1. Introduction

Stephen Howe’s book *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and imagined homes* is in the first place a contribution to intellectual history, and as such it is a fair piece of scholarship. Its breadth of argument, and the depth of reading supporting it, are impressive. *Afrocentrism* is one of the first books to map out in detail, from its remoter origins to its contemporary ramifications and high-profile manifestations, one of the most significant intellectual and political movements of the world today. The book is no longer unique, though. For instance, recent French work has greatly added to our understanding of Cheikh Anta Diop and of Afrocentrist movements in general; and where Howe’s book spends one substantial chapter on the *Black Athena* debate as initiated by Martin Bernal, there is a fast growing literature of writings which largely converge, and in part go beyond, the
things Howe has to say on this Afrocentrism-related topic. But even so, Howe’s book is a standard work and will remain so for years to come.

However, Stephen Howe was a political activist before he became an academic writer, and his book despite its unmistakable academic qualities is less a contribution to detached scholarship than an instance of political polemics. Its aim is not only to depict the Afrocentrist movement and to trace its trajectory through the last two centuries of intellectual and political global history, but also to pass an intellectual, political and moral judgement on that movement. Unmistakably, the author intends his book to constitute Afrocentrism’s definitive denunciation. His primary motivation is profound alarm over what he (with many others, foremost Mary Lefkowitz) sees as the sell-out of intellectual and moral values for the sake of Black, mainly African American, consciousness-raising. These opponents of Afrocentrism are united by a common reasoning which might be summarised as

‘should we allow the standards of scholarship to be abandoned merely for the sake of letting a few African Americans forget such trifles as slavery and the Black ghetto?’

If historical truth, intellectual and pedagogic integrity, the canons of logic and proof are to be violated for the sake of boosting Black identity, then Afrocentrism is among the greatest contemporary threats to mankind, at a par perhaps with environmental destruction and AIDS. Exposing Afrocentrism would be every intellectual’s duty, and Howe and Lefkowitz lead towards Bernal: Berlinerblau, J., 1999, Heresy in the University: The Black Athena controversy and the responsibilities of American intellectuals, New Brunswick etc.: Rutgers University Press; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 1996. ‘Black Athena and Africa’s contribution to global cultural history’, Quest – Philosophical Discussions: An International African Journal of Philosophy, 1996, 9, 2 / 10, 1: 100-137; the present volume in its earlier, TALANTA version; also cf. idem, 2000, ‘Dans le troisième millénaire avec Black Athena?’, in: Fauvelle-Aymar et al., Afrocentrismes, o.c., pp. 127-150.

5 Lefkowitz, M.R., 1996, Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism became an excuse to teach myth as history, New York: Basic Books; and: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, o.c. In addition to their shared views of Afrocentrism and Black Athena (cf. Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 9f), there is a very striking literal parallel between Lefkowitz and Howe: both present, anecdotically, the picturesque detail of their conversation with an Afrocentrist Black female student, who in Lefkowitz’s case claims for a fact that Socrates was Black (Lefkowitz, M.R., 1996, ‘Ancient history, modern myths’, in: Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, o.c., pp. 3-23; p. 3; cf. Arnaiz-Villena et al. (Arnaiz-Villena, A., Dimitroski, K., Pacho, A., Moscoso, J., Gómez-Casado, E., Silvera-Redondo, C., Varela, P., Blagoevskic, M., Zdravkovska, V., Martinez-Laso, J., 2001, ‘HLA genes in Macedonians and the sub-Saharan origin of the Greeks’, Tissue Antigens, 57, 2: 118-127), and in Howe’s case (Afrocentrism, o.c., p. viii) turns out to be ignorant of centuries of West African gold mining and trading. One can only wonder why the combination of Black, female, and ignorant should be so irresistible and infuriating at the same time, to both writers, one of which female and – as far as classics is concerned – a noted feminist.
the way.

Even though completely unsympathetic, if one is familiar with current Afrocentrist writings one cannot help agreeing with their identification of the deficiencies endemic to that genre: the poor scholarship; the amateurish and autodidactic approach to grand historical and comparative themes without systematic use of obvious sources and established methods; the Afrocentrist authors’ manifest and deliberate isolation from current debates and current advances in the fields of scholarship they touch on; and the occasional lapses into Black racism. On all these points Howe has sensible things to say. He presents well-chosen and convincing examples of the ills of Afrocentrism. I find myself in agreement with much of the details of his writing. I particularly admire his uncompromising stance against any introduction of race-based arguments in academic debate – a weakness by which Afrocentrists, and Bernal, have often embarrassed even their most sympathetic readers.

2. In vindication of Afrocentrism

However, where Howe and I fundamentally disagree is with regard to the extent of dismission that Afrocentrism calls for. Howe’s book ends with a note of tragedy: how regrettable that the paradoxes of the modern global history of Black people have ended them up with such a collection of deeply cherished untruths as constitutes Afrocentrism. For him, Afrocentrism is largely what in our Marxist days we used to call false consciousness: a view of reality which is systematically distorted and which can be explained from the historical trajectory traversed, in recent centuries, by the collectivity holding these views. Where Howe finds Afrocentrism by and large intolerable it is because, in the context of the politics of identity on which the postmodern world revolves, it is no longer politically correct, yea it is more and more even politically impossible, to publicly ignore or dismiss the Afrocentrist claims; hence their increasing influence in the U.S.A. educational system. For Howe, as for me, the central issue here is the truth value of Afrocentrism.

Howe asserts himself as one primarily interested in the politics of history writing, but he fails to elaborate on the formidable philosophical

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6 Yet dismissive statements of this nature need to be made with the greatest care. E.g. when Howe declares that no Afrocentrist has ever done a serious study of an African society (neither has Howe), he contradicts himself when discussing (Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 219) The Rebirth of African Civilization by the later Afrocentrist Chancellor Williams (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961), as precisely such a study.

7 E.g. Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 112 n. 9, 226.

8 Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 6.
question of what constitutes truth in historical analysis. If yet he insists on calling the Afrocentric version of history, *mythical* (obviously reserving the claim to non-mythical truth for the non-Afrocentrist history of his own favourite brand), he sadly misses the opportunity of exploring the possibly mythical dimensions of mainstream historiography. In the present argument I shall briefly outline what I see as the mythical, specifically hegemonic, tendency of mainstream North Atlantic history, as confronted by Afrocentrism; but obviously our present context is not the most suitable one to pursue the general epistemological implications of this problem any further.

Howe’s special expertise in British anticolonial politics, a modern topic whose historiography hinges on an abundance of written sources, renders him apparently incapable of appreciating the dynamics of the production of African history. In the latter field it is not so much unequivocally documented facts which inform the writing of history, but often the permutation of theoretical models which help to shed light on marginally available shreds of factual evidence, including oblique mythical statements which

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might or might not contain kernels of historical truth. In the context of African history (a discipline obviously relevant to the study of Afrocentrism), the distinction between truth and myth is far less evident than Howe suggests. Let us once more quote the following assertion by Jan Vansina, the nestor of African history, in his critique of Luc de Heusch:

‘All history as reconstruction of the past is of course mythical. Myths are held to be ‘true.’ De Heusch is to be faulted for not using all the traditions about the past, however recent that past, and considering them myth. But, conversely, historical accounts reflect the past. The well-known problem is to find exactly how a set of data reflects the past as well as how it expresses the present. The succeeding problem, then, is how to reconstruct the past most objectively, and in doing so create a new myth. Not because the account is not true, but because it will be held to be true.’

For Howe the truth value of Afrocentrism is zero, in other words Afrocentrism is entirely mythical. For me, very much to the contrary, Afrocentrism (despite all its endemic defects as summed up above) does contain a kernel of truth, in the form of testable hypotheses about the possible contributions which Africans may have made towards the worldwide development of human culture. Such a position has important political and critical implications. For if there is even the remotest possibility that some of the Afrocentrist tenets (however unscholarly in their present elaboration and substantiation) might yet be confirmed when restated in a scholarly manner and investigated with state-of-the-art scientific methods, then the wholesale dismissal of Afrocentrism cannot simply be the positive, enlightened gesture Howe (and Lefkowitz) claim it to be. Such dismissal risks to be a confirmation of the status quo, a continuation of the processes of exclusion and exploitation to which Black people, inside and outside Africa, have been subjected for centuries. Here there is a political role to be played by the odd person out: the scholar and polemicist who for lack of Black or African antecedents cannot be suspected of being on a mere conscious-raising trip, and who yet, for respectable scholarly reasons, defends views similar to or identical with those of the Afrocentrists.
Martin Bernal’s has been such a case, and inevitably there have been numerous attempts (not all of them totally unconvincing) to deny his integrity, to emphasise the differences between himself and the certified, Black Afrocentrists, and to demolish his scholarship and the conclusions to which it has led him; however, there have also been voices vindicating Bernal and urging that his research initiatives be carried on.\footnote{See Chapter 1 of the present collection.}

3. **Personal intermezzo: Comprehensive correspondences in space and time**

My own case is formally similar to Bernal’s although the scope of my scholarship and my public exposure have been so much more limited as to make the comparison an imposition on my part. I am a European born, light-skinned scholar who for decades has conducted research on and around Africa, both localising and comparative, both synchronic-anthropological and historical. For the past ten years\footnote{The bulk of this text was written in 2000.} I have effectively combined this identity as a North Atlantic empirical social scientist with that of an African-initiated diviner-priest; and for the past three years with that of an academic philosopher, exploring interculturality as a key to the globalising world of today. Socially and ethnically I have no reason to pose as an Afrocentrist, but emotionally, spiritually and scientifically that is what I have become. In my recent academic work, therefore, it has been one of my central concerns to thresh testable scientific hypotheses out of the ideological and otherwise defective writings of the Afrocentrists, and to actually put these hypotheses to the test. I have been struck by the – also for me – unexpectedly great extent to which their empirical truth would appear to be confirmed.

Around 1990, during field-work in Francistown, Botswana, my personal itinerary from ethnographer to intercultural philosopher brought me to an intriguing point, where on the one hand I affirmed the local cultural specificity of Southern African religion, and on the other hand the world-wide ramifications enshrined in that religion were forcefully driven home to me.
In that year I became a Southern African diviner-priest, a *sangoma*. In the process I acquired the mysterious rough wooden tablets of the *sangoma* oracle, consecrated in the blood of my sacrificial goats and periodically revived by immersion in rain water and by the application of the fat of these animals. These tablets seemed to represent the epitome of strictly local cultural particularism. It was as if they had risen from the very soil of rural Southern Africa at some indefinite Primordial Age, and the same seemed to apply to the interpretation scheme which names the sixteen specific combinations that may be formed by the tablets when these are ritually cast. The local oracle of four tablets had been described by missionaries as long ago as four hundred years.\(^\text{18}\) ‘The old woman like a stone’, ‘the old male witch like an axe’, ‘itching pubic hair like a young woman’s’, ‘the uvula like a youthful penis’ – this is how the four tablets are (nick-) named, and their various recognised combinations have connotations of witchcraft, ancestors, taboos, sacrificial dances, and all varieties of local animal totems. What could be more authentic and more African? Not for nothing had I, at the time, described my initiation (which, after more than twenty years of work as a religious and medical anthropologist, made me an accomplished and recognized specialist in an African divination and therapy system) as

> ‘the end point of a quest to the heart of Africa’s symbolic culture’.\(^\text{19}\)

Yet I soon had to admit that this romantic and implicitly hegemonic suggestion\(^\text{20}\) of extreme locality was a mere illusion, under which lurked a reality which had enormous consequences for my theoretical and existential stance as an ethnographer and a world citizen. The interpretational scheme, right up to the nomenclature of the sixteen combinations, turned out to be an adaptation of

(a) tenth-century (C.E.) Arabian magic, notably the divination system known as *‘ilām al-raml* or *ḥabb al raml* (see Chapter 9 above) with

(b) a Chinese iconography (consisting, just like the famous Chinese *易經* *yi jīng* (*I Ching*) oracle,\(^\text{21}\) out of configurations of whole and

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broken lines), and at the same time
(c) astrological implications such as had been elaborated another
fifteen or twenty centuries earlier, in Ancient Mesopotamia.22

The local cultural orientation in which the inhabitants of Francistown had
entrenched themselves, turned out not to be at all the incarnation of absol-
ute and unbridgeable otherness, but – just like my own cultural orientation
as a North Atlantic scholar – a distant offshoot of the civilisations of the
Ancient Near East, and like my own branch of science it had been
effectively fertilised by an earlier offshoot from the same stem: the Arabian
civilisation.23 I had struggled with the other, as if it were an unassailable,
utterly alien totality; but parts of it turned out, on second thoughts, to be familiar and kindred, and accessible.

This amounted to a head-on collision with the central theory of classic cultural anthropology since the 1930s: the historical and cultural specificity of distinct, for instance African, societies; the assumption of their being closed onto themselves and bounded; of their having a unique internal integration and systematics; in general, the idea that something like ‘a culture’ exists; and especially, the dogma that the investigating North Atlantic scholar’s culture, and the investigated ‘other’ culture outside the North Atlantic region, share no historical roots whatsoever.

Distancing myself from these paradigmatic dogmas of Non-Western Studies, was for me the trigger to start a comprehensive research project, which has meanwhile resulted, among a host of other publications, in the earlier, TAAANTA, version of the present collection (1997), and a book manuscript entitled Global Bee Flight: Sub-Saharan Africa, Ancient Egypt and the World: Beyond the Black Athena thesis.

The latter study was to be based on a similar *Through the Looking-glass* experience as I had in connection with the Francistown divination

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system. In the mid-1990s, I went through my various articles on western Zambian kingship in order to collect these in a single volume. This was shortly after I had spent a year at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), Wassenaar, in 1994-95, as the only Africanist member of a Working Group on ‘Magic and religion in the Ancient Near East’. After this extensive exposure my eye was suddenly and totally unexpectedly caught by the many parallels between the ceremonies and mythologies surrounding Nkoya kingship in South Central Africa, and Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and South Asia. The parallels were so striking, so detailed, that I had to seriously consider the possibility of cultural diffusion from these various regions towards South Central Africa or vice versa – once again the suggestion of continuities in space and time across thousands of kilometres and across several millennia.

The Francistown divination system and Nkoya kingship are two concrete examples of the kind of serendipities – paradigmatically unexpected finds – of cultural convergence and diffusion across the entire Old World, which have occupied a central place in my empirical research since 1990. But there has been also a more systematic source of inspiration: the very extensive ethno-historical and anthropological fieldwork which I have undertaken over several decades in various locations on the African continent. In combination with the scholarly literature, and with my involvement in the work of my colleagues and research students, these researches have created a context for comparative hypotheses suggesting considerable correspondences between local cultural orientations, far beyond the strictly local and presentist horizons of classic ethnography.

Against this background I immediately recognised a kindred spirit in Martin Bernal, the author of the multi-volume book Black Athena.

Bernal intends to expose the Eurocentrism which – as he demonstrates – has been at the roots of the study of Graeco-Roman Antiquity over the past two centuries. In Bernal’s opinion, the idea of being heirs to the genial Greek civilisation, allegedly without roots in any previous non-European civilisation, has played a major role in the justification of European intercontinental imperialism. His central thesis is that we must recognise the African and Asiatic roots of classical Greek civilisation (especially its

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27 I gratefully acknowledge the facilities and inspiration offered by NIAS and by my colleagues there within the Ancient Near East work group.


29 Bernal’s own formulation is one-sidedly linguistic hence confusing: ‘the Afroasiatic roots’, see below, p. 329, n.
philosophy and religion) – and in doing so, we would also recognise the non-European roots of major cultural orientations in today’s North Atlantic civilisation, which is increasingly becoming global anyway. Hence the pragmatic title of Bernal’s magnum opus, *Black Athena*: this title is to indicate that the goddess Athena, although the central symbol of classical Greek civilisation, yet had an origin outside Europe, in Africa. With the 1997 *TAΛΑΝΤΑ* version of the present collection, I helped to reopen the debate on Bernal’s work, which appeared to be effectively closed after the devastatingly critical *Black Athena Revisited*. With *Global Bee Flight*, I sought to return to Africa in order to investigate the implications of the *Black Athena* thesis for our Africa research today – and the implication of our Africa research for the *Black Athena* thesis. Because Ancient Egypt occupies a key position in the debates on Africa’s cultural historical relation to Europe and to the rest of the world, a large section of *Global Bee Flight* was occupied by an analysis of the mutual interpenetration of Ancient Egyptian and sub-Sahara-African themes, in the way of concepts and structures of thought, myths, symbolism, the kingship, state formation, and productive practices. My conclusions, however, were sur-

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32 Lefkowitz & MacLean Rogers, *Black Athena revisited*, o.c.
prisingly at variance with the Afrocentric and Bernallian position: I found that, by the end of the fourth millennium before the common era, Ancient Egypt owed its emergence as a civilisation, not to a uniquely African development (which is what Bernal and other Afrocentrists think to be the case) but to the interaction between on the one hand Black African cultural orientations, and ‘Pelasgian’ Eastern Mediterranean / West Asian cultural orientations on the other. However, as a next step my analyses demonstrated that Ancient Egypt, in its turn, did have a decisive fertilising effect not only (as stressed in the Black Athena thesis) on the eastern Mediterranean basin (including the Aegean) and hence on Europe, but also, in a most significant feed-back process, on Black Africa, touching on many aspects of life, including the kingship, law, ritual and mythology. In stead of the familiar image of mutually absolutely distinct ‘cultures’, as in the dominant view both among scholars and in the modern world at large, what thus emerges is an image of Africa which displays a very remarkable cultural unity, not for any mystique of Africanity, but as a result of clearly detectable historical processes: sub-Saharan Africa as first an important source and subsequently as a principal recipient of Ancient Egyptian civilisation, and finally as a result of converging Arabian / Islamic inroads as well as - in the most recent centuries – North Atlantic colonial influences.

It is strange that the argument of convergence has met with so little acceptance on the part of African intellectuals today. Instead they virtually unanimously support the argument of cultural diversity and fragmentation. In the words of Kwame Appiah, one of Howe’s intellectual heroes and someone under frequent attack from Afrocentrists:

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33 Meanwhile, my Pelasgian hypothesis (see Chapter 9, above) suggests that eventually even the sub-Saharan contribution may not stand on its own, but in itself again combined

(a) Palaeo-African elements that had evolved, inside the African continent, out of the pre-Out of Africa heritage (Pandora’s Box), with

(b) ‘African-Pelasgian’ elements, diffused South (via the Nile valley and Western Sahara routes) from West Asia / the Mediterranean.

34 With reference to the work of the Senegalese natural scientist and cultural philosopher C.A. Diop, more than with reference to Bernal’s work (which he does not like any more than he does Diop’s; cf. Appiah, K.A., 1993, ‘Europe upside down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism’, Times Literary Supplement, 12 February, pp. 24-25, Appiah rejects the idea of such a continuity, on the grounds of two self-evidences which however are untenable in the light of recent historical research: the claim that Ancient Egypt had only a non-specialised philosophy (a point reiterated by Howe), which moreover is unrelated, in substance, with current African cultural orientations; and the claim that we cannot expect to find, in Africa, cultural continuities extending over a period of three or more millennia – a mere restatement of the dominant paradigm (c) as discussed below. Appiah, In my father’s house, o.c., p. 161f.
‘If we could have traveled through Africa’s many cultures in (...) [precolonial times] from the small groups of Bushman hunter-gatherers, with their stone-age materials, to the Hausa kingdoms, rich in worked metal – we should have felt in every place profoundly different impulses, ideas, and forms of life. To speak of an African identity in the nineteenth century – if an identity is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought, and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology – would have been “to give to aery nothing a local habitation and a name.”’

In line with this stress on precolonial fragmentation lies the African philosopher’s Kaphagawani’s thesis on ‘C4’, which is a scientistic formula meant to express

‘the Contemporary Confluence of Cultures on the Continent of Africa. This is a postcolonial phenomenon where different cultures meet and mingle to form new, hybrid forms’.36

In this formulation, extreme multiplicity and fragmentation is still held to be the hallmark of the African past, the point of departure. Such unity between African cultures as is being recognised today is taken to be the result of the postcolonial phenomenon of globalisation, which allows this view to salvage the concept of a pristine distinctness of a great number of precolonial cultures in Africa. The discussion on Afrocentrism (with its Senegalese precursor Cheikh Anta Diop) appears to be lost on the majority of contemporary African philosophers. Afrocentrists are scarcely welcomed or cited in these circles.37

4. Hegemonic paradigms, and the empirically testable hypotheses threshed out of Afrocentrism

As Howe states himself, he came to the study of Afrocentrism not as an Africanist but as one interested in the politics (as distinct, apparently, from the philosophy) of history writing; for him, Afrocentrism is primarily politically distorted history. Underlying the above excursions in space and time is therefore a more fundamental question which takes us right back to the heart of Howe’s argument: By what method and with what validity and

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37 Since this was written in 2000, the situation had changed in the direction of greater accommodation of the Afrocentric perspective.
reliability do we construct images of the past?

Historiographic usage offers a number of ready answers to this question. For Howe, and for many historians like him who situate themselves in the empiricist tradition while being suspicious of an over-reliance on systematic theory, a central methodological approach is that of ‘common sense’, an appeal to the self-validating effect of simple everyday logic and common (i.e. North Atlantic, Western) everyday concepts. Inevitably (since everyday common perspectives are by definition – in addition to being implicitly ethnocentric – intersubjective, shared with others and recognized to be so shared) a common-sense appeal would favour the paradigms as taken for granted in a given discipline at a given moment of time.

It has been Bernal’s merit to make us aware of the immense historical and political significance of one such historiographic paradigm, whose demolition has been the purpose of his *Black Athena* project:

(a) ‘Greek classical culture was essentially *independent* from any inputs from the Ancient Near East (Anatolia, Phoenicia, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia) and North East Africa (Ancient Egypt).’

As we have seen, in connection with Afrocentrism, three other such historical paradigms have been dominant throughout the second half of the twentieth century:

(b) ‘Ancient Egypt, although situated on the edge of the African continent, was essentially a non-African civilisation whose major achievements in the fields of religion, social, political and military organisation, architecture and other crafts, the sciences etc., were largely original and whose historical cultural indebtedness lay, if anything, with West Asia rather than with sub-Saharan Africa.’

(In this paradigm we may still detect overtones of the notorious Hamitic thesis which was *en vogue* in the early twentieth century and which claimed sub-Saharan Africa to be the passive recipient of cultural innovations derived from a non-African West Asiatic culture carried by people who did not display any of the somatic features of Blackness.)

(c) ‘Ancient Egypt did *not* have a profound, lasting, and therefore traceable impact on the African continent, particularly not on sub-Saharan Africa.’

(Interestingly, the inverse of this paradigm was a major Africanist paradigm in the first half of the 20th century: diffusionist Egyptocentrism.)

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38 Cf. Howe, *Afrocentrism, o.c.*, p. 115f; and Chapter 12, below.
39 However, admittedly, my own Pelasgian hypothesis might appear to differ only in degree from this thesis. I will come back also to this important point in Chapter 12.
(d) ‘Contemporary Africa is a patchwork quilt of numerous distinct local cultures, each supported by a distinct language and each giving rise to a distinct ethnic identity, in the light of which broad perspectives on continental cultural continuity going back to the remoter past much be relegated to the realm of ideology and illusion.’

(Again, scholarship before the mid-twentieth century, favouring a diffusionist paradigm, stressed far more African continuity in space and time, e.g. in the work of Frobenius; subsequently, African Studies came under the dominance of structural-functionalism with its reliance on fieldwork in one narrow local setting).

Phrased in this way, these paradigms, although largely taken for granted by the scholars working in their context, are in principle testable hypotheses. Although they are not intrinsically ideological, unmistakably they are well attuned to a hegemonic North Atlantic perspective on the world. They postulate a world which is neatly compartmentalised; incomparably more so than would be suggested not only by the globalising experience of our own time, but also by the demonstrable spread of agricultural techniques, weaponry, musical instruments, languages, belief systems including world religions, formal systems such as scripts, board games, divination methods, myths and symbolism, across the African continent and in considerable (though painfully understudied) continuity with the rest of the Old World, and even the New World. Under the alleged conditions of compartmentalisation, a whole mythical geopolitics comes into being: the mystery and mystique of Europe – more recently: of the North Atlantic in general – can be maintained as a solid ideological power base for colonialism and post-colonial hegemony; Egypt, Africa, African cultures, remain the ultimate other, to the North Atlantic, but also to one another; a conceptual and geopolitical ‘divide and rule’ keeps them in their subordinate place vis-à-vis the North Atlantic; and the basic flow of achievement is defined as going from north to south, while the hegemonically undesirable idea of counter-flows in a northerly direction is ruled out. These four paradigms (a) through (d) may be testable hypotheses, but they are very close to geopolitical myths.

If our four paradigms (a) through (d) can be demonstrated to have considerable hegemonic ideological potential, their inverses are likely to have a similar but opposite counter-hegemonic ideological charge. These inverses would stress historical cultural continuity:

(a\text{inverse}) \quad \text{between Greece and the ancient Near East including Ancient Egypt;}

(b\text{inverse}) \quad \text{between prehistoric cultures situated on the Africa continent south of the Tropic of Cancer (23°27’ North), and Ancient}
Egypt;

(cinverse) between Ancient Egypt and latter-day African cultures;
(dinverse) between latter-day African cultures even regardless of the influence of Ancient Egypt.

If paradigms (a) through (d) are so ideological as to be probably untrue to a considerable extent, the same might be the case for (ainverse) through (dinverse). Yet it is likely that the latter contain a healthy and serious critique of hegemonic misconceptions, and therefore in themselves are to a considerable extent, demonstrably true. It now so happens that (ainverse) through (dinverse) are among the central tenets of Afrocentrism, which therefore can no longer be relegated to mere false consciousness and Black consciousness-raising, but deserves to be admitted to the central halls of scholarship. To dismiss these inverse views as ‘myths’, as Howe does in the subtitle of his book, is not only doing them injustice, but also means myopia: the potentially mythical nature of the dominant paradigms, which happen to be Howe’s own, is insufficiently brought to the fore.

5. Howe and Africa

This myopia of Howe’s book is not readily recognised since the execution of its design is largely impeccable. Not being an Africanist himself, Howe can only be praised for the meticulous way in which he has digested the vast relevant bibliography. He finds little, in the enormous literature he has plodded through, to falsify the paradigms (a) through (d). On the contrary, it is his contention that

‘“Black Athena” is a slogan just as false to history as is “White Egypt”’. 40

To Howe,

‘the actual evidence of ideas about kingship paralleling Egypt’s either in Sub-Saharan Africa or in the Aegean is extremely thin’. 41

On the basis of what kind of specialist knowledge and authority is such a statement made? My own discovery of very extensive Egyptian parallels in the material on Zambian kingship came only after studying Nkoya kingship and myths for twenty years, and after far more intensive exposure to Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptological studies than British imperial

40 Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 4; I would endorse, however, much of Howe’s middle-of-the-road criticism of Bernal’s position, based as usual on extensive reading of the literature on the Black Athena debate. I would however shrink from calling Bernal a ‘theorist’, like Howe does (Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 8); my reasons for this are presented extensively in Chapter 1 of the present collection.

41 Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 130.
historians, anthropologists and Africanists normally get. This suggests some of the methodological and paradigmatic problems involved: usually the more one specialises in one spatio-temporally specific domain of human culture, the less likely one is to gain similarly detailed information on another domain, and the more likely one is to retreat into myopic paradigmatic self-evidences.

Howe cites approvingly (p. 173) the opinion of the anthropologist Benjamin Ray – not to be confused with the Egyptologist John Ray – according to whose non-specialist opinion not a single Egyptian artifact has ever been found in sub-Saharan East Africa.42 Alas, by the rules of falsificatory logic one counter-example is enough to disprove this claim.43

However, the distribution of specific artefacts is not the only way to gauge cultural continuity between regions. The extensive continuity

43 Breuil, H., 1951, ‘Further details of rock-paintings and other discoveries. 1. The painted rock “Chez Tae”, Leribe, Basutoland, 2. A new type of rock-painting from the region of Aroab, South-West Africa, 3. Egyptian bronze found in Central Congo’, South African Archaeological Bulletin, 4: 46-50. Further on this find, cf. Leclant, J., 1956, ‘Fouilles et travaux en Égypte, 1954-1955’, Orientalia, 25: 251-252. Shinnie however dismisses, cursorily, this intriguing find as an accidental intrusion (Shinnie, P.L., 1971, ‘The legacy to Africa’, in: J.R. Harris, ed., The legacy of Egypt, 2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 434-455). Admittedly, the trajectories of artefacts may be capricious and difficult to interpret. Thus, a Roman coin from the time of Constantine the Great (c. 272-337 CE) was found near Buea, Western Cameroon, in the 1930s (Bovill, E.W., 1958, The golden trade of the Moors, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 41, n.). Since, contrary to the disputed reports of the Phoenician Hanno sailing down the West African coast and probably sighting Mt Cameroon (‘the Chariot of the Gods’) in the end (Falconer, Thomas, ed. and tr., 1797, The Voyage of Hanno: Translated, and accompanied with the Greek text: Explained from the accounts of modern travellers, defended against the objections of Mr Dodwell, and other writers, and illustrated by maps from Ptolemy, d’Anville, and Bougainville, London: Cadell; Lacroix, W.F.G., 1993, Afrika in de oudheid: Een linguïstisch-toponymische analyse van Ptolemaeus’ kaart van Afrika: Aangevuld met een bespreking van Ofir, Punt en Hanno’s reis, Delft: Eburon; and Herodotus’ claim of a circumnavigation of Africa under Pharaoh Necho II, 600 BCE, Historiae, IV, 42), there is no record of Roman Atlantic trade all the way to Mt Cameroon. Therefore a specialist like Robert Dick-Read (2005, The phantom voyagers: Evidence of Indonesian settlement in Africa in ancient times, Winchester: Thurlton) surmises that this coin is one of the large number that found their way to the Indian Ocean, where Roman trade was going through a revival under Constantine, and where Roman coins were much in demand. In that case the Buea coin suggests a trajectory that brought probably quite a few other items of culture to West Africa via Madagascar and Southern Africa (e.g. cowries – of monetary value both in China and in Africa –, divination bowls – South and West African ones have much in common with Chinese ones displaying 36 zodiacal signs –, Ifa geomantic divination (cf. Chapter 9 above), Indonesian food crops e.g. banana, perhaps even trans-Pacific American food crops); and all this far away from the usual Arab trade routes connecting West Africa with West Asia and the Mediterranean. The Egyptian bronze might have travelled a similar way before ending up in Congo, but there is – as we shall see shortly – sufficient Ancient Egyptian documentary and iconographic evidence of inroads South of the Sahara to make an overland trajectory at least thinkable.
between Ancient Egypt and the rest of Africa cannot be doubted. Already a century ago, the great Egyptologist Petrie\textsuperscript{45} gave an impressive list of such continuities, here rendered as Table 1. When Shinnie revisited the evidence in 1971\textsuperscript{46} he was predictably critical of Petrie’s argument, which inevitably was based on methodologically obsolete and incomplete data. Yet it is worthwhile to summarise Petrie’s now obscure article because, even after almost a century, its author’s phenomenal knowledge of Egyptian material culture, plus the obvious quality, already, of the available ethnographic literature on Africa,\textsuperscript{47} allowed him to identify many details of continuity which still cannot fail to impress us.

Table 1. Petrie on African-Egyptian continuities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nature of the evidence</th>
<th>Egyptian-African parallels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>treatment of the body</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. mummifying</td>
<td>7. recess graves</td>
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<td>2. contracted burial</td>
<td>8. pole over grave</td>
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<td>3. beheading the dead</td>
<td>9. round-domed graves</td>
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<td>4. passage for the spirit</td>
<td>10. domed pit tomb</td>
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<td>5. vehicle for the spirit</td>
<td>11. sloping passage tomb</td>
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<td>6. restoration of ability to the corpse</td>
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<tr>
<td>offerings for the dead</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. beer and flour offerings</td>
<td>18. men sacrificed at royal funeral</td>
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<td>13. cloth offering.</td>
<td>19. eldest son the family priest</td>
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<td>14. offerings at the grave</td>
<td>20. the funeral image</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. killing the offerings.</td>
<td>21. tall hats of officiants</td>
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</table>

\textsuperscript{44} Cf. many important contributions in: O’Connor, David, & Andrew Reid, 2003, eds., \textit{Ancient Egypt in Africa}, London: UCL Press, including the one by Wengrow and (on West Africa and Egypt) Fohninso.


\textsuperscript{46} Shinnie, ‘The legacy’, \textit{o.c.}

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<tr>
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<th>16. offering chamber above grave</th>
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<td></td>
<td>17. drain to the east</td>
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<td>22. offering chamber for the image</td>
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<td>23. the soul house</td>
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<td>royal functions</td>
<td>24. the chief as priest</td>
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<td>25. the king killed before old age</td>
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<td>26. indirect mention of king’s death</td>
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<td>27. sister marriage</td>
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<td>28. honour of the royal placenta</td>
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<td>29. importance of leopard’s skin</td>
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<td>30. potency of the ox tail</td>
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<td>31. ensign of the saw fish</td>
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<td>beliefs</td>
<td>32. the mundane spirit world</td>
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<td>33. every object has its spirit</td>
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<td>34. the ancestral spirit</td>
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<td>35. the roads of the future</td>
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<td>36. twins human and animal</td>
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<td>37. ram-headed gods</td>
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<td>38. the bull god</td>
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<td>39. totemism and animal clans</td>
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<td>40. the sacred sycomore fig tree</td>
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<td>41. red cattle sacrificed</td>
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<td>42. animal skulls hung up</td>
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<td>43. divination by objects thrown</td>
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<td>material products</td>
<td>44. red and white pottery</td>
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<td>45. red and black pottery</td>
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<td>46. mud toys</td>
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<td>47. wooden head-rests</td>
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<td>48. wooden hoes</td>
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<td>49. double process spinning</td>
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<td>50. flat ground-loom</td>
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<td>51. mosquito nets</td>
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<td>52. harpoon</td>
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<td>53. drag net</td>
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<td>54. hand net</td>
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<td>55. basket traps</td>
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<td>56. ring snares</td>
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<td>57. cone on the head</td>
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<td>late influence from Egypt</td>
<td>58. terracotta Nigerian heads</td>
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<td>59. the classical patterns</td>
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<td>60. interwoven patterns</td>
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<td>61. architectural style</td>
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The question however has always been whether such parallels are due

1. to the influence of Ancient Egyptian culture on the rest of Africa,
2. or reversely, to the fact that Ancient Egypt simply, as another African society, was a product of sub-Saharan Africa,
3. to a third factor which, as a shared substrate, both sub-Saharan Africa and Ancient Egypt had in common, or whether
4. the parallels are insignificant and simply spring from accidents of cultural history (‘parallel invention’) against the background of the converging properties of the minds Anatomically Modern Humans.

The information contained in Table 1 is too extensive and too detailed to make (4) a plausible option. My personal preference is for (3), for the extensive reasons presented in Chapter 12, below. However, throughout the 20th century reflection concentrated on the dilemma between points (1) and (2). Since this choice was most cogently put by the Egyptologist Fairman (1965), I propose to call it ‘Fairman’s dilemma’; Keita has posed the same question in slightly different terms. Comparative professional thinking among Egyptologists and archaeologists in the last few decades

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has tended towards view (b) and has thus converged with Diopian and other forms of Afrocentrist thought. A new phase has entered in this debate, now that the Afrocentrist point of view is taken more and more seriously in Egyptological circles (e.g. Ndigi 1997, and in general the scholarly journal Cahiers Caribéens d’Égyptologie).

Given the fact that Ancient Egypt was a major cosmopolitan power for three millennia, and that its trading and military contacts extended far

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52 Ndigi cites a number of prominent early Egyptologists supporting the same idea, e.g. J. Capart, R. Cottereille-Giraudet, K. Meinhof (in fact a Bantuist), H.P. Blok (who from Egyptologist developed into a Bantuist), and F. Daumas; Ndigi, Oum, 1997, Les Basa du Cameroun et l’antiquité pharaonique égypto-nubienne: Recherche historique et linguistique comparative sur leurs rapports culturels à la lumière de l’égypologie, I-II, thèse de doctorat, Université Lumière, Lyon 2; éditions Sententriion_Lille.
South into the Sudan and beyond, it is simply inevitable that Ancient Egypt, once established as such, exerted a strong cultural influence all over the Northern half of the African continent,\(^{53}\) where its representatives travelled widely for local products, ranging from skins and gold, to dwarves.\(^{54}\)

Why then are there admittedly few concrete attestations of Egyptian objects on sub-Saharan? Table 1 implies one ready explanation. Whatever cultural forms came down the Nile valley and spread across sub-Saharan Africa, were appropriated in a process of transformative localisation, and absorbed, as well as eclipsed, the imported Egyptian forms by very similar local African forms. Moreover, whereas the soils of Egypt (with the exception of the Delta) are exceptionally suitable for the long-term preservation of artefacts, the opposite is the case for most of sub-Saharan Africa.

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course, the abundance of Ancient Egyptian artefacts in Nubia cannot be counted in this connection, in the first place because Nubia is not sub-Saharan, in the second place because throughout three millennia Nubia and Egypt, even when politically separate, have been culturally so continuous that one cannot really speak here of a dissemination of culture from one region to the other.

Thus we arrive at the assessment by the Meroe specialist Shinnie, by no means an Afrocentrist, and one healthily suspicious of Egyptocentrism:

‘...it can be seen that, here and there, there are strong resemblances to Egyptian objects and to Egyptian culture scattered throughout Africa. In the realm of material culture a small number of objects have been found which might reasonably be supposed to have originated from Egypt. Amongst these are musical instruments such as the small harp used by the Azande and other peoples of the southern Sudan and Uganda, wooden headrests in various parts of the continent, certain types of sandals, and many other similar objects. In West Africa attention has been drawn to the use of ostrich-feather fans, very similar to pharaonic ones, in Wadai and Bagirmi and other places in the neighbourhood of Lake Chad. (...) In other parts of West Africa, particularly Nigeria, there are resemblances in the regalia of chiefs to the pharaonic regalia - whips, crooks, and flails have all been reported and some have seen them as direct borrowings from Egypt. The god Shango, of the Yoruba, whose sacred animal is the ram, has been derived by some from the god Amun, and Wainwright 55 has cited a ram-headed breastplate from Lagos which certainly very strongly suggests an Egyptian influence.’ 56

Shinnie is sceptical of Seligman’s stress on Egyptian parallels in African kingships, yet he has to admit that the case for such parallels for the Bunyoro in Uganda

‘...does suggest, however remotely, Egyptian influences. Yet the Bunyoro royal line cannot have reached its present home more than a few hundred years ago and, as Seligman himself observed, this makes Egyptian influence unlikely, it being just as probable that these traditions are due to old and widespread African beliefs which affected Egypt as they have affected other parts of Africa.’ 57

Nor can one help suspecting that the two queens of Mpororo, also in Uganda, who were carried around in baskets scarcely a century ago,58 were a sub-Saharan African enactment, across several millennia, of the Ancient Egyptian title nbty, ‘The Two Ladies’, which was represented in

55 Wainwright, G.A., 1949, ‘Pharaonic survivals, Lake Chad to the west coast’, Journal of Egyptian Archaeology, 35: 167 -75; Wainwright had been a major Egyptologist for decades when he began to explore, towards the end of his career, Egyptian influences in sub-Saharan Africa.
56 Shinnie, ‘The legacy’, o.e., pp. 447f.
57 Shinnie, ibid.
hieroglyphic sign Gardiner G16\textsuperscript{59} as the vulture goddess Mwt and the cobra goddess W\textit{dyt} – the two principal divine protectors of the Egyptian king.

Nubia (northern Sudan) has often been identified as the likely scene for the interactions, if any, between Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa.\textsuperscript{60} To Howe however, Nubia appears not as the corridor it is for most specialists, but as a forbidding boundary, in line with the dominant paradigm (c) cited above but at deviance with some available specialist readings of the archaeological evidence.

As a non-specialist, Howe admirably compiles most of the available specialist literature, offering a middle-of-the-road synthesis in line with the dominant paradigms (a) through (d). But he has simply not spent enough time in the various disciplines his argument touched upon, nor looked closely enough once he was there. He misses the feel of the disciplines involved,\textsuperscript{61} their internal counter-currents, and some of their more recent developments.

Thus the African origin of humankind is dismissively glossed over by


‘Egypt was remarkably unsuccessful in transmitting its culture to the rest of the continent’ (Iliffe, J., 1995, \textit{Africans: The history of a continent}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 26; cf. Howe, \textit{Afrocentrism}, o.c., p. 146)

this should have been appreciated by Howe as another mere restatement of the dominant paradigm, and not as an independent empirical conclusion in its own right. In the face of the enormous evidence to the contrary, from Petrie onwards, Iliffe’s statement can only be considered as naively hegemonic.

\textsuperscript{61} For instance, with the sheer difficulty of mastering the relevant scripts and languages, the century-old backlog in publishing primary materials, the small number of Egyptologists and Assyriologists in the world, and their disciplines’ rather too successful insulation from the rapid turnover of theoretical paradigms (functionalism, structuralism, marxism, postmodernism, etc.) which since the early twentieth century have affected most other provinces of academia, the rate of obsolescence of intellectual products in Egyptology and Assyriology is far slower than Howe takes for granted (e.g. Howe, \textit{Afrocentrism}, o.c., p. 225) on the basis of his personal experience with such fields as political and intellectual history, African Studies, etc.
Howe in his chapter III, but hardly a word here on recent discoveries which have added, to the meanwhile generally accepted view that humanisation took place in Africa some four million years ago, the fact that it was also the African continent which saw the emergence of Anatomically Modern Humans (c. 200 ka BP), capable of language, art, symbolism, social organisation etc. It is from Africa that now hail our oldest finds of animal representations, paint, and sophisticated weaponry like barbed harpoons.

Such a probable African background of modern humans (who, for the additional survival value as ultraviolet-ray protection, may well have been black-skinned, to boot) provides Afrocentrism with a prima facie case too good to be ignored or dismissed.

Howe’s good intentions have not prevented him from implicitly endorsing a view of world history that is potentially hegemonic, Eurocentric, and mythical, and that therefore is not to be preferred over the Afrocentrist alternative he fights.

6. Polemical overkill

That Howe is ideologically far from neutral is suggested by his style of writing. Frequently his good intentions are overtaken by his polemical stance.

When he refers to the collectivity of Afrocentrists as a ‘posse’ (a mindless group of henchmen relentlessly pursuing their adversaries at the orders of an authoritarian leader) or a ‘pack’ (a noun usually reserved for a collectivity of non-humans, specifically canines), the boundaries of good taste and decency appear to be crossed. This is also the case when, out of sheer philosophical ignorance, the idea of possible African alternatives to binary logic has to be caustically dismissed. Likewise the nostalgic or

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62 ka = kiloyear, millennium; BP = Before Present.
64 Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., p. 282.
proud adoption of African and Egyptian names by Afrocentric writers has to be ridiculed by Stephen Howe, as if it is incomparably more rational that twentieth-century parents, like his own, under conditions of massive secularisation, should call their children after the earliest Christian martyr. Perhaps Howe could explain to the benighted Blacks the superior rationality of Christian martyrdom?

Scholarly reputations are also readily sacrificed on the altar of Howe’s indignation vis-à-vis Afrocentrism, and the more readily so, the less Howe knows of their specialist field. The synthetic, programmatic overview of Afrocentrism by Clyde Ahmad Winters is sarcastically dismissed, but no attention is paid to that same writer’s intriguing linguistic work, published in authoritative international journals, tracing linguistic parallels between West African languages, Asian, and native American contexts, and suggesting an unexpected Asian dimension to African presence, thus challenging all accepted geopolitical wisdom. Inevitably, Herodotus is paraded worth:

67 Interestingly, Winters himself takes exception at the identification of Bernal’s work as Afrocentrist:


Winters’ position is puzzling in its ethno-linguistic classification: apparently, what for him, here, is the qualifying criterium for Afrocentrism, is not the claim of African provenance (which, after all, could very well have been mediated via West Semitic speakers from Phoenicia and via ‘Semitic Hyksos’ (?) speakers, drawing on Egyptian sources that, in Afrocentric fashion, could be ultimately considered as African), but the fact of cultural transmission by certified Africans / Blacks.

by Howe in the all too familiar, clichéd manner as the ‘Father of Lies’, whereas claims as to the amazing extent of objective historical fact in Herodotus are ignored. Henry Frankfort, who was one of the greatest Egyptologists and Assyriologists of his generation (scarcely half a century ago), and whose books still rate as lasting standard works among the specialists, is denounced as ‘outdated’. Frobenius, one of the greatest Africanists of his generation (early twentieth century CE) and the main single intellectual influence upon Afrocentrism, is anachronistically depicted as of negligible intellectual capabilities, of damaging influence even on European African Studies, hardly taken seriously anymore by the specialists, and an art thief to boot. Sergi, a highly original physical anthropologist of the early twentieth century, is filed by Howe as merely ‘long-forgotten and academically discredited’.

69 Whilst providing grist for the mill of my Pelasgian hypothesis, at the same time; see Chapter 12, below.
70 Howe, Afrocentrism, o.c., pp. 152f.
72 The measure of Howe’s expertise in the field of Egyptology is indicated by the fact that (albeit on what he claims to be the authority of the non-Egyptologist Michael Mann) he indiscriminately writes (Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 126) *Ma’at and Macat* for the well-known goddess of order and good measure, mistaking in the latter version of the word the glottal stop for a ‘c’. More importantly, Howe (*Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 127) sees Ancient Egypt’s achievements mainly in the spiritual and moral field, ignoring what Egypt gave the world in terms of unrivaled architectural feats (the pyramids, Karnak), hydraulic engineering, political organisation, agriculture, myth, culture, law and science... Obviously, Howe’s is not the kind of expertise that should sit in judgement over the specifics of Bernal’s work on Graeco-Egyptian cultural and linguistic interrelations.
74 Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., pp. 167f.
75 Howe, *Afrocentrism*, o.c., p. 34 n. 9, cf. p. 46; Howe leaves the reader to guess at the details of Sergi’s downfall although there is the suggestion that it related to Sergi’s controversial – but not generally discredited – reading (like C.A. Diop’s, *Civilization or Barbarism*, Brooklyn (N.Y.): Lawrence Hill!) of the Grimaldi skeletal remains as negroid.
What Howe does not realise is that all these ancient and modern scholars have one thing in common, which makes them unwelcome in the common-sense, main-steam paradigmatic world to whose authority Howe appeals. They all had the ability to think across established cultural and geopolitical boundaries, whether this meant explaining the origin of the Persian wars in a complex context encompassing the entire Ancient World (Herodotus), or lumping Egypt and Mesopotamia in one grand argument (Frankfort’s *Kingship and the gods*), or stressing the essential continuity between West Africa, North Africa, and Europe, when it comes to kinship patterns and symbolism (Frobenius) and somatic traits (Sergi).

7. Transcontinental influences or ‘Africa for the Africans’?

The case of Frobenius is particularly instructive. In addition to other allegations (some of which may be only too true but none of which should be treated anachronistically), Howe – suddenly adopting an Afrocentrist perspective! – reproaches Frobenius for stressing outside influences on

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African cultures. Such emphasis on Frobenius’s part certainly does not fit in the Afrocentrist orientation, yet it is the inescapable implication of global cultural exchanges percolating since at least the Upper Palaeolithic. In fact, we encounter here a fifth main-stream paradigm:

(e) There have been no substantial non-African influences on African cultures.

This paradigm happens to be shared by late twentieth century Africanists, and Afrocentrists alike. In my opinion, the hegemonic background of the contention enshrined in this paradigm lies in a combination of two ideological stances. In the first place, the North Atlantic tendency to an absolute othering of things African, which does not tolerate them to be polluted by transcontinental connections and thus to be recognised, after all, as part of the wider world. In the second place, I see here an attempt at compensation for a guilty feeling about the violation of African dignity in the context of the transatlantic slave-trade and colonialism; something like:

‘now that we have admittedly robbed Africa of everything, let us at least grant it its independent cultural integrity’.

Yet Africa has unmistakably been part of the global world of humankind since the latter’s African origin, both giving to the wider world, and taking from it; and transcontinental exchanges in human culture have been the hallmark of history, also as far as Africa is concerned.

8. Conclusion

I chose a question as the title of this paper: Is there a future for healing in Central and Southern Africa.
Afrocentrism despite Stephen Howe’s dismissive 1998 study? It is time for an answer.

Let us be grateful to Howe for giving us a serious scholarly study of the background and contents of Afrocentrism as a case of intellectual history. His devastating political and ideological critique of Afrocentrism has been inspired by the best of intentions, by concern not only for the future of scholarship and education but also by abhorrence at the thought of Black intellectuals retreating into an intellectual ghetto. Contrary to Bernal, who—by a surprisingly desperate conception of scholarly knowledge construction—prides himself for being right for the wrong reasons, Howe can be said to be wrong for the right reasons. His book does not put paid to Afrocentrism; and I am pleased to report that, as a sign of commitment and intellectual integrity on Howe’s part, he was obviously pleased when, at the colloquium where the present argument was first delivered, I stated the case for the possible empirical truth of some of the most cherished Afrocentrist theses; all the antagonism marked the preceding pages, did not prevent us from the most amicable exchanges during that colloquium.

It is not in the Black ghetto or in its academic counterparts (such as the Journal of African Civilizations and Karnak Publishers, and Transaction Press, all bastions of Afrocentrism), but in the open, transparent, universally accessible environment of academia itself, that Afrocentrism will assert itself. It has to be coaxed into open debate, in order to be cleansed from poor methodology, restrictive selection of data, entrenched refusal to take cognisance of existing detached scientific inquiry, and above all, racism. Beyond the unmistakable defects of current Afrocentrism glows the promise of a bright future, where thanks to Afrocentrism’s inspiring reversal of accepted hegemonic paradigms, we may hope to come much closer to the empirical, demonstrable truth concerning such contributions to mankind’s world-wide culture as Africa has exchanged, over the millennia, with the other continents.

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80 This is the assessment by an anonymous reviewer in the authoritative journal Antiquity, 12 (1991): 981; and quoted, with perhaps too little self-criticism, by Bernal himself (this collection, p. 218).