

Pan-African Psychologies

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African people and their descendants from various regions of the Diaspora have endured a history of struggle that has been replete in violence and structural oppression. Offering a *psychology* of Black people entails an understanding of these pervasive, sustaining structures and their intersection with culture, gender socialization, and the panoply of “isms” that shape people and contexts. What is needed as part of a knowledge base on Black psychology is an elaboration of the common themes that cut across global contexts and the conditions that characterize specific regions, all of which have bearing on individual, interpersonal, and societal functioning. More than ever, there is an urgent need for psychological scholarship that unapologetically centers race and the ever-changing role of context in understanding the history, struggles, and strengths of Black lives and communities around the globe. The series seeks to make a novel contribution to the broader area of critical & radical psychology by drawing on marginalized voices and perspectives and by engaging with the praxis agenda of improving the lives of African/Black peoples. It both seeks to critique oppression (more particularly, of the racialized, neo-colonial world) and provide prospective strategies (practices of liberation, of peace) to respond to such forms of oppression.

More information about this series at
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/15830>

Ismahan Soukeyna Diop

African Mythology,
Femininity,
and Maternity

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SERIES EDITORS' FOREWORD

Over the past several decades, there has been much scholarship—as well as a multitude of films, songs and literature sources—focusing on the importance of the emancipation of African people. It is our hope that this series will add to this base of knowledge and creativity and offer scholars and activists a solid, a one-stop resource for understanding the obstructions to emancipation and possible solutions for moving forward to construct new ways of being. This is book two of a book's series focusing on *Pan-African Psychologies* highlighting the work of psychologists and other health and applied professionals whose work centers on unpacking the systemic issues that plague black communities throughout the globe and impacting our day-to-day deliberations. The series also seeks to highlight solutions to addressing these issues individually and systemically. Lastly, through this series, we seek to create a corpus of writings addressing the call for more liberated and freed Black individuals and communities who continue to be significantly affected by centuries of oppression.

Although each of the books in the series focuses on a distinct subject area, they are all linked through one main web: this collection is comprised of the writings of scholars in Black/African, liberation, radical, Fanonian, critical, cultural psychology or related fields and whose common focus is to shift the discourse on the structural damage of racism to finding antidotes for such a disease.

The first book by Chalmer Thompson provided the foundational context for developing, creating and disseminating a series of books on

Pan-African Psychologies. We encourage you to read this first book to, for an in depth and solid background, a *raison d'être*, for the development of the series.

Given the importance and significant role of women in our Black communities, it is fitting that the second book in the series would focus on women with a specific focus on *African Mythology, Femininity, and Maternity*. The liberation of the individual must start from the cradle and mothers must play a significant role in this endeavor. The well-being of Black women is crucial as they prepare for such an impactful role.

Our intent in this series is to share with readers the array of psychologies that exists throughout the African Diaspora but with a very specific, twofold focus:

1. To spread knowledge about the freedom to “be”.
2. Learn with and revel in the freedom that many already experience, at least psychologically, and as they pursue liberation for other people of African descent.

In some cases, we transcend our regional spaces by addressing similarities across contexts within the Diaspora. This particular effort to engage transnationally is one we hope will inspire our readers to act, or continue to act, toward liberation and peace at the global level.

Indianapolis, USA
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FOREWORD

Ismahan Soukeyna Diop's book is an extension of her thesis where she was already questioning the question of the femininity and the maternity after a mastectomy or a hysterectomy in Senegalese women.

In her book, this question is approached through African mythology in the light of cultural anthropology and psychoanalysis. It has the merit of detailing the myths, tales and legends to highlight the power of women in the matriarchy, being incompatible with the balance of the world, if not counterbalanced by that of men.

This matriarchy finds its origin in the founding myth, Amma, a woman, as creator of the world, but introduced in her symbolic order, the matrilineage, which must pass through a man, the maternal uncle. This family structure has led to a lively debate between psychoanalysis and American anthropology about the Oedipus that unfolds between four protagonists in this society and not three, as in the western world.

This work opens a question that of the original mother as a figure of the Great Symbolic Other, in the Lacanian sense of the term, from which the subject will be defined. This maternal figure foreshadowed already in totemism through transmission, but which, to ensure its symbolic function, had to pass through a man, the maternal uncle, recalling the fantasy of fraternal incest, slightly mentioned in western societies but very present in the non-Western societies, and the oedipal father of the child. The oedipal ambivalent feelings of the child are displaced on two paternal figures, as specified by Roheim (1943).

Does this mean that the African founding myth already reflected the Lacanian thought? Does the unconscious of the subject pass through the maternal law, a phallic figure, speculated by the child but counter-balanced or even castrated by that of the man, for the subject to become in a position of desire? This is what this book tends to demonstrate by exposing the different female figures through the myths that are only the reflection of the human unconscious, which is ambivalent in its essence.

The symbolic references related to the body of the woman argue, in the second chapter, its power of procreation, power that could, by identification with the immortal original mother, take the place of the creator, involving a parthenogenetic fantasy. This fantasy would be repressed thanks to the rites of passage which reminds her of her human mortal condition, confronting her at the same time with her lack, so that her desire is addressed to another (or the Other). The calabash as a symbol of the womb and feminine power seems rather inspired by an analogical thought.

Psychoanalysis was also confronted with this question of the femininity and the maternity because of the cultural representation of the woman at the time, dissociating them. The cleavage, which was concretized through the notion of envy of penis as an organ and which will be the object of a debate with Melanie Klein, feminist psychoanalysts, and reviewed by Lacan.

Should we believe that the implication of cultural diversity in the construction of the unconscious has not ceased to question psychoanalysis, not in its universal foundation, but in its mode of expression and of conflict resolution, such as Roheim (1943) and Devereux (1955) already enunciated it? Devereux (1955, 1972, p. 71) states that “certain desires, fantasies, or other products of the human psyche that are repressed in one society may, in another, reach consciousness and even be socially actualized”.

The aim of this book is to make a link between myths and the collective unconscious that is actualized in practices, beliefs, religions and civil law, to question the conflictuality generated in the subject located between tradition and modernity in the contemporary world, and how the African woman subjectivizes her position to integrate the femininity and the maternity without cleaving them.

This book opens interesting perspectives both from the point of view of a psychoanalytic reflection and that on clinical practice with patients.

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