga sessions.

- Trained teachers on how to use meditation in their classrooms and apply deep breathing techniques with students during conflict resolution.
- Produced written report about the program, best practices in mindfulness, and suggestions for expanding health equity initiatives throughout the organization.

Digital Content Strategist

2018 – 2019

Grow Greater Englewood, Chicago, IL

- Coordinated and drafted a Digital Communications Plan that outlined social media campaigns and solution-oriented strategies to increase online presence and develop relationships towards community impact.
- Developed online content on a monthly basis, utilizing a variety of digital tools while launching new digital platforms (e.g. blogs, newsletters, etc.).
- Provided consultation for the incubation of Englewood Village Farms and Asase Yaa Hemp Co-op, two agricultural enterprises aimed at diversifying the urban agriculture and hemp industries.

Program Director

2017 – 2018

Community Movement Builders, Atlanta, GA

- Advanced STEM-related summer programming towards the improvement of a community garden, outdoor stage, urban farm, and several programming initiatives.
- Maintained effective communication with over 300 members, organizers, residents, educators, political officials, volunteers, social media followers; including working with LGBT-identified, runaway and homeless, foster care and immigrant youth populations.
- Submitted and received a \$2,500 grant for a social entrepreneurship incubator and farmers' market in Atlanta.

Community Health Fellow

2016 – 2017

Access Center for Discovery and Learning, Chicago, IL

- Devised complimentary and public health research projects for adults and youth in Chicago's south side communities.
- Integrated healing arts theories and practices with complementary and alternative medicine approaches to engage community in collective dialogue about health.
- Proposed culturally sensitive programming to increase organizational outreach and capacity.

Founder & President**2015 – 2017**

Ujamaa Community Land Trust, Chicago, IL

- Coordinated all aspects of Board Member education, training, and recruitment.
- Designed and implemented the Healing Arts Village, an 8-week, healing and restorative justice program for over 75 youth to aid with violence prevention.
- Built a website and led marketing and community engagement initiatives through social Media, neighborhood events and story-sharing interventions.

Youth Organizer**2014 – 2015**

Chicago Freedom School, Chicago, IL

- Coordinated with youth across the city to develop organizing strategies and direct actions that led to restorative-justice initiatives at students' schools.
- Designed a social justice political education curriculum and summer program for high school students (20).
- Mentored youth throughout the summer and school year on their personal and professional goals.

Founder & Director of Restorative Justice**2011 – 2014**

Healers of Color, Chicago, IL

- Facilitated peace circles in dozens of schools and organizations as we promoted restorative justice as a framework for violence prevention.
- Presented locally and nationally on community healing as health equity and black cooperative economics as civic engagement.
- Coordinated art and media-based education projects across several multimedia platforms (i.e. photography, videography, blogs, podcasts, etc.).

Adjunct Faculty, Sociology of Sex and Gender**2013 – 2014**

Daley College, Chicago, IL

- Designed syllabus and administered all professorial duties for SOC 207: Sociology of Sex and Gender.
- Advised students on issues outside of the coursework through online communications (i.e. email, Blackboard, etc.).
- Worked with the administration to create support for students.

Founder**2010 – 2014**

Live Free Arts & Media Collective, Chicago, IL

- Facilitated contractual digital media content for nonprofits, individuals and other public and private clientele; trained community members about how to use digital media to tell their stories.

- Facilitated operations for a community healing celebration for over 100 people that featured group meditation, zumba, qi gong, capoeira, African drumming and dance and other healing modalities.
- Designed restorative justice workshops for students in Pilsen, Englewood, and Hyde Park that use African and Indigenous culture (African-centered values) to restore trauma (i.e. Adinkra symbols, Ma'at, etc.).

HONORS AND AWARDS

Community Engagement Grant	2018
● Awarded \$5,000 to provide social entrepreneurship education to CPS students.	
Summer Research Grant	2017
● Awarded \$5,000 for dissertation research.	
Community Engagement Grant	2016
● Awarded \$5,000 for providing a digital media program to Englewood youth.	
Digital Media Award	2010
● Awarded \$5,000 for a 5-minute video contest about violence prevention and immigration.	
POSSE Scholarship	2003
● A full-tuition, merit-based leadership award.	

PRESENTATIONS

ASCAC Midwest Region Conference	2020
Presented, "Keepers of West-African Humanism and Traditional Healing: Narrative praxis in Chicago"	
College of Education Research Day	2016
Presented, "African-centered Educational Research Paradigms"	
Advancement of Curriculum Studies Conference	2015
Presented, "Homeplace: Re-humanizing education through African-centered Education"	
Pedagogy & Theater of the Oppressed	2015
Presented, "Let your Energy Flow: Movement in theater, love, and life"	

LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

- Vice President of Asè: The Chicago Association of Black Storytellers, Chicago, IL, November 2020.
- Facilitator, Spiritual Closing Ceremony, Chicago Freedom School, Chicago, IL, June 13th, 2019.
- Facilitator of Accountability Circle, Chicago Freedom School, Chicago, IL, June 12th, 2019.
- Guest Lecturer, John Marshall Law Clinic, Chicago, IL, May 15th, 2019.
- Facilitator, Mindfulness Meditation, Chicago Commons, Chicago, IL, March 30th, 2019.
- Co-host, Food Funding Friday, Chicago Food Policy Network, Chicago, IL, November 13th, 2018.
- Panelist, Chicago Cooperative Economy Summit, Chicago, IL, August 25, 2018.
- Facilitator, Peace Circle Training, Grow Greater Englewood, Chicago, IL, June 15th, 2018.

- Facilitator, Student Voice and Activism Fellowship, Chicago Public Schools, June 28th, 2018.
- Facilitator, Peace Circle at the People of Color Forum, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, April 5th, 2018.
- Facilitator, Strategic Planning Session, Cowry Collective, St. Louis, MO, April 6th, 2018.
- Facilitator, Toxic Masculinity Circle, Chicago Freedom School, Chicago, IL, March 16th, 2018.
- Facilitator, MLK Student Leadership Conference (CPS), Chicago, IL, January 18th, 2018.
- Presenter, Meditation for 1st graders, Village Leadership Academy, Chicago, IL, April 15, 2018.
- Guest Lecturer, Field Studies in Social Justice course, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, May 21st, 2017.
- Facilitator, MLK Day of Service, Community Movement Builders, January 15th, 2017.
- Guest Lecturer, Rudy Lozano Leadership Academy, Chicago, IL, July 2nd, 2014.
- Panelist, Conjure Women and Medicine Men: Traditional and Contemporary Medicine and Vernacular Healing Practices as Cultural Work and Artistic Practice, Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago, IL, July 26th, 2015.
- Facilitator, “African Historiography”, Teaching About Africa, Kemet Institute of Chicago, Carruthers Center for Inner-City Studies, Chicago, IL, January 21, 2012.
- Panelist, Forum on Music and Movements, African Festival of the Arts, Chicago, IL, September 4, 2011

SKILLS

Computer: Experience with Microsoft Office, Adobe Creative Suite, client-relationship management, cloud-based software, web design, data management software, quantitative and qualitative software, and other applications.

Social Media: Proficient in communication through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms and digital archival and learning tools.

Language: Working knowledge of oral and written Spanish and Kiswahili

Other: Proficient in photography, videography, digital media, editing, music production, and other media arts.