

Natural/Man-Made Disaster and the Derailment of the African Worldview

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Most often natural disasters (i.e., earthquakes, hurricanes, mining collapse, etc.) are viewed in terms of physical damage, death to people, and destruction of infrastructure (buildings, places, landscape, etc.). The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) Disaster Relief Task Force from its inception has, however, recognized that the experience of natural disasters, for all people, especially African people, are made more devastating due to unrecognized and untreated man-made disasters. Too often the historical trauma of man-made disasters, such as slavery¹, colonialism, genocidal warfare, persistent police brutality, state-sponsored oppression, racial segregation, apartheid, and so on, are never addressed in the wake of a natural disaster and consequently invisibly erode and/or impede the effectiveness of the recovery efforts in the context of a specific natural disaster. Psychological injuries from disaster traumas are cumulative and most often untreated. Unresolved traumatic experiences, left unaddressed, can and do contribute to both long-term impairments to physical and psychological recovery. What is seldom addressed in response to man-made disasters are the lingering effects of trauma and, most important, the challenge, erosion, and/or destruction to the people's general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality, that is, cultural worldview caused by disasters.

With this recognition, the ABPsi Disaster Relief Task Force has cojoined man-made and natural disasters and proposes that all recovery and/or restorative efforts must simultaneously address the effects of both man-made and natural disasters. While many profess that there is no single body of beliefs and practices that can be identified as African, that intellectual—more correctly political—belief is far from being correct. In actuality, it is possible to identify a clear and common African worldview that reflects African people's most comprehensive ideas of order, our picture of the way things are or should be, and our beliefs about the “nature of reality” and the “meaning of being,” which in turn reflect our explanations, expectations, relationships, roles, responsibilities, and place in the world.

Universally speaking, African people, with little exception, hold that there

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is a divine source and maker of a dynamic and vital universe and that to be human is to be spirit housed in a physical container having a human experience. The African worldview, technically/philosophically, is comprised, at minimum, of beliefs akin to (a) autogeny, (b) the primacy of the person, (c) the consubstantiality of primordial substance, (d) perpetual evolution, (e) vitalism, and (f) living forever. The trajectory consistent with these fundamental beliefs was derailed by the man-made disasters of colonialism and chattel slavery (Nobles, 2007). It is argued herein that this derailment was, in fact, intentional. It was equivalent to “psychic terrorism” in the form of civilizing, Westernization, modernity, and so on, and its consequence almost always resulted in the dehumanization and rearrangement of a people and the cultural genocide of our general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality. Almost in every way, to be effective, colonialism required the rearrangement of all aspects of the colonized life and living. The so-called colonial masters believed that they had the “right” to claim and use for their own benefit any and every material or object having commercial value, including defining the ideas, values, and beliefs of their conquered and colonial subjects. Nowhere has social science been more guilty of this cultural genocide, in the form of scientific colonialism, than in the disciplines of psychology and anthropology (Nobles, 2006).

This derailed and colonized African worldview now reflects an infrequently challenged belief in White supremacy and/or White privilege, institutional oppression, apostolic authority, aristocracy, neocolonialism (political disenfranchisement), place, cultural denigration, classism, tribalism, elitism, genetic inferiority (savage/second class citizen), economic exploitation, Western educational hegemony, patriarchal domination, nation/state imposition, colorism, individualism, and greed.

A suboptimal orientation, for persons of African ancestry, is the product of living in a Eurocentric society that values materialism and possessions over interpersonal relationships with people (Myers, 1988). This is the overwhelming subtle and subliminal man-made disaster for African people. The “mental map” created by the Europeanization of the African (both continental and diasporan) can be viewed as the aftershock of colonization and chattelization. Wright (1984) correctly notes that “Mentacide” results from the deliberate and systematic destruction of a person’s, people, or group’s mind and/or capacity to think, which in turn results in the abandonment of one’s own authenticity and the relinquishing of responsibility for the ownership of life-sustaining institutions.

In effect, the author believes that the man-made disaster and the derailment of the African worldview as reflected in the mindset of victims of the man-made disaster of slavery and colonialism have been covered with a “curtain of anomaly” that is equivalent to “spirit damage.”

Serudja Ta (Srwd Ta):1 The Reciprocal Re-Birthing of African Spiritness²

In response to this damage, I have proposed, as part of the ABPsi disaster recovery strategy, a restoration process called Serudja Ta (srwd ta) designed to give reciprocal re-birthing to the African spirit. Srwd ta means to “make secure, set right (a wrong), provide, fulfill (a contract)”; “to restore, repair, to make new again”; “to make grow, flourish” (Karenga, 2006). The idea of “Reciprocal Re-birthing” requires a mutually interactive application of African wisdom traditions, history, culture, philosophy, and deep thought to illuminate, inform, and develop simultaneously the re-birthing of (a) personal character (African personhood) and (b) environmental character (national sovereignty) by tapping into the most fundamental and essential core root and source for inspiring health and eliminating imbalance and discord and reestablish and/or restore harmony and optimal human functioning for African people (both continental and diasporan).

The ultimate charge in any recovery, treatment, intervention, and development process responding to the derailment of the African psychocultural moorings, that is, worldview by natural and/or man-made disaster, must be to make secure, set right, provide, fulfill, restore, repair, to make new again and to make grow, and flourish the authentic African spirit/humanity, ergo, Serudja Ta.

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Notes

1. The moral mandate of Serudj Ta is found in the ancient Egyptian sacred text, The Husia, which teaches that one should see and sense the world as sacred space with a shared heritage given by the Divine. All of reality is sacred and is respected and constantly renewed by the ancestors who leave to us a rich legacy to cherish, care for, and continue to renew and then pass on to future generations to do likewise. Indeed, Serudj Ta is a constant call and ongoing obligation to actively care for the health, wholeness, and sustainment of the world: To constantly raise up the ruined; repair the damaged; rejoin the severed; replenish the depleted; strengthen the weakened; set right the wrong; and make firm and flourish the insecure and undeveloped (Karenga, 2011).

2. In discussing the fundamental challenge of Black psychology, I have suggested that the idea of being “spiritual” or “spirituality” limits the full understanding of the phenomenon called human and that given the African deep thought, the idea of “Spiritness,” which pertains to being spirit has more conceptual utility.

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