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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the origins of the universal human practice of mentoring. It assembles information from various sources and employs content analysis and socio-linguistic and historical approaches to interrogate and evaluate the material from an Afrocentric perspective. The major focus is upon the concept of mentoring in the widest context of the history of humanity, but with particular attention to intersecting narratives of Kemet (ancient Egypt), Homeric Greece, and the impact of Eurocentrism. The results invalidate popular ideas about the origins of mentoring and confirm that this universal human practice is to be found in all human societies, including the oldest ones, a large number of which predated the Greeks. They demonstrate the practice to be widespread and indeed institutionalized in Kemet, which exerted a tremendous influence upon most subsequent societies, including Greece.

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Keywords: mentoring, Homer, Afrika, Kemet, socialization, gender, Eurocentrism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Western civilization clamorously declares itself to have sprung from the Greeks, asserting Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to be the quintessential classic texts. However, Homer exhibits a profound reverence for these Nubians, called Aithiopians (burnt-skin peoples) by the Greeks; and who are deemed to be the most beautiful and most holy human beings on the face of the planet.¹

A distinguishing feature of all humanity is a compulsion and developed capacity to transmit information across generations, usually in such forms as values, knowledge, skills, techniques, experiences, insights, expectations and their corresponding attitudes and patterned behaviours. Every human group demonstrates this characteristic, irrespective of its level of organization and development. The alternative is an unrecognizable humanity, one bereft of memory and a capacity for improvement, with each generation inheriting nothing from its predecessors. In such a condition there will be no stories, no recollections of challenges and struggles, strategies, tactics, and solutions; no social memory and store of strategic information, skills, or values upon which to deploy creativity and help to build and sustain society and its progress. Each generation will be perpetually paralyzed at the inception of what has become the human journey into greater humanity. Every generation will be condemned to restarting itself exactly where the first humans began on the road to development, which is always about improving people and their lives. Then development itself will forever be impossible, as every generation will be limited in the same way and face the identical challenges as its progenitors. In a world without intergenerational transmission and a corresponding assimilation of knowledge, humanity will hardly, if ever, become human. We shall forever be arrested by an absence of intellectual heritage, paralyzed in our earliest embryonic condition, and doomed to an endless circle of primitive stagnation, never becoming anything more than our primordial selves.

¹ Ian Isidore Smart, *What is Ukraine to Me?* (Washington, DC: Original World Press, 2022), 49.

It is in Afrika that humanity first became human, in all aspects of that condition: spiritually, biologically, socially, culturally, psychologically. The archetypes of the human being and human culture are therefore Afrikan.² The implications of this realization for the intergenerational transmission of information seem obvious. It is the specifics of that transmission that are not as obvious at first glance, particularly with the realization that the process and its participants are always subject to variations, and even differentiations, that are dictated principally by space, time, and culture.

Even an elementary outline of the pedagogical history of humanity instructs us that there are two inescapable facts about the process of intergenerational transmission. From the beginning it flowed generally from the older and or more experienced and or knowledgeable to the younger and less experienced, but always the less knowledgeable or skilled. In addition, it was innate to humanity from our first societies. Yet, the dominant narrative of such transmission is today framed by an epistemology that centres Mentor, an eponymous Greek male character from the tales and time of Homer, which are millennia after the birth of humanity. Further, Mentor was not, and could not have been, the first person to perform mentoring. Simply, there are many millennia of humanity before him, so it is impossible for him to have been the archetype of this defining characteristic of humanity.

In the discourse on mentoring, there is therefore an unacknowledged and unexplained gap between the known beginnings of humanity and so of mentoring, and the location of Homer's Mentor in time and space within the history of humanity.

This essay addresses itself to this very significant deficiency, as well as to attendant issues, in this aspect of the intellectual history of humanity.

² Molefi Kete Asante and Nah Dove, *Being Human Being: Transforming the Race Discourse*. (New York: Universal Write Publications, 2021), 6-7, etc.; Edward Bruce Bynum, *Our African Unconscious: The Black Origins of Mysticism and Psychology*. (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2021); Charles F. Finch, *Echoes of the Old Darkland: Themes from the African Eden*. (Atlanta: Khenti Inc., 1991).

II. BECOMING MENTOR: THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION OF WESTERN EUROPE

In the last quarter of the last century, western European scholarship became marked by a significant and growing academic literature about mentoring. This trend announced a growth area in the knowledge industry in this part of the world and its dependencies. Increased interest in mentoring is visible in the academy as well as in other forms of the workplace. Lectures, seminars, and new ways of developing personnel are among the interventions prompted by this new focus. Attention has been centered on a range of issues that intersect with this concept and its practice,³ including various demographics, professions, and levels in the education system. However, amidst this profusion of writing about mentoring, there is, generally, a paucity of references to the origins of this concept and its practices.⁴ Furthermore, there appears to be no study dedicated to these vital aspects of the subject. In fact, this dearth in the investigation of its origins has its corollary in the almost universal and uncritical acceptance of the assertion, sometimes implicit but usually very explicit, that mentoring was first performed by Homer's⁵ eponymous male character in the *Odyssey*, a long poem in the classical literature of western Europe, in which the main character bears the Greek name Odysseus, (Ulysses in Latin).

³ Godfrey E. Henry, "Mentoring and Black People in Further Education Management." Unpublished PhD Thesis, (School of Education, The University of Birmingham, 2008).

⁴ A refreshing exception is Nick Dukakis, Efthymios Valkanos and Ioanna Papavassiliou, "Reconstructing the Homeric Model of Mentoring: A Review of Mentoring Relationships in Prehistoric and Ancient World History of Human Development." *Journal of Human Resource Management*; 10(2): 56-65 (2022). <http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/jhrm>. [Last accessed 11/30/2022].

⁵ Examples include Jeremiah A. Barondess, "A Brief History of Mentoring." *Transactions of the American Clinical and Climatological Association*. Vol. 106 (1995), 3-6; Barondess, "On Mentoring." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. Vol. 90 (June 1997), 347; Helen Colley, *Mentoring for Social Inclusion: A critical approach to nurturing mentor relationships*. (Routledge Palmer, 2003), 1; Andy Roberts, "Homer's Mentor: Duties Fulfilled or Misconstrued?" *History of Education Journal*. (1999). <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>. [Last accessed 11/30/2022].

Andy Roberts has shown (even with his gaze that is restricted to Homer), that the above-mentioned construction of the origins of mentoring is empirically unsound, as it overstates the impact of Mentor and ignores the more effective mentoring role of the goddess Athene, for Mentor's mentoring is severely diminished without her impersonation of him. In Roberts' reading, it has been left to the genius of the Frenchman, Francois de Salignac de La Mothe-Fenelon (1651-1715), to gather the roles and attributes of mentoring that are represented in the *Odyssey* and infuse them into his character of the same name. The result was first published in his novel, *Les Adventures de Telemaque* (1699). It is this work that is the immediate intellectual basis of the current connotations of the term mentor.⁶ Perhaps it is significant that its publication occurred right at the rise of Eurocentrism. Even though there are other critiques in the literature, these do not invalidate the central misrepresentation of Mentor as the original mentor, and hardly contest the sexist and racist connotations of this Eurocentric construct.

In describing the goddess' Athene's methodology, Telemachus himself offers some testimony to its format: 'like a father... to his son'⁷ and, like 'a guest who has become a friend'.⁸ These two similes, especially the father/son formulation and its suggestion of close personalized exchange, in addition to Mentor's age and experience, Telemachus' relative youth and inexperience, and the objective of enhanced vocational competence, are of the greatest significance as descriptors of the concept and roles of mentoring in the history of humanity. These are the elementary person specifications for mentor and mentee and the specified aim of the process. They confirm the ancient outline provided in the introduction. The terminology of family is enlightening. It points to the origins and nature of mentoring, and much more.

⁶ Roberts 1999.

⁷ Homer, *The Odyssey*. Translated by E. V. Rieu. (Penguin Classics, 1974), 33. See also 38, 43, 245, etc. for verbal images of father. All references to Homer are from this translation, unless otherwise stated.

⁸ Homer 1974, 33.

Ultimately though, Athene's effectiveness in these roles is demonstrated in the changed behaviour of the young man. We are told that after a session of what has become known as mentoring, 'she left Telemachus full of spirit and daring' and very focused upon achieving his objective, which she had worked out with him and motivated him to attain.⁹

Therefore, to judge from the intellectual authorship by performance of these roles, it is the goddess Athene, a woman, who is the original mentor in the specific context of this story, though this is not what has been made of it in the western world. Her aims are clear: "I myself will go ... to instill a little more spirit into [Telemachus] and to embolden him... It is possible that... the effort will redound to his credit."¹⁰ She is disguised as Mentes and provides useful suggestions, as well as a pep talk, to Telemachus. He in turn pondered upon these suggestions.¹¹

It is only after then that Mentor enters the story, first as himself,¹² then as impersonated by Athene.¹³ She is far more effective as an advisor and enabler, that is, a mentor, to Telemachus.¹⁴ Furthermore, she expands the scope of this role and advises his father, Odysseus,¹⁵ his mother Penelope,¹⁶ and generally intervenes at various points in the narrative to help the family through one difficulty or the other.

Hence, though in recent times a very powerful myth has been spun around Homer's character, significant gaps exist between Mentor and his achievement, or lack of it, in the original tale. There is therefore a gap between Mentor's performance and the roles and achievements universally attributed to this character in modern western discourse.

But there is a far more fundamental gap which exists within the current interpretation of Mentor

⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 27-36, *passim*.

¹² Ibid., 37-38.

¹³ Ibid., 333-35.

¹⁴ Ibid., 43-48, *passim*, 50, 52, 56, 60, 230-231.

¹⁵ Ibid., 249, 268, 277, 304-305, etc.

¹⁶ Ibid., 316.

as the first mentor and the origins and practice of this concept in the social history of humanity. In truth, it is not even to Fenelon that one must turn when seeking the origins of the roles performed by his Mentor. The construction and critique of mentoring in western scholarship have so far been confined to the Eurocentric interpretation of the experience of the European world, usually beginning from Greek times, and to a Eurocentric imagination that has been both fed and restricted by patriarchy and colonialism. This scholarship has therefore left unaddressed and unanswered very important questions of whether there were cultures and societies, and so concepts, practices, and practitioners, which may today be termed mentors and mentoring, that existed before the Greeks of the Homeric age, or indeed before Greeks of any age. The simple fact is that there were many of each of the foregoing representations of humanity. At present the scholarship on the origins of mentoring is therefore usually both empirically unsound and conceptually flawed.

A sober contemplation of the evolution of human society will show that Mentor could not have been the first person to practice the roles with which he has become associated and now symbolizes. The eponym Mentor could have been based on another name of another person, from a civilization far older than the Greeks, who symbolized the person specifications and performed the distinctive collection of roles that are now widely associated with a particular semi-historical Greek man named Mentor. It is quite possible that such a precursor of Mentor would be culturally distinguished from Mentor in ways that influenced the shape of the service they delivered, but it is certain that these roles would be recognizable as those covered by the widely used terms of today. This is demonstrated below in the example of Kemet, Ancient Egypt (Part V). However, the distinction of the character Mentor does not lie in the mere fact that he performed those roles; uncountable numbers of persons did them in numerous societies before him and his time.

There have been uncounted mentors before Mentor, and many of them were women. Even

though Athene was more effective in this role, it is Mentor who has been chosen and promoted in western discourse and so has become distinctive as symbolic of this role. This distinction has been conferred upon him because he is popularly known as an early, perhaps the earliest known male European example of this figure who nevertheless has populated human history from its very beginning. It seems certain that he became popular among Europeans as the foremost representative of those roles in their experience because he is a man. In addition, in a Eurocentric reading of the *Odyssey*, he is located in this way in this foremost text of the classical literature of western Europe. The basis of his distinctiveness in the dominant view among western Europeans is therefore a narrow focus upon male versions of themselves and the diminution and/or exclusion and misrepresentation of women, even among western Europeans, as well as of all other peoples and cultures of humanity.

The final reason why Mentor has become Mentor, and thereby popularly accepted as archetypal in a world dominated by western Europeans, is because of a feature of Eurocentrism that has been pointed out by Afrocentric, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-patriarchal scholars. In the last six hundred years, western Europeans have actively sought to impose themselves and their values, standards, and perspectives upon other peoples of the world while negatively distorting and destroying the Indigenous Knowledge Systems of the people they oppressed.¹⁷ Mentor could have been a woman or another man with a different name from any of the other cultures who developed and practiced mentoring long before Europeans did. But western European patriarchy,

¹⁷ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*. (Monthly Review Press, 1989); M. K. Asante, *The Egyptian Philosophers: Ancient African Voices from Imhotep to Akhenaten*. (Chicago: African American Images, 2000), 7-24; Kimani Nehusi, "Forty-Seven Years After: Understanding and Updating Walter Rodney." In Biko Agozino ed. How Europe Underdeveloped Africa: A Tribute to Walter Rodney. *Africa Update*. Vol. XXVI, Issue 3 (2019). www2.ccsu.edu; Nah Dove, *Afrikan Mothers: Bearers of Culture, Makers of Social Change*. (SUNY Press, 1998); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and many others.

enslavement, colonization, imperialism, and other atrocities have never been only spiritual, or military, or economic, political, or social. Western European domination and oppression is intellectual also. Intellectual violence has been an accomplice in all other kinds of violence unleashed by the dominant sections of western Europeans in their colonial and imperial depredations around the world.¹⁸ The minds, visions and imagination of western Europeans and the people they subjugated were mostly forcibly confined to the western European intellectual universe. This is substantially a hegemonic space in which the dominant male sections of western Europeans have inculcated themselves as superior and all other varieties of humanity as inferior, a space to which 'the others' were not admitted as themselves, with their own philosophies, social histories, and other credentials of their humanity intact. Hence it is Mentor who has become associated, with these personal attributes and roles allegedly accorded him by Homer, in the popular mind of Europe and, in turn, in the minds of peoples dominated by Europe.

The significance of Mentor therefore lies not so much in the concept he practiced, but in the fact that he is the first European man known to have done so, and consequently and falsely, the person selected and promoted as the first in the world to have done so. Mentor has been made necessary, and so possible, by the necessity to defend six centuries of western European crimes against humanity: enslavement, colonialism, and imperialism.

III. MENTORS BEFORE MENTOR

In pursuing the origin and meaning of the term mentor, various dictionaries in western European languages supply an allusion to Homer's male character as the starting point of this concept.¹⁹

¹⁸ Nehusi 2019; Nehusi, "Introduction: The Strategic Intellectual Importance of Kemet." In Karen Exell. Ed. *Egypt in its African Context: Proceedings of the Conference held at The Manchester Museum, University of Manchester, 2-4 October 2009*. BAR International Series 2204. (Oxford, UK: Archaeopress, 2011), 11-20.

¹⁹ *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. [COED] 1993. Second Edition. (BCA and Oxford University Press, 1993); *El*

These official guardians of major European languages uphold, institutionalize, and perpetuate the Eurocentric worldview outlined above. Hence, at this advanced scientific and academic level, the etymology and meaning of the term mentor in modern western European languages, and so in those parts of the world dominated by the modern western European meta narrative, are rooted in the false construction of Homer's male character as the first person in the world to perform those roles which have come to be associated with and are epitomized by this character.

Yet, there is no record of Homer himself ever saying that his character was the first person in the world to perform such tasks. The patriarchal, ethnocentric, and racist notions that became dominant features in European thought, European action, and European scholarship, did not appear to mark and mar Homer's view of the world. Writing at about 740 BCE,²⁰ Homer had different preoccupations.²¹ As shall be seen below (Section IV), Eurocentrism did not prejudice his view of humanity in general, nor of Afrika in particular. In fact, the scourge of Eurocentrism began after the age of Homer. The very least that may be said of the currently prevailing notion of Mentor as the first mentor, in western and western dominated societies, is that it is ultimately based either upon ignorance of the history of humanity before Homer, or upon a deliberate attempt to ignore and distort that history, and so the history of humanity in general. In any event, a narrative that begins the history of mentoring with Mentor is clearly based upon a misrepresentation of Homer and misrepresentation of the social history of humanity.

An objective assessment of the origins and development in human society of the functionary

Diccionario de la lengua Espanola [DLE]. Vigesima Segunda Edicion. (La Real Academia de Espana, 2001); *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. [SOED]. Third Edition. Vol. II. (Clarendon Press, 1973).

²⁰ Albert Cook, "Visual Aspects of the Homeric Simile in Indo-European Context" in A. Cook. Trans. and Ed. *The Odyssey: A Verse Translation, Backgrounds, Criticism*. 2nd Edition. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993), 348.

²¹ Example, T. W. Adorno, "Odysseus, or Mythos and Enlightenment" in A. Cook, *The Odyssey: A Verse Translation*, 307-313.

and associated roles that have come to be known in the west as mentor and mentoring, necessitates the expansion of our horizons from Europe-bound parameters of being and existence to time/space conjunctions that existed well before the Greeks and well beyond Europe, and to ways of knowing, to knowledge and to systems of producing, organizing and transmitting knowledge, that are also different from those of the western Europeans.

Such civilizations as those of the Ancient Egyptians (in a conservative estimate of from about 3100 BCE), Kushites, Mesopotamians, people of India (from about 2500 BCE) and the Chinese, (Shang Dynasty from at least about 1766 BCE) all arose before anything remotely comparable did in Europe. In contrast, the Greeks are said to have achieved this status much later, and Homer wrote at about 740 BCE, on the eve of this rise of his native land to civilization.

The very fact that many of these civilizations endured for multi-generational time spans argues the inter-generational transmission of information as well as implicates mentoring as a vehicle of transmission. The continuous nature of the transmission, and the great length of time it endured, also argue organization and systemization and their consequences in institutional structures, functions, functionaries, and processes and therefore, indeed, the certainty of many or all aspects of organizational practice. Intergenerational transmission is always an enabling context for the roles that are today termed mentoring, and functionaries that are called mentors.

IV. THROUGH HOMERIC EYES

It is significant that Homer was a people's bard whose repertoire was composed of popularly held tales that were already traditional in Greece when he wrote them down.²² It is therefore entirely likely that he replicated the popular view of Kemet and of Afrika that was alive in the Greek mind of his era²³ and before then. That vision is certainly

²² E. V. Rieu, "Introduction" in Homer, *The Odyssey*, (1974), 10-11.

²³ Rieu, *Ibid.*, 11

very consistent throughout both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the *Odyssey* it is obvious that Egypt is personified and presented as the eponymous 'Aegyptius, an old lord bent with years and rich in wisdom' who is, quite significantly for Afrikan ethical tradition, accorded the right to speak first in the assembly, though in Homer's explanation that right has nothing to do with age.²⁴ Yet Homer associates the two, which is consistent with the association of age, experience and the expectation of wisdom in Afrikan culture. This notion of immense wisdom and the knowledge upon which such wisdom must have been founded is clearly and further articulated by Homer in relation to Egypt, this time specifically concerning one aspect of the ancient knowledge industry. He alludes to many useful drugs from Egypt,²⁵ then asserts that 'in medical knowledge the Egyptian leaves the rest of the world behind.'²⁶

Current knowledge about ancient Egypt substantiates both the allusion to the drugs produced there, which was part of a large and sophisticated herbal pharmaceutical industry,²⁷ and the related fact of the medical knowledge and skill of its doctors, which were considered immense by contemporary authorities as well as those of later ages, including today.²⁸ It should be emphasized that the outstanding medical

²⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*. Translated by E. V. Rieu. (London: Allen Lane. Penguin Books, 1973), Book II, 37.

²⁵ Homer, 1974, 54.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁷ Lise Manniche, *An Ancient Egyptian Herbal*. (London: The British Museum Press, 1989); E. A. Wallis Budge, *Herb Doctors and Physicians in the Ancient World: The Divine Origin of the Craft of the Herbalist*. (Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., 1978).

²⁸ Cyril P. Bryan, Trans. *Ancient Egyptian Medicine: The Papyrus Ebers*. (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1974); E. A. Wallis Budge, *Herb Doctors and Physicians in the Ancient World: The Divine Origin of the Craft of the Herbalist*. (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1978); Charles F. Finch, "The African Background of Medical Science" in Ivan Van Sertima ed. *Blacks in Science: Ancient and Modern*. (Trenton, NJ: Transaction Books, 1983), 140-156; J. R. Harris, "Medicine." In J. R. Harris ed. *The Legacy of Egypt*. (Oxford University Press, 1988), 112-137; Chauncey D. Leake, 1994. *The Old Egyptian Medical Papyri*. (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1994); Frederick Newsome, "Black Contributions to the Early History of Western Medicine" in Ivan Van Sertima, *Blacks in Science*, 127-139; Carole Reeves, *Egyptian Medicine*. (Princes Risborough, UK: Shire Publications, 1992).

knowledge and skills of the people of Kemet were acknowledged by much of the contemporary world, that is, by other people with first-hand experience of those achievements. For example, in this regard, Kitchen mentions the Greeks themselves, other Europeans, the Hittites and their vassal states, as well as the people in other 'Near Eastern' states.²⁹ Harris mentions Greeks (including Homer's reference), Persians, Syrians, and other peoples of the contemporary Eurasian world.³⁰ The thrust of Eurocentrism is therefore to doubt, diminish and even delete the evidence of historical eyewitnesses, some of whom were themselves Europeans.

The superlative image of the people of Kemet transcended medicine and was consistent with the general image of Afrika in the eyes of ancient Europeans, and indeed in the eyes of the ancient world. For example, it has been established that many Greek scholars attained their higher education in Kemet. These include Thyles, Anaximander, Anaximenes of Miletus, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Isocrates of Ionia, Pythagoras, Solon, Plato, Eudoxus, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno, Melissus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and many others.³¹ Further, Blyden records that 'Homer and Herodotus have written immortal eulogies to [Afrikans]', the former terming them 'blameless Ethiopians' who were the only humans the Greek gods felt themselves fit to dwell among, spending twelve days on holiday with them each year. This latter is a reference to a passage in the *Iliad*.³² This exalted view of Afrikans is upheld in the *Odyssey*, where Homer has the Greek god Poseidon visit them to participate in two of the most important rituals: a sacrifice and a feast.³³ Lucian held similar views. In addition, Blyden observes that 'the ancient philosophers of Greece and Rome' travelled to Kemet 'to gaze upon its

²⁹ K. A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt*. (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 91-92, 95.

³⁰ Harris 1988, 112-137.

³¹ Asante 2000, viii, 79-80; Asante, *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999), 57; Harris 1988, 112; George G. M. James, *Stolen Legacy*. (San Francisco: Julian Richardson Associates, 1985), 9-19, 42-45.

³² Homer, *The Iliad*. Translated by E. V. Rieu. (Penguin Classics, 1966), 34.

³³ Homer 1974, 25.

wonders and gather inspiration from its arts and sciences.³⁴ In the context of currently dominant Eurocentric representation of Greece as having no influence from Kemet, Bertrand Russell's observation that "[i]n all history, nothing is so surprising or so difficult to account for as the sudden rise of civilization in Greece"³⁵ does not therefore appear unfounded, especially as it is well established that Kemet contributed tremendously to the civilization of Greece.³⁶ This is a fact that is upheld by many ancient Greek scholars, including Hecataeus³⁷ and Herodotus.³⁸ However, the extent to which this may have been common knowledge in Homeric Greece has not been clearly delineated in the scholarship on this and related issues. Nevertheless, Blyden's conclusion on this matter is of unerring accuracy. "It shows," he says, "the estimate in which the ancients [of Europe] held the Africans, that they selected them as the only fit associates for their gods."³⁹

The influence of Kemet upon Homer may not be explicitly stated in every instance. Cheikh Anta Diop notes that the stratagem of sneaking five hundred soldiers inside jars into the rebel town of Joppa by General Thuty, under Pharaoh Thutmose III, 'served as a pristine model' for Homer's Trojan horse in the capture of Troy in the *Iliad*, as well as for the storyteller in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*.⁴⁰ These parallels are widely

³⁴ Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*. (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1994), 133-135, 175.

³⁵ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its connection with Political and Social Circumstances from Earliest Times to the Present Day*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961), 25.

³⁶ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vols. I&II. (London: Free Association Books, 1987, 1991); Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and of Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. (London: Karnak House, 1989), 66-74, 181-190; James 1985.

³⁷ Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*. Trans. Andrew Jenkins. (Harvard University Press, 1996), 423-426.

³⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*. Book Two. Trans A. de Selincourt. (Penguin Classics, 1972), especially 151-160.

³⁹ Blyden 1994, 134.

⁴⁰ C. A. Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. Trans. Yaa-Lengi Meetma Ngemi. (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991), 95.

acknowledged in Egyptology.⁴¹ Yet, it is left to Diop to arrive at the obvious conclusion that “Homer, far from creating *ex nihilo*, relied heavily on models, particularly Egyptian ones.”⁴² This is a restatement of the tremendous anteriority of Kemet and its multi-faceted, though not always immediately obvious, impact upon Greece.

Internal evidence from both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as well as the dominant image of Afrika in the mind of early Europe, thus strongly suggest that Homer did not share a worldview that is Eurocentric, patriarchal, ethnocentric, or white supremacist. Homer may therefore have quite significant differences from many of his current interpreters on this matter of the supposed anteriority of Mentor as mentor in the social history of humanity and the related issue of the image of Afrika, and by extension also that of other non-European societies, in the gaze of the currently dominant sections of western Europe.

The cumulative image of Afrika in the eyes of Homeric Greece as a land old in age, advanced in learning, and fit for the holiday of the gods, reflects the Greek experience of Afrika, and the Greek representation of that experience before the rise of western European colonialism. It was the consequent need of colonialism to justify itself that led western Europeans to invent false narratives that attempt to lessen and demean Afrikans, Asians, Indigenous Americans, and other non-western peoples as a way of trying to justify western European barbarism and crimes against humanity, particularly in black and brown skin.

Homer’s references to ancient Egypt (Kemet) ought to lead us in this direction in our search for ancient models, in fact, for the archetypes of his Mentor, who has been since popularized and even institutionalized as mentor, the first and foremost representative of this distinctive collection of

⁴¹ James H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt: from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. 1909), 312, 454; G. Posener, “Literature.” In J. R. Harris 1988, 242; W. K. Simpson, ed. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions and Poetry*. New Edition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 81, etc.

⁴² Diop, 1991, 153.

related roles in the history of humanity. For it is in ancient Egypt with its immensely long history that Afrikans, the first people in the world, became the first people in the world to achieve that status scholars term civilized. However, Kemet did not develop in isolation from the rest of Afrika.⁴³ Its roots lie in earlier Afrikan societies further up the Hapi [Nile] and other river valleys, south of Kemet itself, in the heart of the continent. In addition, Homer’s deployment of the terms ‘father’ and ‘son’ to communicate a mentoring relationship indicates unmistakable conceptual proximities to Afrikan thought, Afrikan epistemology and Afrikan practice that preceded Homer and the Greeks by many millennia.

For all these reasons, it is entirely logical that it is to Afrikan civilization that we must now turn to ascertain whether there were models of the mentor more ancient than the character after which this functionary and its associated roles have come to be known in the western and western dominated world.

V. KEMET: A MENTORING SOCIETY

It is important to recall here the operational definition of mentoring that has been achieved from the identification of the roles of Homer’s Mentor and Telemachus, his mentee, and especially the goddess Athene, who mentored the entire family of Odysseus. This is useful for comparison with a far older Afrikan tradition as expressed in Kemet, where, as in any society, the culturally determined context of the transmission is characterized by common social values that are transmitted as behavioural ideals in an ethical system which usually imposes mutually binding rights, expectations and therefore behaviours

⁴³ S. K. Damani Agyekum, 2012. *Distorted Truths: The Bastardization of Afrikan Cosmology*. (New York: Afrikan World InfoSystems, 2012); Ayi Kwei Armah, *Wat nt Shemsw: Myth, History, Philosophy and Literature: The African Record*. (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2018); Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974); Nehusi 2011; Théophile Obenga, *African Philosophy. The Pharaonic Period: 2780-330 BC*. Translated from French by Ayi Kwei Armah. (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh. 2004), 15-17, 20, 69-70, etc.

upon both parties (or sides) in the mentoring process.

There was great investment in the value of humanity. A person was composed of nine different aspects that included a physical body and spiritual, social, and moral aspects⁴⁴ and she or he was defined by their relationship to other persons: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.'⁴⁵ *Ma'at*, or universal cosmic order, was accessible through truth, justice, righteousness, order, balance, reciprocity and harmony.⁴⁶ Successful persons were expected to give back to their community.⁴⁷ Age was valued, as is indicated by the value accorded elders and ancestors. Each of these was critical in the process of intergenerational transmission.⁴⁸

These social values had a significant impact upon the fact of mentoring as well as its high incidence in the society. In Afrikan society, anyone older than a person is that person's elder and mentoring was a function and an expectation of being elder. This fact alone accords significant status to the chronologically older person, the mentor. That status, the value it accorded and the influence it exerted were very highly regarded in the relationship and therefore became a significant factor in mentoring. In modern terminology this resulting bond between mentor and mentee is known as the Therapeutic Alliance.⁴⁹ The system

⁴⁴ Nehusi "The Construction of the Person and Personality in Africa." In Mammo Muchie, Vusi Gumede, Samuel Oloruntoba and Nicasius A. Check Eds. *Regenerating Africa to bring African Solutions to African Problems*. (Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa, 2016), 61-76.

⁴⁵ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (London: Heinemann, 1988), 117, 108-109.

⁴⁶ Maulana Karenga, *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt. A Study in Classical African Ethics*. (Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 2006).

⁴⁷ Helmut Brunner, 1981. "L'éducation en ancienne Egypt." In Gaston Mialaret and Jean Vial eds. *Historia Mondiale de L'éducation: des origines à 1515*" Vol.1. (Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), 68; Christian Jacq, ed. 2006. *The Wisdom of Ptah-Hotep: Spiritual Treasures from the Age of the Pyramids*. Trans. M. de Brito. (London: Constable, 2006), xxv, 16, 82-84.

⁴⁸ Nehusi, *Liberation: An Afrikan Ritual of Heritage in the Circle of Life*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2016), 97-19.

⁴⁹ For nursing see L. Dinç and C. Gastmans 2012 Sept. "Trust and trustworthiness in nursing: an argument-based literature

of Age Grades⁵⁰ organized the inculcation of the great value of age and socialization into appropriate ethical behaviours from an early age. Further, the social value of great respect for significant experience, knowledge, skills, and the wisdom that was predicated upon these, translated into respect for persons who embodied them, and so of additional respect for mentors. It is the same in apprenticeship and the historically later innovation now known as teaching, as well as in almost all other functionaries, sites, and processes of knowledge transmission. Age plus knowledge and wisdom amounted to social capital of considerable weight.

It was not only these vessels of knowledge that were highly valued. The people of Kemet possessed a great regard for knowledge itself. Their vocabulary contained such terms as *rekh-khet*, literally 'a male knower of things', hence a wise man or sage.⁵¹ The Late Period writing of this term,⁵² indicates a remarkably stable concept throughout the history of this state, well over five thousand years. The feminine counterpart of the knowing man was 'the knowing woman' who was also a divining woman.⁵³ There was also *sia* = a wise man, a term that is, significantly, rooted in the word for skill.⁵⁴ These terms register the great

review." *Nurs Inq*.19, 3 (September 2012):223-37. Doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1800.2011.00582. x. Epub 2011 Nov 3. PMID: 22050646; D. S. Tarlier, "Beyond caring: the moral and ethical bases of responsive nurse-patient relationships." *Nurs Philos.* 5,3 (October 2004), 230-41. Doi: 10.1111/j.1466-769X.2004.00182. x. PMID: 15385033.

⁵⁰ Susan Bailey, "Circumcision and Male Initiation" in Theodore Celenko ed. *Egypt in Africa*. (Indianapolis Museum of Art and Indiana University Press, 1996), 89.

⁵¹ Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*. Vol. I. (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 430; A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*. Vol. II. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1982), 443; A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*. 3rd Edition. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1988), 52.

⁵² Leonard H. Lesko and Barbara S. Lesko. ed. *A Dictionary of Late Egyptian*. Vol. I. Second Edition. (Providence, RI: B. C. Scribe Publications, 2002), 275.

⁵³ B. Lesko, "Rank, Roles, and Rights" In Leonard H. Lesko (ed.) *Pharaoh's Workers: The Villagers of Deir el Medina*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 26.

⁵⁴ R. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1991), 208; Lesko and Lesko, *Dictionary of Late Egyptian* Vol. II. ((Providence, RI: B. C. Scribe Publications, 2004), 11,14.

significance of knowledge and skills to the people of Kemet. The association of wisdom with age and the capacity to mentor and indeed the expectation of so doing, are registered in the *Sebayat* or written teachings or instructions. This concept amounts to an indigenous institutionalization of both the practice of giving back and the value of age, experience, and knowledge. Each of these terms proclaims a role or roles that would amount to mentoring in today's terminology.

In the evolution of human society, the first persons to play the roles of mentoring were parents, who, along with nature which they observed closely, were the first teachers, models, and mentors. Direct transmission through demonstration was the first methodology, and observation and imitation the first learning strategies. Apprenticeship, mentoring, teaching, and other knowledge transmission methodologies followed in time. The family/clan was the first location of transmission, and specialized institutions such as societies of secrets and schools followed later. Children were the first learners, as apprentices and mentees, for apprenticeships were sites of mentoring. For millennia training was based on the family or clan, with fathers, uncles and other close male relatives tending to train boys in their professions, while mothers and other close female relations trained girls in theirs.⁵⁵ Obenga is certain that the knowledge was "dispensed by a master to a student, by a wise expert to someone younger, by an experienced veteran to a neophyte."⁵⁶ Hilliard concurs: "Usually the initiate would be assigned to a master as an apprentice."⁵⁷ The xry-a: apprentice or assistant,⁵⁸ in later times the student, was inserted into the living conditions of the role, trade, or profession to develop the

⁵⁵ P. Ghalioungui, *Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 107; Nehusi, *The System of Education in Kemet (Ancient Egypt): An Overview*. (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization 2010), 34.

⁵⁶ Obenga 2004, 201.

⁵⁷ Asa Hilliard, *The Maroon Within Us: Selected Essays on African American Community Socialization*. (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1995), 99.

⁵⁸ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Modernized by Boris Jegerović (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2017), 251; Lesko and Lesko, Vol. 1, 387.

requisite skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. The term for master is neb.f,⁵⁹ literally 'his male owner'. It is a term which highlights the presence of morality and ethical behaviour as intimate aspects of this tradition of knowledge and skills acquisition, for the master or mentor was expected to be an authority, one who consistently lived and so modelled the professional and ethical behaviours expected of his or her mentee.

In Afrikan culture, the designation of parent includes grandparents as well as 'social' parents; every adult was expected to be involved in parenting once a need arose and a person was available. It is quite possible that the closeness afforded by such personal proximity of parent and child was carried over to other interactions, became decisive in other relations of intergenerational transmission and exerted a tremendous influence upon instructor and apprentice, teacher and student, mentor and mentee. This is the likely explanation of the psychological closeness that Obenga identified as pervasive in the society.⁶⁰ It is the very context and ethos of caring and mentoring.

The dominant characteristics of mentoring in Kemet: the psychological closeness identified by Obenga, as well as the low ratio of those who imparted to those who learnt, and the personalized nature of the relationship of transmission, are maintained in many learning and teaching locations in the society. This accounts for the terminology of affection that characterizes the language and challenged many Eurocentric scholars. For example, lovers, wives, and husbands referred to each other as 'brother' and 'sister'.⁶¹

The father/son metaphor witnessed in the *Odyssey* is therefore neither alien nor misplaced in this loving and caring context of Kemet. In fact,

⁵⁹ Gardiner, "The House of Life." *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. No. 24 (1938), 159.

⁶⁰ Obenga, "La parenté égyptienne: considérations sociologiques" *Ankh: Reveu D'Égyptologie et des civilisations africaines* Nos. 4/5 (1996), 141.

⁶¹ Benedict G. Davies, 1994. *Egyptian Historical Records of the later Eighteenth Dynasty: Fascicle V*. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1994), 74; Lichtheim Vol. II 1976, 181–193, *passim*; Obenga 1996, 143.

long before Homer, the metaphor was extended in the *Sebayat* and other instruments and sites of intergenerational transmission, some of which are mentioned above. In the quote above, Obenga is precise in identifying specific roles and statuses within the two categories of participants in the mentoring process: 'a master,' 'a student,' and 'a wise expert' and 'someone younger,' 'an experienced veteran' and 'a neophyte.'⁶² It is significant that Obenga is role specific, but neither sex nor gender bound. The emphasis is upon social roles. It is not upon biology. Here, each of those roles was a focus on an aspect of what is known as mentoring today. In effect, the conditions and roles that define mentoring and co-mentoring were reproduced and maintained at all sites of knowledge transmission and skills development throughout the society of Kemet.

The influence of the family upon the social institutions is also attested by both the high incidence of familial terms that describe roles in the wider society and the relatively few terms employed to convey them.

It is of further significance that the vocabulary of existence in Kemet reflected this predominance of quality social relationships over biological ones. The people of Kemet distinguished *sA n xt.f*, literally 'son of his body,' a biological son, from *sA n ib.f*, literally 'son of his heart,' a social son.⁶³ This is reflected in the language as well as social practice. The father/son format in which the *Sebayat* is articulated is but one example.

The roles of father and mother as mentors were extended from the family into other social institutions. The supreme statement of father as mentor resided in the post of *It Neter*, literally 'Father of the God [i.e. the Pharaoh].' Here he was the mentor and chief advisor of the Pharaoh. The title of *Mut Neter* or 'Mother of the God' was not an empty designation; one devoid of power, influence, and function. She was the female

⁶² Obenga 2004, 201.

⁶³ Armah 2018, 88; Saphanaz-Amal Naguib, "Fille de dieu", 'Espouse de dieu', 'Mère de dieu' ou la métaphore féminine" in G. Luft Ed. *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt. Studies presented to Laszlo Kakosy on the occasion of his 60th birthday. Studia Aegyptiaca XIV.* (Budapest : La Chaire d'Egyptologie, 1992), 443.

mentor of the pharaoh. There were also chief mentors to other important royals. Here mentoring is clearly specialized, institutionalized and elevated to the topmost rungs of the society.⁶⁴ The vocabulary of its articulation clearly indicates its origin in the model transmitted from the bosom of the family/clan.

Each person and every institution defined a collection of roles that usually included and indeed valued and validated roles that operationally defined the concept of mentor. In fact, so pervasive was this specific role that it was not usually separated as a stand-alone aspect of intergenerational transmission, and so it was not thought necessary to define it by a particular term in the language. Mentoring was a major factor in defining numerous social relationships. It was a tool possessed and experienced by all and was deployed in the processes of personal, professional, and national development. This is one of the significant cultural differences between the concept and practice of Kemet and that which obtains in much of the European dominated world today.

The subsequent development and institutionalization of education in Kemet, where Africans developed the first system of formal education in the world, from nursery to university,⁶⁵ leads to the conclusion that in the beginning of humanity, learning and teaching were not distinguished from socialization, either institutionally or conceptually. Therefore, 'non-formal' modes of intergenerational transmission of information were dominant in the very early stages of the development of humanity. The processes of teaching and learning were still in the hands of biological parents or other close relations, or

⁶⁴ Nehusi, "The *It Neter* or Father of the God. A Case Study of Cultural Dislocation and (Re)Location in Kemet. Part I: The Royal Court, Miscellaneous Examples and Senenmut." *Moja: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Africana Studies*. Vol. 3, Issue 1. (December 2022), 10-24; Nehusi, "The *It Neter* or Father of the God. A Case Study of Cultural Dislocation and (Re)Location in Kemet. Part II: Language, The Temple, Ay and Joseph." *Moja: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Africana Studies*. Vol. 3, Issue 1. (December 2022), 25-36.

⁶⁵ Nehusi 2010.

others who acted as such, and reproduced the personal closeness that characterizes such relationships. The risk of distancing, or even alienation, was minimized or prevented. These modes continued to be instrumental in some locations of intergenerational transmission even after the arrival of formal education and specialization. In today's terms, mentoring was a key aspect of intergenerational transmission, whether it was through learning and teaching, or it was conducted at sites such as the family/clan, apprenticeships, formal teaching, the *Sebayat*, the Sovereign, Father of the God, Mother of the God, or other social institutions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The relocation of information about Afrika to the history and culture of Afrika transforms our understanding of Afrika and Afrikans and helps to clarify the social history of all humanity. The modern workplace with its persistent and often obscured or hidden dangers of racism, sexism, and other afflictions that challenge inclusion and equity, emphasizes the importance of the roles of mentor as well as the necessity for identifying and understanding the origins and development of this universal human practice.

The most important factor in determining the image and perception of the concept of mentor in the world today is the Eurocentric misrepresentation of both Homer's Mentor and the misplaced origin and significance of mentoring in Homeric Greece. Ultimately, the western European intellectual and academic violence that accompanied the military violence of western European enslavement, colonialism, and other formats of dominance, is a primary tool in determining the intellectual horizons of western Europeans as well as the peoples they have conquered and now dominate. The resulting epistemology of oppression demeans, pathologizes and excludes the Indigenous Knowledge Systems of conquered peoples. That is why Mentor has been selected, imposed, and widely accepted as an archetype that he never was and could not be, simply because there were, in other societies, uncounted individuals who played the same or similar roles to what he did in

Homeric Greece, for thousands of years before Homeric Greece.

Contemplation of this information from an Afrocentric standpoint reveals significant contradictions that are inherent in the epistemology articulated in the term Mentor. Further, it permits, even encourages us, to ask some very important questions and to reach some extremely significant conclusions. Hegemonic mental structures imposed by western Europeans are exposed. Worlds that existed long before European domination are revealed and validated. The people who inhabited them are (re) humanized. The positive effects of this knowledge upon people today and in the future are incalculable.

For example, it may be significant of patriarchal domination that is central to Eurocentric existence that Homer's Mentor is a male, when in the history of humanity, women have been, in the very least, equal to men in the provision of mentoring services to other human beings. In addition, it should be noted that such mentoring and related services done by women are often unwaged, usually because their location is in the home. Yet, in the actual tale as told by Homer, Athene is woman and divine, and she, not Mentor, is by far the most effective mentor in the story.

The single term, Mentor, thus casually deletes the presence and agency in the social history of the world of entire categories of humanity: women and people of colour, by far the great majority of humans. Mentor is therefore another example of the Eurocentric tradition of names and naming.

Yet, the term 'Mentor' is but a single representative of something much larger than itself. Another example of this epistemology of oppression is easily available from Homer's text. The term 'odyssey' and its variants, derived from the name of Homer's hero, are widely applied in European languages to mean a wandering and adventurous journey. But these very characteristics are present in journeys with identical features that were celebrated in the literatures of much older civilizations long before the Greeks and other western Europeans sought

to celebrate Odysseus in this way. For example, Afrikans in Kemet celebrated such journeys of *Harkhuf*, *The Shipwrecked Sailor*, *Sinuhe*, and others. It is not illogical to expect stories with similar features in the literatures of other civilizations. The impact of the omission of these archetypes from the study of humanity helps to shape humanity's awareness of itself in ways that threaten inclusivity, equity, and sensitivity at the very foundations of ourselves in a world in which it has become commonplace for us to describe humanity as global and even integrated. It ought not to be difficult to imagine the consequences of these observations for the interpretation and teaching of such significant texts as Tennyson's poem, *Ulysses*, or James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses* (1918-20, 1922), even if only at the departure points of these journeys of the human imagination that, like the dominant but deficient Eurocentric concept of mentoring, have been instructed by a peculiar and inaccurate reading of Homer's poem.

Other patriarchal and often racist terminology that arise from and continue to uphold Eurocentric epistemology are in easy everyday use. They define untrue and unhealthy perceptions of humanity and the human reality. The absence of this information from academic discourse about Kemet and Afrika in general, and other cultures such as the Chinese, Indians and indeed of all humanity, is indicative of a much wider problem of Eurocentric scholarship. Other manifestations of this affliction lie in the many distortions, outright lies and omissions about the history of Afrika and other varieties of humanity that have become lodged, in fact institutionalized, in Eurocentric scholarship.

Mentoring was a public good, widely defused and dominant in the social practice of Kemet. It expressed the ethos of the society of Kemet and was a decisive tool in intergenerational transmission. But this fact is deleted by the deployment of the Eurocentric epistemology that deletes Kemet, other Afrikans and many other peoples from humanity and falsely centres Greece and by extension Europe, in the history of humanity.

As oppressed people transform themselves into the conscious agents of their own destiny, they seize control of their own minds and begin to beat back the boundaries of their mental enslavement and the intellectual dominance of hegemonic forces. In their moment of power, the forces of liberation of the World Majority root their epistemology in their own experiences, perceptions, and interests. Hegemonic forces will then no longer possess intellectual power and so can no longer construct the mental universe to suit their own purpose. In that moment, Mentor will, appropriately, cease to be Mentor and become a mentor, both in the story to which he immediately belongs, and in the great narrative of humanity in which everyone belongs.