Bolekaja:

Marimba Ani’s African-centered Cultural Science

DeReef F. Jamison

Associate Professor of African American Studies

University of Alabama at Birmingham

(*The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies, Vol. 39, #1, pp. 15-27, Summer 2021)*

Marimba Ani (aka Dona Richards) is an African-centered cultural scientist whose work and scholarly production is grounded in the study and deep appreciation of the manifestations of culture, philosophy, psychology and spirituality expressed among people of African descent throughout the diaspora. Ani received a BA in philosophy from the University of Chicago, and MA and Ph.D. degrees in anthropology from the New School for Social Research. During her 25-year academic career, Ani taught Africana Studies in the Department of Black and Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College. Ani has published numerous scholarly articles and several books including *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora* (2004) and her Magnus opus, *Yurugu: An African-centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (1994). As scholar activist, Ani was a field organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Mississippi from 1963 to 1966 and director of the Summer Freedom Project. She has also been actively involved in the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations and the African Heritage Studies Association. Ani served as director of the Afrikan Heritage Afterschool Program in Harlem and as consultant for several Afrikan rites of passage programs (Ani, 2004). As a Pan Africanist, Ani’s scholarship and activism follow in the tradition of Marcus Garvey, Amy Jacques Garvey, Queen Mother Moore, and John Henrik Clarke. The lessons she learned from Clarke are examples of how the intellectual transmission of knowledge occurs (Ani, 1994). Ani explains the impact of her relationship with Clarke as contributing to her “awakening and growth towards a Pan-African, Nationalist consciousness…Professor Clarke tapped my African center and I developed a passion of the Pan-African vision” (Ani, p. 1994). In similar fashion to her intellectual ancestors, Ani adheres to the concept of Bolekaja, which means to come on down and fight (Ani, 1994). Ani positions herself as a scholar/activist obligated to using her intellectual skills to fight in the service of liberating African people. This cursory investigation of Ani’s work consists of (1) an analysis of her efforts at deconstructing the discipline of anthropology and (2) an exploratory examination of the ideas that influence and inform her articulation of an African-centered cultural science.

**Deconstructing Anthropology**

 Historically, anthropology has been discussed as an example of how social science can be utilized to reinforce some of the racial and cultural stereotypes that form the basis of rationalizations that justify institutional racism (Baker, 1998). During the late 1960s, Black social scientists begin questioning the disciplines in which they had been trained. As a result, Black social scientists broke from the American Psychological Association and created the Association of Black Psychologists, Black sociologists formed the Association of Black Sociologists, and Black Social Workers organized the Association of Black Social Workers (Guthrie, 1998). In line with the disciplinary tensions and the organizational ruptures that followed, Black anthropologists also commenced reexamining the role and function of anthropology and started the Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA). The ABA identifies some of their goals as: (1) promoting research on Black people around the world; (2) mentoring Black students and all students who study Black people; (3) developing leadership in anthropology; (4) exposing and explaining the politics of anthropological research; (5) studying how different people of color experience white supremacy; (6) decolonizing anthropology within the structure of the American Anthropological Association; and (7) changing those anthropological traditions that are rooted in hierarchal, exploitative, racist, sexist, and homophobic perspectives (Harrison,1997; Norment, 2019).

There have been attempts to rectify and resolve the cultural deficit approach in anthropology that focuses on studying the objectified cultural other or the exoticized savage (Ani, 1994; Baker, 1998). However, for many Black anthropologists, scholars in the discipline were not doing enough to include diverse theoretical orientations and cultural perspectives grounded in lived experiences. Harrison (1997) contends:

Our future as a discipline depends on whether we can reinvent ourselves and find new ways to create a more humane anthropology…new paradigms are needed for the transformation of anthropology from a Western intellectual tradition to one that embraces the critical intellectual traditions and chronicles the experiences of Third-World people…The native anthropologists has many roles. One is to provide critical analysis of the violent and volatile social problems in the world today. Another is to build new theories to help transform anthropological inquiry (p. v).

Ani’s observations and concerns are similar to Harrison’s (1997), yet her stance on the role and function of anthropology adds another dimension that is somewhat different. Reflecting on the intellectual of history of anthropology, Ani queries, “What are we to conclude about the state of anthropology from this history of ideas? What about the Black anthropologist? Should there be one and, if so, what should his or her role be?” (Richards, 1979, p. 14). Furthermore, Ani states:

Either anthropology will be redefined or it will become obsolete. I am not arguing for the continuance of anthropology as an academic discipline. Perhaps, in terms of what anthropology *should* (italics in original) be, we ourselves (people of African descent) have been doing it for hundreds of years and, perhaps, all leaders of African liberation are our great anthropologists, in the sense that they have consciously understood the political and revolutionary implications of cultural behavior (Richards, 1979, p. 16).

Although Ani’s statement suggests that anthropology as we know it should be changed, she also discusses anthropology’s relationship to political orientation and hints to the end of anthropology as an academic discipline.

As part of her efforts to deconstruct Eurocentricity within anthropology, Ani ponders why white anthropologists do not study their own culture? She answers her own query and states “the work of the anthropologist is an embodiment of the existential circumstances of political superiority: Europeans could study others, they could not be studied” (Richards, 1979, p. 16). Based on her interpretation of this phenomena, Ani contends “I devoted much of my energies to ‘White studies’, an endeavor that should be a part of any Black Studies curriculum” (Richards, 1979, p. 59). Thus, *Yurugu* is part of her response to the existential dilemma she identified in anthropology and in Western intellectual thought in general. To fully understand the impact and significance of Ani’s text *Yurugu* (1994), it is important to place it within proper historical context. *Yurugu* (1994) is published during the 1990s amidst a resurging tide of Black cultural nationalism popularly known as Afrocentrism (Asante, 2003; Asante, 2011). Scholars during this period critiqued Eurocentricity through cultural and political frameworks (Amin & Moore, 1989). In *Yurugu* (1994), Ani seeks to fill the void in the lack of formal academic inquiry about the intellectual, cultural, and political systems created by white people and their implications for people of African descent. Ani’s (1994) purpose for writing *Yurugu* can be observed in her statement:

To be of African descent and to study anthropology is to be struck by the pervasive anti-Africanism of the discipline…it emerges as a tradition of Eurocentrism, functioning to satisfy the needs of the European ethos…I had no alternative then but to embark on a critical study of the totality that is European culture; to lay bare its ideological underpinnings, its inner workings, the mechanisms that facilitate its functioning. (p. 3).

With this methodology, Ani (1994) posits “We turn the tables by transforming ‘subject’ into ‘object’, and in the process we are ourselves transformed into victors rather than victims” (p. 24). *Yurugu* is Ani’s attempt to accomplish her mission of exposing the racist foundations of the discipline of anthropology and the Eurocentric worldview on which it was established while simultaneously contributing to an African-centered cultural science of liberation.

**Toward an African-centered Cultural Science**

While some Black anthropologists seek to decolonize and/or transform anthropology (Harrison, 1997), Ani (1994) attempts to deconstruct anthropology by proposing an African-centered cultural science. In the introduction to *Yurugu* (1994),Ani establishes her disciplinary position: “My chosen field is African-centered cultural science-the reconstruction of a revolutionary African culture” (p. 2). The cultural science aspect allows for disciplinary freedom and the revolutionary component provides a space to address African and African diasporic political orientations that address the quality of life experienced by people of African descent. Ani’s conceptualization of African culture begins with the study of Africa but also encompasses the surface and deep structural manifestations (Nobles, 1986) of African culture expressed throughout the African diaspora.

Cultural science has been defined as “the total study of a people” (Semaj, 1996). Ani’s work extends and expands some of Semaj’s (1996) cultural science concepts. Her conceptual approaches overlap with and relate to Semaj’s principles of cultural science (1996) in several areas. This section will examine how Ani operationalizes the following cultural science principles: (1) primacy of self-knowledge; (2) no scientific colonization; and (3) the publication and distribution of scholarship cannot be entrusted to just any individual or institution.

*The Primacy of Self-knowledge*

Semaj (1996) insists that the primacy of self-knowledge is rooted in “the ancient African admonition ‘Know Thyself’…The extension will be knowledge of the forces working to oppress one’s people and strategies for liberation” (p. 199). Semaj’s (1996) statement illustrates the importance of Black scholars centering diasporic culture and the importance of utilizing scholarship to advance the interests of African people. According to Carruthers (1996), “The scientific community and its admirers arrogantly assert that science is itself objective and neutral, i.e., that it can be used for good and bad; but our wisdom instructs us otherwise” (p. 186). Ani (1994) agrees with Semaj (1996) and Carruthers (1996) in highlighting the role of scholarship in the service of liberation and in interrogating the notion of objectivity in Western scientific methods. Thus, Ani (1994) seeks to deconstruct the concept of objectivity by exposing the cultural subjectivity embedded in the concept and advocates for the primacy of self-knowledge as being critical.

Historically, social scientists have discussed and debated the role and function of objectivity (Carruthers, 1996; Semaj, 1996). Melville Herskovitz, one of the pioneers of cultural anthropology, provides an example of the contention surrounding objectivity. Herskovitz questioned the ability of African American scholars to be ‘objective’ when researching issues pertaining to people of African descent (Morris, 2017). Herskovitz argued that African Americans are unable to conduct research on African culture in an objective manner because they are too emotionally attached to the subject matter (Morris, 2017). Furthermore, Herskovitz placed a higher value on objectivity in Western social science when he took the stance “the world was full of crusaders. Their role (anthropologists) instead was to be that of the calm, detached scientist who investigates race relations with the same objectivity and detachment with which the zoologist dissects the potato bug” (Morris, 2017, p. 114). From this perspective, Eurocentric social sciences have exercised objectivity in a manner that limits the ability of scholars of African descent to study themselves with their own ideological and political interest in mind.

Based on her research interests that emphasize Africana spirituality, history, culture, and politics, the primacy of self-knowledge that Semaj identified as essential to cultural science are central to Ani’s approach. Ani argues that African-centered cultural scientists are not completely objective because they always consider the political and practical implications of their positions as cultural workers (Ani, 2004; Ani, 1994). Although trained in disciplines that stress the importance of objectivity, Ani demonstrates an intense commitment and concern for the primacy of self-knowledge. This posture is evident when Ani (1994) argues “The illusion of objectivity promotes the myth of universalistic commitment, that is, it is a stance that disavows political or group interest…Once individuals are persuaded that universal characteristics are the proper human goals, European patterns and values can be presented as universal, while others are labelled as particular” (pp. 551-552). This focus on self-knowledge and its implications recognizes universalism as a myth that is cloaked under the guise of objectivity (Ani, 1994; Carruthers, 1996). In the critique put forth by Ani (1994), objectivity (a detached approach to investigating human phenomena) and universalism (a lack of emphasis on self-knowledge) are intricately linked. Ani (1994) argues that Eurocentric scholarship is presented as universal and thus objective when it is in fact culturally specific to the political needs of people of European descent. Hence Ani’s rejection of the concepts of objectivity/universalism and her acceptance of the primacy of self-knowledge allows her the intellectual freedom to address the issues she deems important to Africana communities with purpose and passion.

*No Scientific Colonization*

Scientific colonization (Nobles, 1986) is “a process wherein the political control of knowledge is carried out by a sophisticated process of falsifying the production of information and ideas” (p. 19). Elaborating on Nobles’ definition (1986), Semaj (1996) defines scientific colonization as “the process by which information (raw data) is extracted from the community for the benefit of the scientist and others located outside of the community” (p. 199). Both definitions imply that scientific colonization is an academic and intellectual component of systemic racism that works in conjunction with and reinforces political colonization. In a similar vein, Clarke (1970) recognizes the deleterious effect of scientific colonization and its relationship to political colonization when he asserts:

African peoples will no longer permit our people to be raped culturally, economically, politically and intellectually merely to provide European scholars with intellectual status symbols of African artifacts hanging in their living rooms and irrelevant and injurious lectures in their classrooms…We suspect that this is a new area of academic colonialism and that it is not unrelated to the neocolonialism that is attempting to reenslave Africa by controlling the minds of African people

(p. 10).

Drawing from Clarke (1969) and Semaj (1996), Ani discusses a concept she calls academeitus (M. Ani, personal communication, November 9, 2019), which refers to overidentifying with the Eurocentric academic culture of publish or perish, obtaining distinguished university titles, and parroting the latest buzzwords and theoretical positions of popular intelligentsia. Likewise, Swann (2013) cautions scholars against selling “Black struggle narratives to the academic industrial complex for jobs, mortgage payments, academic positions, seats on educational boards…tenure, book contracts, visas, speaking engagements and all the other perks” (p. 68). For scholars suffering from this disorder, scholarship as a means of obtaining individual achievement is prioritized instead of scholarship for the collective liberation of African people. Ani identifies these social scientists as co-conspirators in a process that Clarke (1991) referred to as the European colonization of information. This type of scientific colonization takes information from Black communities and uses it for the benefit of themselves or the university instead of for African people. Academia recognition and validation defines the totality of their existence. However, Ani (M. Ani, personal communication, November 9, 2019), argues that African-centered cultural scientists are not solely concerned with tenure, promotion, and other forms of academic recognition. African-centered cultural scientists seek to avoid vulgar careerism. According to Ani (1994), the African-centered cultural scientist prioritizes collective knowledge of self and does not produce scholarship acquired from African descended people to advance knowledge for knowledge sake. Ani’s articulation of no scientific colonization emphasizes the ways scientific colonizers exploit people of African descent and attempt to justify the exploitation in the name of intellectual freedom and objective scholarship. On the other hand, African-centered cultural scientists endeavor to conduct research that contributes to addressing issues that impact and improve Africana lived experiences (Ani, 1994).

*The Publication and Distribution of Scholarship Cannot be Entrusted to Just Any Individual or Institution.*

Semaj (1996) also discusses developing a cultural science that understands why it is important to be aware of the theoretical and political orientations of the individuals and/or institutions with whom scholars choose to publish their work. Closely related to this principle is the idea that “the cultural scientist should be concerned with the possible interpretation and application of the data” (Semaj, p. 199) obtained from Black communities. A conscious decision to adhere to these principles is evident in Ani’s scholarship. Ani is formally trained in anthropology, yet she does not regularly publish in anthropology journals, including journals that are associated with Black Anthropology. Much of Ani’s work (Richards, 1989; Richards, 1980; Richards, 1979) can be found in journals connected to the discipline of Black Studies. In explaining the relationship between Black Studies and anthropology, Fischer (2018) contends that numerous Black anthropologists have “found intellectual homes in departments and journals of Black/Africana Studies” (p. 98). Thus, anthropologists publishing articles in Black Studies journals is not an anomaly as several Black anthropologists have made concerted efforts to connect with Black Studies (Fischer, 2018). Although Black anthropologists publish in various journals that often transcend disciplinary boundaries, the scholarly production of many Black anthropologists can be found in the pages of *Transforming Anthropology* or *Notes from Natives* published by the ABA in conjunction with the American Anthropological Association. It is interesting to note that Ani has not published in many of these venues. Instead, Ani’s work is found in the pages of Africana/Black Studies journals such as the *Western Journal of Black Studies*, the *Journal of Black Studies* and *Imhotep: Journal of Afrocentric Thought*. Additionally, both of her books, *Let the circle be unbroken* (2004)and *Yurugu* (1994),are published by Black-owned African-centered printing presses.

What accounts for Ani’s conspicuous absence from journals and books associated with Black anthropology? It appears is if Ani intentionally distances herself from anthropology proper in order to carve out her own intellectual space. Perhaps the answer is also found in her different understanding of and approach to anthropology as a formalized, academic discipline. Not only does Ani interrogate the discipline of anthropology, but she also questions whether Black anthropologists should exist (Richards, 1979). Although she earned a degree in anthropology, Ani’s critique of anthropology is not purely that of an insider. Instead, she is more of an interloper whom after being trained in anthropological theories and methods is armed with the theoretical tools and intellectual insight needed to look beyond the veil of Eurocentric thought (Amin &Moore, 1989) as she deconstructs many of the philosophical anchors that undergird the Western intellectual tradition. The sites Ani chooses for the dissemination of her intentionally political scholarship exemplify the cultural science principles mentioned above and demonstrate Ani’s attempt to establish a sense of academic and intellectual sovereignty.

**Constructing an African-centered Cultural Science:**

In addition to building on some of the foundational cultural science principles posited by Semaj (1996), I contend that Ani’s African-centered cultural science contributes to a conceptual shift in the dominant narrative that challenges the ways scholars discuss and analyze the cultural logic underlying African and European worldviews. Ani’s analysis shifts the narrative in two fundamental ways. First, she shifts the narrative by changing the language that is utilized when examining the African diaspora. Ani’s (1994) use of African languages, terms, and concepts such as Yurugu (the incomplete being), utamoroho (culturally structured thought), utamawazo (the emotional tone that motivates the collective behavior of a culture), and Maafa (the great disaster/misfortune/dehumanizing circumstance) is more than a semantical move, it is a conceptual restructuring of cultural terms that stem from African diasporic expressions that have meaningful cultural and political significance when exploring Africana experiences. Secondly, Ani’s use of new language and vocabulary moves away from a European-centered orientation that entails African descended scholars using European concepts to examine how African people have been victimized. Through her innovative application of language, Ani shifts the narrative from an analysis of the victims of oppression to an interrogation of the worldviews held by the perpetrators of cultural and political imperialism.

Ani’s development of an African-centered cultural science uses language as a major component in constructing a new cultural and political vocabulary. According to Ani (1994), “the liberation of our thought from its colonized condition will require the creation of a new language” (p. 10). Ani attempts to deconstruct European cultural logic by applying much of the language mentioned earlier to initiate a process of rediscovering how African languages can be employed by diasporic Africans. In taking this position, Ani aligns with Wa Thiongo (2009) who argues that “Diasporic communities must try to add an African language to their cultural arsenal. For though the diasporic African has a new mother tongue, he can reach out to this African memory only by making effort to learn an African language to add to, not replace, what he already speaks” (p. 90). Ani’s technique of adding African languages is seen in *Let the circle be unbroken: The implications of African spirituality in the diaspora* (2004). In *Let the circle be unbroken* (2004) there are sub-sections of chapters in the text that are coupled with African languages (Kiswahili, Yoruba, and Bamana) and English. Examples of sub-sections in *Let the circle be unbroken* (2004)that demonstrate this cultural blending are Utaratibu wa Kutizama (the way of the world): African philosophy and worldview; Kuzinduka (reawakening): African retentions in the Caribbean and South America; Kunganga/Emi Lilo (to come together/spirit possession): African Diasporic Ritual Drama; Kucheza Ngoma (to dance to the drum): Communing, shoutin, and feeling rhythm; and Amelogwa (under the spell of witchraft): Denials of African Diasporic Humanism.

The addition of these African languages coupled with English illustrated in *Let the circle be unbroken* (2004), demonstrate how Ani recognizes the importance of facilitating cultural understanding and the recovering of cultural memory addressed by Wa Thiongo (2009). Language is closely connected with understanding culture (Fanon, 1952), and the application of African languages to assist in interpreting and understanding African and European thought and behavior is a useful technique that has heuristic value. Ani uses African languages as theoretical and analytical tools to emphasize the centrality of African worldviews (Carroll, 2008). For Ani, the semantical exercise of translating words from one language to another is not the primary objective. The primary objective of her methodology is to liberate African scholars from the conceptual and cultural confines of European theories and languages. Ani follows the model of Fu-Kiau (1991) who states that the African-centered scholar:

does not ‘merely’ translate European conceptions from English to Kikongo, rather he intentionally stretches and molds his (her) use of the English language to reflect Kikongo syntax, meaning, and expression. The effect is a powerful one, so that as we read the text we feel that we are actually beginning to think again with African minds (p. xvi).

Although Ani’s methodology of utilizing African languages may appear unorthodox to some, it is an attempt to place Africa and its diaspora at the center of the discourse. This centering process is part and parcel of creating a new narrative that shapes the issues, concepts, and terms that are used in analyzing and conceptually mapping African and European worldviews.

Ani’s conceptualization of the term Yurugu provides an example of the ways in which she applies language as a conceptual lens for critically analyzing culture. Ani (1994) attempts to use African language as a foundational framework from which to examine European intellectual thought and behavior. Ani taps into the deep reservoir of language of the Dogon people and employs the mythological trope of Yurugu. Based on Dogon mythology, Ani (1994) defines Yurugu as the being “responsible for disorder in the universe. This is a being conceived in denial of the natural order, which then acts to initiate and promote disharmony in the universe…and is threatening to the well-being of humanity” (p. xxviii). According to Ani (1994), the Yurugu myth can be viewed as being representative of the European psyche that seeks to dominate and control. The Yurugu mentality is a deep-seated cultural malady that has infected not only Europe, but every culture Europe has contacted. Here Ani (1994) uses the language of Yurugu from the Dogan and identifies the myth as a cosmological construct that personifies the historical and contemporary relationships between Europeans and people of African descent.

 In *Decolonizing the Mind: The politics of language in African literature* (1992), Wa Thiongo argues “Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition” (p. 16). As if addressing Wa Thingo’s concern, Ani’s *Yurugu* offers people of African descent tools of self-definition through the utilization of languages and concepts grounded in African diasporic culture. Ani (Richards, 1980) asserts “But if we are not to emulate white behavior nor to adopt European conceptions, what theoretical models shall we use (Are there any others?) *All cultures* (italics in original) are based on and create ideological constructs and mythological systems which provide the symbols which make them work” (p. 76). For Ani, producing scholarship that serves in the best interest of African descended people is vital. It requires an analysis that centers African descended people through the implementation of African languages, myths, symbols, and motifs. These alternative conceptual spaces signify epistemological changes and are critical shifts that illustrate the significance of Ani’s emphasis on African languages. The role and function of language is important in that it provides an understanding of cultural logic. Language provides a conceptual window that gives an intimate view into the nuances and complexities of culture. Hence Ani (1994) attempts to use African languages as a foundational framework from which to develop a cultural science.

**Implications of an African-centered Cultural Science**

As ideology and practice, white supremacy is not defined by and limited to overt forms of racism. The ideology of white supremacy is grounded in European worldviews that over emphasize individualism, materialism, rationalism, and the power to control (Kambon, 2012; Myers, 1993). In order to deem a culture and people inferior, there must be a culture and people positioned as superior. For Ani, Manichean thinking (Fanon, 1952) is the foundation of white supremacy thought and behavior. The overt forms of white supremacy such as slavery, colonization, lynching, church bombings, Jim Crow and racialized state violence against Black and Brown bodies are manifestations of a specific cultural logic that thrives on the need to have an inferior cultural other that feeds the Eurocentric cultural ethos (Ani, 1994). By breaking through the conceptual incarceration (Nobles, 1986) entrenched in traditional disciplinary approaches, Ani’s exposes and illuminates the intellectual and theoretical mechanisms that support the cultural logic and ideology of white supremacy.

As scholars engaged in Bolekaja (Ani, 1994) or intellectual warfare (Carruthers, 1999), Ani (Richards, 1979) suggests that an African-centered cultural scientist must: (1) sever the ties between social theory and white supremacist ideology; (2) emphasize the political significance of the culture concept by focusing on the relationship between ideology and group commitment; and (3) utilize his or her sense of culture to change what needs to be changed in the interest of African self-determination. Ani’s innovative use of African language and her redefining and critiquing of concepts based on history and lived experiences counters the cultural hegemony imposed on people of African descent. This type of cultural reconceptualization provides a framework for scholars to envision the construction of paradigms and theories that are not restricted by conceptual boundaries that center the cultures of Europeans (and their descendants) while simultaneously marginalizing the cultures of Africa and its diaspora by placing Africana lived experiences on the periphery. Ani (1994) states that her study of Europe is “an intentionally aggressive polemic” (p. 1) and is vitally important because “beneath this deadly onslaught lies a stultifying intellectual mystification that prevents Europe’s political victims from thinking in a manner that would lead to authentic self-determination” (p. 1). Similar to Morrison’s (2009) recognition of the relationship between language, violence and the limits of knowledge, Ani acknowledges and brings attention to the epistemic violence (Nobles, 2013) that occurs when different cultural understandings and ideologies clash.

Ani (1994) identifies the detrimental impact that the internalization of European thought and behavior has on Africana lived experiences. Cultural values, beliefs and symbols can be weaponized to serve political needs that empower and/or disempower (Wilson, 1998). Along these lines, Wa Thiongo contends:

the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves (1992, p. 3)

Similarly, Ani (1994) contends that cultural imperialism is the “systematic imposition of an alien culture in an attempt to destroy the will of a politically dominated people…cultural imperialism causes cultural insecurity…separated from their ancestral legacy, they lose access to their source of political power” (p. xxvi). However, Ani also offers a counter-narrative with her application of the Sankofa concept. Ani (2003) states, “We are using the term Sankofa from the Akan tradition in Ghana, West Afrika which tells us to return to the Source, so that we can go forward with strength and clarity. Culture is a powerful tool for inspiring human beings” (p. 15). Thus, an African-centered cultural science facilitates the process of decolonizing information and implementing aspects of culture that are relevant to contemporary issues affecting African descended people. Ani employs her scholarship to construct cultural memory and confront the cultural bombs released by systems of white supremacy. Cultural recovery and reclamation require a holistic understanding of Africana experiences operationalized through an African-centered cultural science.

To the extent that the lived experiences of African people are diverse, then there must be diverse approaches to studying and understanding Africana lived experiences. Africana/Black Studies and African-centered cultural science were developed and designed within a historical and political context that recognized and acknowledged the importance of expanding the scope and direction of what can be studied and how it can be studied. Inherent within the interdisciplinary nature of African-centered cultural science are calls for no restriction on disciplines and methodological approaches used when conducting research about African descended people (Azibo, 1996; Kershaw, 1992; Semaj, 1996). Ani’s African-centered cultural science draws from various disciplines such as Africana/Black Studies, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, political science, sociology, communication studies, popular culture, religion/spirituality, and African diasporic literature. Yet, it is informed by and filtered through an African-centered lens. Ani offers an alternative approach to the cultural hegemony of Eurocentric social sciences through her articulation and implementation of an African-centered cultural science that incorporates aspects of Africana culture that address the lived experiences of African diasporic people.

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