SANKOFA: RECLAIMING AND RE/POSITIONING INDIGENOUS AFRICAN RHETORICS

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Rhetoric and Writing—Doctor of Philosophy

2025

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine the situatedness and importance of African rhetorics within the field of rhetoric and writing as well as its related fields. Grounded in a decolonial research orientation and rooted in African thought, I investigate how African worldviews can be analyzed to reveal the profound rhetorical power and significance embedded in Indigenous African knowledge systems. I focus on African rhetoric and then shed light on how the shortcomings of Euro-Western frameworks adopted to examine any phenomena in African contexts tend to often lead some scholars to reduce African worldviews and rhetorical practices to superficial elements such as aesthetics, religious performances, or entertainment. To address these constrained perspectives, I propose and develop the *sankofa methodology*—a decolonial research framework inspired by the Akan philosophical concept of *sankofa*, which emphasizes purposeful return to the past in order to reclaim, reinterpret, and reapply valuable cultural knowledge for the present and future. Through this methodology, I investigate the deep-seated knowledge and rhetorical dexterity of kente and kente weaving. Focusing on the rhetorical and technical communication dimensions of kente and kente weaving among the Ewe people of Ghana, I use talking circles and counter-storytelling to engage with weavers to uncover, articulate, and reclaim the epistemic, communal, and meaning-making power of kente weaving practice. By adopting a decolonial perspective, this research offers new insights into how African meaning-making practices foster community-building, inclusivity, and decolonial encounters. This research contributes to decolonial and Indigenous rhetoric, technical communication, and cultural and material rhetorics by foregrounding relationality, cultural specificity, and rhetorical sovereignty. Ultimately, this research calls for a paradigmatic shift that centers African ways of knowing as vital to global knowledge-making practices.

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife (Rebecca) and my children (Peace Abena, Yesutor Godwin and Sitsofe Grace) for motivating me.

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CHAPTER 1: CHOOSING THE KENTE TYPE AND DESIGN

Finding Myself

A few years ago, before beginning my graduate studies, a friend introduced me to the field of rhetoric and writing—an area that was not part of the undergraduate curriculum in Ghanaian universities at the time. During my coursework, I encountered foundational concepts in rhetoric, composition, and technical communication. In rhetoric and composition studies, threshold concepts such as writing as a social and contextual act (Adler-Kassner, 2016), the power of language (CCCC), rhetorical situation, and rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe, 1999) offered new lenses for understanding communication through writing/composition. Similarly, in technical communication, threshold concepts included contextualization, rhetorical awareness, visual literacy, and the role of technology in meaning-making. As someone new to the field, I found the early weeks of my master's program both challenging and disorienting; I often felt lost during classroom discussions. In retrospect, this experience was humbling but humorous for an international student, like me, while navigating unfamiliar academic terrain.

Beyond the fact that rhetoric and writing studies were entirely new to me—as I believe they are for many international students—a more significant challenge I faced during my early coursework was the field's apparent reliance on Greco-Roman rhetorical traditions. This reliance often rendered the material culturally distant and intellectually limiting. Interestingly, this concern was not mine alone. One of my classmates, who was not an international student, expressed frustration about the predominance of Euro-Western rhetorical texts in our assigned readings, noting the lack of engagement with non-Western rhetorical traditions. During class discussions, they also voiced concern about how scholars of color and scholars from non-

Western contexts are often expected to analyze cultural phenomena through Greco-Roman conceptual frameworks. My coursemate states:

> In the article, "Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric." Jacqueline Jones Royster does an incredible job to move away from western tradition by incorporating several examples. However, she utilizes Aristotle's appeals and rhetorical precepts as part of her analysis. Through this action of utilizing this framework to approach African American women's perspectives, I begin to wonder: why are we still reinforcing some of those "guidelines" that Aristotle utilized to oppress women and communities that are non-white? Are there avenues to disrupt/dismantle these rhetorical strategies from Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* that are threaded in our readings/field of study then and now?

A key takeaway from these discussions—and from the concerns raised by my classmates—that kept me wondering all these years was a growing question: how can we effectively understand or analyze phenomena rooted in non-Western contexts, particularly within African worldviews? This line of inquiry is not only essential to rhetoric and writing studies but also has broader implications across research fields committed to cultural specificity and epistemic justice. I find a compelling resonance with this question in the work of Adam J. P. Gaudry (2011), who makes a profound claim along these lines when he states:

> … research is especially alienating when the "objects of research" are Indigenous peoples. Research *on* Indigenous peoples tends to reproduce tired colonial narratives that justifies occupation and oppression. It also effectively renders that validity of Indigenous cultural knowledge meaningless through its appropriation and translation by knowledge-extraction industries such as anthropology, sociology, policy studies, and law. (p.113)

Here, Gaudry not only underscores the importance of recognizing differences in worldviews in research but also highlights the potential harm in applying research frameworks and methodologies that are misaligned with—or foreign to—the communities being studied.

As I reflect on my observations and prepare to interrogate them more deeply, I am reminded of Lorena Escoto Germán's (2021) assertion that "one way to interrogate [our imaginations] is to study the silence and omissions in stories" (p.12). Expanding this insight into the context of rhetoric and writing studies, I see Germán's call as a powerful prompt for teacher-scholars to critically examine the narratives, histories, and rhetorical traditions that shape—and often constrain—the field. In particular, Germán's claim serves as an invitation for rhetoric and composition/writing and technical communication scholars to identify and engage with the stories and epistemologies that have been marginalized, silenced, or excluded from dominant disciplinary discourses in rhetoric, composition, and technical communication.

Another factor that shaped the direction of this project was my recurring sense of "absence" in many of the rhetoric and writing courses I took throughout my master's and doctoral studies. Across the broader field of rhetoric and composition—including technical communication—there remains a significant gap in scholarship on Indigenous West African rhetorics. This absence became even more apparent in the overwhelming emphasis on Egyptian rhetorical traditions (Karenga, 2003; Sweeney, 2004; Campbell, 2006; Crawford, 2004; Lipson, 2013) in both classroom materials and, more broadly, in scholarly conversations about African rhetoric. In many academic spaces outside the continent, discussions of African rhetorical traditions tend to be narrowly focused on Egyptian and Nubian cultures, often to the exclusion of the rich and diverse rhetorical practices of other African cultures and peoples.

Building on the work of scholars such as Lorena Escoto Germán, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Angela Haas, Iris Ruiz, Laura Gonzales, Malea Powell, and others who engage in reclamation and recovery of marginalized rhetorical traditions, I argue that interrogating the silences and omissions surrounding "othered" and Indigenous rhetorical practices is essential for the continued growth and diversification of the field. Thus, I want to use my study to contribute to this effort by examining the rhetorical traditions and practices of West Africa—long overlooked in rhetoric and composition/writing studies. Rather than treating African rhetoric as a singular, monolithic category, this project emphasizes an Indigenous West African rhetorical practice. By centering this practice, my research seeks to expand the field's understanding of rhetorical knowledge and promote more inclusive, culturally responsive frameworks for research and pedagogy.

This research holds critical importance for African scholars and the broader fields of rhetoric and writing studies. A significant gap persists in understanding the value and complexity of Indigenous African rhetorics and ways of life—particularly those rooted in pre-colonial traditions and minimally influenced by Western or colonial paradigms. Too often, researchers interpret Indigenous African practices through problematic lenses that reduce them to aesthetic, religious, or performative dimensions, thereby overlooking their epistemological and rhetorical depth. As Michael Bokor (2016) and others have argued, achieving a fuller appreciation of the rhetorical richness embedded in Indigenous African knowledge systems requires a more critical and culturally situated approach—one that engages seriously with the ontologies, epistemologies, and communicative practices of Indigenous West African communities. This study takes up that challenge by foregrounding such knowledges as vital rhetorical frameworks rather than peripheral cultural expressions.

It is increasingly recognized that Western imperialism and colonialism have systematically marginalized—and in many cases erased—Indigenous ways of life, knowledge systems, and meaning-making practices that hold profound value for contemporary education and scholarship. In response, decolonial scholars and scholars of color have sought to challenge and dismantle the persistent Eurocentric dominance within rhetoric and writing studies. As part of this broader decolonial agenda (see Oyekunle, 2022; Smith, 2021; Ruiz & Baca, 2017), many Indigenous scholars have committed their work to reclaim Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing. This work often involves reasserting original identities, constructing new or resistant identities that more accurately reflect their lived experiences and cultural orientations, and centering Indigenous epistemologies within research, pedagogy, and institutional practices. These efforts are vital not only for representation but also for expanding the intellectual and methodological dimensions of the field.

This work not only highlights how forces such as coloniality and systemic marginalization have undermined the significance of Indigenous African rhetorical traditions in literacy and communication practices but also brings attention to critical contributions these traditions can offer to the growth and diversification of the disciplinary landscape of rhetoric, writing studies, and technical communication (see Royster, 2003). Historical and scholarly evidence makes it clear that colonialism—along with its enduring structures—has deliberately suppressed Indigenous African knowledge systems, educational models, and communicative practices. These practices, deeply rooted in African thought, form the foundation of cultural and intellectual life for many African communities. Importantly, African epistemologies often diverge from Euro-Western philosophical traditions, particularly in how knowledge is enacted, understood, and valued. Recognizing and engaging with these distinctions is essential to

decolonizing the field and fostering a more inclusive and globally responsive understanding of rhetoric and communication.

Our understanding of the world and the methods we employ to generate knowledge are deeply shaped by our cultural and lived experiences, as well as by the philosophical traditions that underpin our worldviews. In the case of Indigenous African communities, centuries of marginalization and neo/colonization have profoundly impacted knowledge-building practices, including the reduction of rich, epistemologically grounded traditions to mere aesthetics, ritual, or entertainment, stripping them of their intellectual and rhetorical value. Yet, in many African contexts, rhetorical and communicative practices are embedded in the fabric of daily life—dynamic, relational, and accessible to all. This aligns with Barbara Christian's (1988) assertion that theorizing is not confined to "Western form of abstract logic" but is, in fact, an everyday practice rooted in lived experience and contextual knowledge (p.52). Recognizing these practices as legitimate modes of knowledge making for marginalized communities affirms their intellectualism and underscores the urgency of restoring their place in scholarly discourse.

The African world is endowed with profound creativity and resourcefulness in its communication and literacy practices. Yet, this richness is often overlooked or misunderstood, particularly by those who fail to engage deeply with its cultural contexts. Even many scholars who have written about African worldviews and ways of life have tended to rely on Euro-Western frameworks or adopt deficit-based approaches that misrepresent or undervalue Indigenous knowledge systems. It is important to reiterate that African communities and cultures possess deeply rooted epistemological, philosophical, ontological, and practical traditions that shape their approaches to communication and literacy. In expressing this point clearly, Elleni Tedla (1995) states:

Over the millennia, Africa has distilled and encoded its experiences and philosophy (i.e.,

its understanding of the world or the cosmos) in countless ways. In other words, Africa's

experiences and philosophy are found encoded in its symbols, rituals, designs, artifacts,

music, dances, proverbs, riddles, poetry, drums texts, architecture, technology, science

and oral traditions. Though many of these appear simple on the surface, it is not until one

attempts to unravel the encoded philosophical or messages within them that one is struck

by their profundity. (p.1)

Drawing from Tedla and from my lived experiences as an African, I assert that everything—

including communication practices—is rhetoric and rhetoric is everything. In Indigenous African

contexts, rhetoric, communication, and literacy are inseparable. Rhetoric, communication, and

literacy practices are at the core of everyday life experiences, such as food, folk songs,

drumming and dancing, weaving, and naming among others. With this understanding, I am

compelled to interrogate how the rhetorical and communication dexterity of knowledge making

practices in African contexts can be examined effectively in academia. This direction is critical

in research, as many scholars engage in research projects *about* and *on,* but not *with* Africans

while using African Knowledge systems and concepts. In line with this, Elleni critiques "modern

educated Africans" who essentialize non-African approaches to research by "... uncritically

importing wholesale ideas and institutions from overseas without assessing their merits for the

well-being of African societies" (p.4). Tedla similarly emphasizes that meaningful understanding

of the African world by African scholars requires abandoning deficit-based approaches and

rather engaging African ways of life and thinking within their own cultural, historical, and

philosophical contexts (p.4).

Purpose of This Study

As I build on these insights, I use this study to re-engage conversations around African rhetoric and the study of rhetoric as a form of communication and literacy practice within African contexts. In alignment with concerns raised by Afrofuturist and Afrocentric scholars (See Collins, 2001), I contend that studying African rhetorical traditions offers significant contributions to knowledge production, literacy, and communication—while also fostering a more holistic understanding of ourselves and our relationships with the world. It is important to clarify that this study does not seek to pit African rhetorical practices against those of any particular cultures or communities. Rather, its intention is to highlight key insights and orientations found within African traditions of rhetoric and writing/composing, and to demonstrate how these practices and understandings can productively expand the landscapes of rhetoric, writing studies, and technical communication.

A deeper interrogation of African conceptualizations of writing and rhetoric can meaningfully contribute to the re/development of theories, methodologies, and frameworks for reimagining, redefining, and expanding our understanding of rhetoric, writing, and communication. In this study, I apply African rhetorical principles to examine rhetorical and communicative dexterity embedded in the practice of kente weaving—a knowledge-making tradition rooted in Indigenous Ghanaian contexts. An example of kente is shown in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1 An Example of Kente Woven in Ghana (Source: Maakola)

In my study, I argue that both the artifact of kente and the practice of weaving it possess rich rhetorical and technical communication significance that merit scholarly attention. Yet, contemporary discussions around kente tend to emphasize its aesthetic appeal and fashion value, often overlooking its rhetorical functions and communicative depth. What remains largely absent from these conversations is a consideration of kente weaving as a rhetorical and technical communicative practice—particularly its potential alignment with principles of design thinking in technical communication.

Some questions that guide this research include the following:

1. What are the ethically effective and appropriate approaches for doing any research in African contexts?

2. What can African rhetoric contribute to rhetoric and writing studies as well as technical communication?

3. How can kente and kente weaving be appreciated as rhetorical beyond fashion and arts work?

To address these questions, I examine the communicative, rhetorical, and writing practices of African communities to interrogate the question, *What is African rhetoric?* and to reveal the limitations of classical Western methodologies when applied in African contexts. In doing so, I establish both the conceptual grounding and the exigence for the methodological framework presented in Chapter 3. I begin by outlining key rhetorical principles grounded in African worldviews, then critique the inadequacy of Western approaches in capturing the complexity, nuance, and cultural specificity of African knowledge-making practices. The next chapter builds on this foundation by developing a research methodology rooted in decoloniality, drawing specifically on the Sankofa principle—a central concept in the Adinkra system of the Akan people of Ghana. *Sankofa* calls for returning to the past to inform the present and future, foregrounding memory, identity, values, and traditional knowledge systems. Applying this methodology to my research reaffirms that the rhetorical and technical communicative richness of kente and the practice of kente weaving have been overlooked or excluded in dominant narratives of knowledge production.

Concepts and theories that I use to center my study include *sankofa*, counterstory, talking circle, and decoloniality. Drawing from Thomas King's (2010) claim that "stories are who we are" and from Aja Martinez's (2012) position that counter storytelling promotes narratives that create room for alternative perspectives to dominant ones, I demonstrate how counter storytelling and talking circle acknowledge all agents of meaning making as well as reclaim and empower the Indigenous knowledge practice of kente weaving through sankofa methodological framework. Influenced by decolonial considerations, I apply talking circle and counterstory as a blended method in gathering data for this study, while I adopt the interpretive dimension of sankofa methodological framework to analyze the data (Quarcoo, 1972).

In chapter 4, I focus my analysis primarily on the experiences of some kente weavers from the Ewe community in Ghana as well as my personal experiences as a kente weaver to demonstrate how the communal practice of kente weaving serves as a complex, purposeful rhetorical act and a process of knowledge-making and world-building in African contexts. I was born and raised as a member of the Ewe ethnic group located in Ghana. At a very young age, I was taught kente weaving, as it was a source of livelihood in the local community where I was born and raised. Hence, I have expert knowledge in relation to kente and kente weaving. Although Kente and kente weaving are a source of livelihood in my local community, they have strong connections with our cultural heritage. Drawing from the experiences of these weavers as well as mine, I interrogate the deep-seated rhetorical and communication dexterity of kente and kente weaving. Through *sankofa* considerations, my goal is to reclaim the rhetoric and technical communication emergence in kente and the practice of making it.

Finally, I close my study by reflecting on the implications of my study for African rhetoric and for disciplinary, pedagogical, and scholarly conversations. I believe my study makes significant contributions to Indigenous and decolonial studies, design thinking, communication, as well as rhetoric and writing studies. This study underscores the need to expand rhetoric, writing, and technical communication by centering Indigenous African rhetorical traditions as vital sources of theory, practice, and pedagogy. It demonstrates that practices like kente weaving offer rich rhetorical and technical insights when understood through culturally grounded frameworks like *sankofa*. The implications are clear: research must account for context-specific knowledge systems; pedagogy must be responsive to diverse literacies and identities; and disciplinary conversations must move beyond Eurocentric models to embrace plural traditions.

Doing so not only enriches scholarly inquiry but also fosters more inclusive, transformative educational and communicative practices.

CHAPTER 2: PREPARING THE LOOM: RHETORIC IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

Rhetorical practice is an integral part of human existence. We humans engage in rhetorical practices in our everyday lives, whether it is how we relate with people and with the world around us or it is about how we communicate or project our identity. Since humans are social, cultural, and political beings, these factors heavily influence the practice of rhetoric. Rhetorical practices tend to vary to some degrees from community to community. A good number of rhetoric scholars (including Berlin, 1994; Royster, 2003) acknowledge rhetoric in its plurality, hence advocate for creating space rhetorics from diverse communities and cultures. James Berlin, in recognizing the significant contributions that the inclusion of rhetorics from different places could make to the field, charges rhetoric scholars to locate and amplify the interactions that exist between diverse rhetorics and the factors influencing their production, while acknowledging the suppression of rhetorical practices of certain communities or groups (p.116). As rhetoric is influenced by social, economic, political, and cultural factors, it is necessary to attempt the comprehension of any rhetoric based on how a particular community defines or conceptualizes it within its own terms. Rhetoric within African contexts is conceptualized within African ways of life and cultural histories.

In this chapter, I stand on the shoulders of scholars in the field and scholars whose work sheds more light on the communicative practices—including writing and rhetorical practices—of people and communities of African backgrounds to examine "what is African rhetoric" as well as "why classical methodologies do not always work in African." In addition, I use this chapter to provide the grounding and exigence for developing my own methodology in chapter three. This is done in two ways: first, I discuss what rhetoric is in African contexts. Secondly, I explain why Western methodologies do not always work for examining any phenomena, especially examining

or comprehending the rhetorical dexterity of any knowledge making practice, in African contexts.

Understanding Writing and Rhetoric in the African Context

What is rhetoric in (Indigenous) African contexts?

In Africa, there are many modes of communication, composing, writing and diverse rhetorical practices that emanate from culturally influenced rhetorical traditions over the years. These practices go beyond the verbal and written forms of communication. From an African perspective, many of the rhetorical traditions and the modes of communication exist in mediums and practices related to the African ways of life and cultures, including language, festivals, chieftainship, weaving, games, dance, drumming, songs, and many others. In an African context, writing and rhetorical practices are constitutive of community building and communal living. Though Africans communicative practices heavily relied on orality or orature, there have been important writing or composing practices common among many of the African cultures/communities. These practices hold and demonstrate rhetorical values and characteristics of African writing and composing.

At the core of rhetorical and writing/composing practices in Africa are principles of community, communality and the relationality of humanity to cosmic beings and nature, including land, living things, and objects. Rhetoric, in African contexts, shapes and is shaped by theories and practices grounded in African thought. Digging deeper into the ancient rhetorical traditions of African cultures reveals that rhetoricians (men and women) engaged in different forms of rhetoric, especially in speechmaking (Smith, 2021, p.13). Rhetoric is understood among African societies as both an ancient and contemporary practice of communication that reiterate the creative power of language and roots individuals in a historical community and culture,

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providing the foundation for self-knowledge and self-assertion in the world (Karenga, 1997; Asante, 1998; and Obenga, 1990).

The purposes of writing and rhetoric/composing are ingrained in everyday life of African people which makes communication and interactions that exist in African cultures beautifully simple but complicated. This everyday life graced by the choices, actions, and inactions surrounding the ways of being, knowing, and doing the African cultural ways reinforces better understanding of the rhetorical and writing/composing practices of African cultures elusive of non-African frameworks. Many African cultures see rhetoric and writing serving the purposes beyond communication and preservation of history to include enactment of identity (ingrained in culture), telling their own stories in their own terms, sustaining history/herstory for generations to come, practicalizing community and communality. Based on the Indigenous context, many African cultures engaged and still engage in writing or composing in the form of hieroglyphs. Barbara Christian describes hieroglyph as "a written figure which is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative" (p.52).

Indigenous African rhetorics operate within different areas of life in connection to the various subfields of rhetorics in the rhetoric and writing studies. While some people might want to limit their comprehension of Indigenous African rhetorics within just the scope of cultural rhetorics, a more critical examination of processes and practices of producing rhetoric in Indigenous African context reveals how complex and interconnected these rhetorics are. What I mean by this is that in Indigenous African contexts, rhetorics employed by the people are interconnected to such an extent that it is quite difficult to clearly differentiate between them. For instance, it is quite difficult to differentiate environmental rhetoric from cultural rhetoric and so on.

In the Indigenous African settings, the everyday life experiences of people are heavily characterized with engagements of various meaning-making practices. These practices are engaged in by using different tools that range from the human body, including the hands and facial features, to tools designed or created from objects. More intentionally situated investigations into accounts of rhetorics and rhetorical practices engaged in by African communities in relation to their everyday life and cultural practices is critical in understanding how rhetoric is integral to Indigenous African ways of life.

Many of these rhetorical practices employed by Indigenous African communities are invisible, partly because the African ways of life and knowledge systems have suffered and still continue to suffer marginalization, colonization, and erasure. Gabriela Raquel Rios contends that people from marginalized communities engage in the production of rhetoric in ways that go beyond texts in the public domain (p.60). Drawing from Rios claim that marginalized folks "deploy rhetorics in response to ideologies of literacy that construct them as rhetorical" (p.60), Indigenous African folks engage in the production of rhetorics based on the conceptualization of rhetorics and literacy rooted within African thought. The ideologies of literacy and the conceptualization of rhetoric thrive on the defining characteristics of African rhetorics, as explained in a previous section.

Defining Characteristics of African Rhetoric

In his study, Lamptey (2023) puts together a list of seven characteristics of African rhetoric (see the table below) to help people for easy recognition of what counts as rhetoric in African contexts. He further states that despite there being many cultures in Africa, these characteristics run through all African cultures.

Characteristics of African Rhetoric	Explanation
Recognition of the supernatural	It gives reverence to supernatural forces, such as God, gods, deities, and other divinities.
Emphasis on the relevance and power of the past—including ancestors	It recognizes the past and ancestors as holders of valuable knowledge and treasures as well as having a recursive relationship with the present and future.
Emphasis on community	It acknowledges principles of collective good and communality as foundational to communication.
Emphasis on morality	It plays critical roles in building and sustaining community through good behavior, character, and attitude.
Emphasis on emotions and synthesis	It acknowledges its critical impacts of emotions on truth and integrity in communication, as well as comprehensiveness in promoting unity. (Smith, 1971, p.16)
Recognition of context	It acknowledges that rhetoric is not tied to any specific group of people, as their definition and application of rhetoric is contingent on their communication needs.
Emphasis on and integration of materiality and orality	It recognizes materiality and orality as critical components of communication and life.

Figure 2.1 A Table Showing Some Characteristics of African Rhetoric

These characteristics show why the conceptualization of African rhetoric is different from the "theoretical orthodoxy" in the Euro-Western worldviews, which tend to center "persuasion in rhetorical theory" (Blake, 2009, p.48). African rhetoric goes beyond persuasion to promote and sustain moral life grounded in African beliefs and moral principles of African communities. African rhetoric also underscores the recognition and celebration of principles of relationality—

relationships that humans form with other humans, things (such as animals, land, cosmic powers), and the environment.

Is (Indigenous) African Rhetoric Just Oral?

Many scholars, in writing about Indigenous African rhetoric and writing practices, mostly focus their argument on orality/orature. There has been little attention to how Indigenous Africans have and continue to engage in rhetoric and writing practices during pre-colonial and contemporary times. Until recently, many of the scholarly works on African rhetoric fall short in digging deeper into what defines African rhetoric as rhetoric. Major concerns raised about some of these scholarly works include, first, their over dependence on Western frameworks in examining the rhetoricity of any phenomena in African contexts. In this way, they un/intentionally tend to "westernize" African rhetorical practices, leading to neo-colonization and undervaluation of the significance of these practices in knowledge making. Secondly, much of this work has a narrow understanding of what counts and what does not as rhetoric and writing. *What is rhetoric* and *what is writing* are questions that remain controversial, as writing and rhetoric are still not clearly defined in the fields related to writing and rhetoric.

The inability of the field of rhetoric and writing studies and its related fields to clearly define what writing and rhetoric are should remind scholars that there are different ways of comprehending the concepts of writing and rhetoric. In effect, African rhetoric and writing is one of the ways. In shedding more light on African rhetoric, Lamptey (2023) states:

> "In African communities and for African rhetoric there is more than the verbal or the verbal/written binary. It is enacted in material, agricultural, gastronomic, artistic, spiritual and more ways of knowing and communicating culturally. … While African rhetoric is richly material, it is also verbal." (p.12)

Among the Indigenous people, objects and materials are used to make meanings, communicate meanings and ideas, and create cultural connections within and beyond a specific community. In African contexts, materiality of an object is not restricted to the aesthetics of the objects. Rather the value of an object's materiality transcends to include the deep-seated knowledge embodied by the object, the communicative enabling of the object, the relationality of the object to humanity, and among other things the rhetorical nature and functions of the object. As Mavis Boatemaa Beckson (2020) uses her article "Transforming Feminist Narratives and Participation of African Marginalized Women through Ceremonial Beads" to reclaim the beads as a "symbol of African femininity" and as "African feminist artifacts," she argues that the people are able to redefine and negotiate the crucial relationship between that exist between human bodies and objects when they critically examine the materiality of created objects like beads. Beckson emphasizes that beads hold social significance and have the ability to play an agential role in advocating feminist values in the Indigenous Ghanaian sociocultural context. She further states:

> Beads are an emblem of feminine identity, beauty, socio-cultural and family connection, and a relationship between mother and daughter. For instance, during a marriage ceremony, Akan mothers often pass down beads to their daughters as gifts that represent their bond.

Beyond this, African cultures employed drumming, dances, weaving, and songs, among others to communicate, preserve their histories, and enact their identity. What makes African writing and rhetorical or composing practices unique and intriguing is its ability to combine different modalities in achieving the purposes of writing and rhetoric/composing. Many people who do not fully comprehend rhetoric and writing within the African frames and thought erroneously

think or contend that African societies or cultures were/are not as expressive as some non-African societies/cultures.

The Nubian & Egyptian rhetorics

Many conversations surrounding African rhetorics in the field are heavily focused on histories of rhetorical traditions and practices of North African people and communities – specifically Nubian and the Egyptian rhetorics. Many African rhetoric and writing scholars would agree that this approach is foundational and critical to conversations, discussions, and/or discourses about the situatedness of African rhetorics in the field. Consequently, much of the works that receive the "much deserved attention," as claimed by Schoen are expansive enough to cover the rest of the African communities across the continent. This means that several rhetorical traditions of African communities have not received scholarly attention in the field of rhetorical and writing studies. This position is vertically important to any interrogation into the situatedness of African rhetorics in the field. Schoen acknowledges this position when she asserts, "many African traditions remain largely unstudied in the fields of rhetorical studies and cultural studies" (p.2). To support this assertion, she examines a contemporary African rhetorical tradition – Kagiso rhetoric – common in Botswana.

The basis for this argument is the acknowledgment from Schoen that "developing and applying broad-scale, timeless theories of African rhetorics throughout the continent might homogenize and simplify the diverse array of rhetorical traditions throughout Africa" (Schoen 3). Africa is a big continent with over fifty countries, and with diverse Indigenous communities. Therefore, any research into rhetorical traditions of Africans needs to be done in ways that do not pose any danger of eroding the diversity and the uniqueness of rhetorical traditions in Africa and how these traditions originated and continue to evolve (Hum & Lyon, p.161). I am not seeking to

use this research to engage in any kind of debate in relation to the histories of rhetoric. What I am attempting to do is draw our attention to the rich rhetorical traditions and practices that the continent of Africa and its people engage in, which are missing in mainstream conversations in the field. In other words, overreliance on Nubian and/or Nubian rhetorics in course materials related to African rhetorics has grave detrimental effects on other examples of African rhetorics which are missing out in our course materials.

Deborah Sweeney makes an interesting point about the predominant focus of interrogations into rhetoric during ancient Egypt. She notes that "the investigation of rhetoric in ancient Egypt has focused mainly on the elite and on the more formal aspects of eloquence expressed in literary and monumental texts" (p.99), to the neglect of the rhetoric practices in everyday context" (p.99). In the same light, over-focusing on Egyptian and/or Nubian rhetorics in relation to African rhetorics contributes to the neglect of many more rich and significant rhetorics from other African cultures and communities, leading to their marginalization.

The African cultural landscape is very vast and has not been fully understood, especially by many scholars whose research orientations and paradigmatic approaches are rooted within worldviews outside of the African worldviews. Maulana Karenga (1997) contends that to fully appreciate and understand African culture requires the need to dialog with it. He further states:

> This dialog with African culture requires that one ask at every critical juncture of research, writing, and discourse the crucial question of what Africa (i.e., African people and African culture) has to offer in efforts toward understanding human thought and practice, improving the human condition, and enhancing the human prospect. Moreover, to dialog with African culture is to constantly engage its texts, continental and diasporan, ancient and modern. This will include engaging its oral, written, and living-practice texts,

its paradigms, its worldview and values, and its understanding of itself and the world in an ongoing search for ever better answers to the fundamental, enduring, and current questions and challenges of our lives. (p.4-5)

From the above excerpt, Karenga draws our attention to two important positions that are fundamental to any attempts aimed at understanding the knowledge systems and meaning-making practices of African communities. These positions can be extended to the field of rhetoric and writing studies. The first position underscores an important question about the potential contributions of the worldviews of African societies and cultures in improving human knowledge, education, development, and human wellbeing. Drawing from Karenga, I contend that an adapted version of Karenga's question will be crucial to examining the significant contributions that African writing and rhetorical traditions and practices can make to the expansion of the field. The second position, as stated in the excerpt above, relates to the call to engage with African texts, of "continental and diasporan and ancient and modern" (p.5). The exigence of this call is highlighted by the experiences of many students in the field, who find it difficult to find their identity in the assigned readings in writing and rhetoric classrooms.

Building on Karenga's perspective, my study poses critical questions about the contributions of African rhetorics—encompassing writing, rhetorical traditions, and communicative strategies—to the field of rhetoric and writing studies. Specifically, I explore how African knowledge systems, thought, and practices can deepen our understanding of meaning-making, while also expanding the "disciplinary landscape" (Royster) of the field. In doing so, I align with Karenga's call to improve the human condition and enhance the human prospect through culturally rooted, transformative knowledge practices (p.4-5).

As a rhetoric and writing scholar, I find Karenga's call compelling. The ways of life in African cultures and communities are very different from how communities and cultures in other parts of the world understand the world around them. What I find foundationally crucial in Karenga's call is his push for the most ethically effective and appropriate approaches that researchers need to adopt in their research studies in relation to Africa. It is important for African researchers to establish and make it visible in unambiguous terms why methodological frameworks rooted within Western thought/s do not always work in African contexts. In doing this, it is required of African scholars to use existing methodologies grounded in African thought or design new ones. This question is what I seek to interrogate further and respond to in my study.

Megan Schoen (2018) claims, in her article, that "ancient and modern African rhetorics have received some much-deserved critical attention" (p.2). In support of this claim, she makes reference to the scholarly works of scholars such as Michael V. Fox, Deborah Sweeney, Cecil Black, and Carol S Lipson. Concerning contemporary African rhetorics, Schoen makes reference to the scholarly work of scholars such as Philippe-Joseph Salazar, Katherine Elizabeth Mack, and Thomas Moriarty. While I find it quite difficult to accept the claim that the attention received so far by African rhetorics in the field is "much-deserved" (Shoen, 2018, p.2), it is crucial to reveal some complications surrounding this claim. Shoen's first claim demonstrates the overreliance on the histories of the rhetorical traditions and practices of North African people and communities —specifically the Nubian and Egyptian rhetorics. Though I find this problematic, I believe this approach is a necessity or foundation to responding to or addressing the exclusionary approach and practices in teaching and researching the histories of rhetoric in the field. As James Berlin contends, there is the need for conversations about the histories of

rhetoric to consider locating differences while "situating rhetorics within their unique economic, social, political, and cultural conditions" (p.116), epistemologies, and philosophies.

Why Western Methodological Frameworks Do Not Always Work in African Contexts

African Worldview is Different

In the area of research, frameworks connect theoretical knowledge and structural approaches to inform practices in a particular study or project. Frameworks can be broken down into theoretical, methodological, philosophical, conceptual, and methodological dimensions. In terms of methodological frameworks, it involves methodologies that are employed in any research. Methodology is a system of methods and approaches for a particular study or research activity. Since methodologies provide a wider scope for methods, including reasons for choosing certain methods, how the methods are implemented, and how the results are shared, it is noteworthy that the purpose and/or the objectives for conducting any specific study heavily influence the choice of methodology. It can also be inferred that theories have influence on the development of methodologies, hence the influence of worldviews on methodologies. Therefore, Western methodologies are founded within Euro-centric worldviews. The differences in worldviews that influence the development of methodologies demonstrate that the application of a methodology grounded within Western worldviews to the examination of any phenomena outside the Western world will be problematic. It is also noteworthy to state that a phenomenon anywhere is rooted within a particular worldview.

Therefore, any attempts to understand a specific phenomenon from a different worldview outside of that phenomenon's specificity will be fraught with problems such as false assumptions, misrepresentations, misleading knowledge among others. For instance, African worldviews are different from Western worldviews. So, employing a Western methodology to

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investigate a phenomenon in African contexts will be problematic, as the Western methodology will fall short of digging deeper into the ontological, epistemological, and philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenon. In the next section, I explain further why Western methodologies do not always work in African contexts.

Though all African cultures are not the same in several ways, there are certain important values and beliefs that characteristically make African worldviews unique and different from beyond the African continent. Most of these values are founded in shared philosophical groundings among many Indigenous African knowledge systems. While this section explains further why Western methodologies do not always work in examining phenomena in African contexts based on ontological, epistemological, praxis, and axiological differences or perspectives, it also highlights the foundations of the characteristics of rhetoric in African contexts, as explained above.

Difference in Ways of Life (Ontological Difference)

Ontological perspectives about life and living experiences in African communities are profoundly relational. Life, within any African culture, is understood as connected as interconnected across humans, spiritual elements, ancestors, and natural environments (comprising land, animals, and non-living things). For Africans, how people relate to one another (including ancestors and cosmic beings), things (including materials), and the environment (including land) is critical in life. Thus, relationality is a core concept in African ways of life. This understanding underscores why African rhetoricians contend that recognition of the supernatural and integration of materiality and orality are characteristic of rhetoric.

Examples of Relationships:

- **Human beings:** African cultures emphasize the need for building relationships among human beings. These relationships emerge from and are grounded in community and communality. Community building and communal living, and these values are ingrained on the psyche as well as the moral and behavioral fabric of the majority of African communities.

- **Ancestors:** African communities acknowledge and celebrate the importance of heritage and the significant roles played by ancestors in shaping people's identity, values, faith, and beliefs.

- **Spiritual elements**: In many Indigenous African communities, spiritual relationality is an important component of their cultures. This relationship is believed to exist among human beings, as humans are considered as spiritual beings (Gyekye 1996). Some communities build spiritual relationships between humans and deities as well as humans and nature. These relationships heavily influence and are influenced by how they understand the world around them through active interactions.

- **Natural environments:** From Indigenous African perspectives, human beings form useful and purposeful relationships with the natural environment. These relationships are understood to be the basis of drawing originality, authenticity, justice, and truth in connection to natural phenomena within the African worldviews. In terms of justice, many Indigenous African communities emphasize relationships between human beings and nature are connected to nature being a fair judge and executor of punishment meant for wrongdoing—which later form the basis for the phrase "natural justice."

Reality in the eyes of people from many African communities is shaped by the interdependence between human beings, ancestors, nature, and the spiritual world. Therefore, while African thought emphasizes interbeing and sacredness of all life, Western thought emphasizes a more fragmented and hierarchical reality and often sees the world as a separately constructed to be analyzed or extracted.

Difference in ways of knowing (epistemological difference)

Epistemologies from African contexts prioritize embodied, oral, and spiritual forms of knowledge transmission (Gyekye, 1996; Blake, 2009). In these contexts, knowledge is not just learned or known, it is lived, remembered, felt, and performed. Knowledge making, of which rhetoric is part, in African contexts is rooted within all the areas of everyday life. For many people in African communities, the process of knowledge is complex systemically emphasizing that small actions and connections in everyday life are invaluable in any attempts to understand the world in which we all live. Embodied knowledge making, in African communities, extends to storytelling, proverbs, communal memory, folk songs, and materiality of the things used in daily life activities. African epistemologies recognize that human experiences with spiritual realms and non-living things also serve as resources in knowledge making (Lamptey, 2023). For instance, dreaming, intuition, and ancestral guidance are legitimate and respected sources of knowledge—this emphasizes recognition of the supernatural as a characteristic of rhetoric in African contexts. The quest of knowledge influences all aspects of society, leading to setting up culturally and socially constructed ways of life in African communities.

Indigenous Africans from most of the African cultures acknowledge spiritual beings as sources of knowledge. The ultimate divine source of wisdom or knowledge and even moral foundations are believed to be handed down to human beings from the supreme God, deities, and

other lesser gods. Therefore, as African ways of knowing prioritize experiential, collective, and

spiritual knowing, Western epistemologies more often privilege objectivity and individual

discovery. The differences in epistemological groundings reveals the incompatibility of Western

methodologies to be employed in examining or understanding any phenomena in African

contexts.

Praxis Difference

Orality, materiality, and multimodality are critical to knowledge making practices among

Africans. In African communities, transmission of knowledge is done through practices such as

storytelling, rhetorical Artwork–including sculpture, weaving, painting, clothing etc, music and

dance, and textile (Lamptey, 2023; Falola, 2022). Popular knowledge systems include the Akan

people's idiographic (Gyekye, 1996), the Egyptian Maat (Obenga, 1989; Crawford, 2004), and

the Egyptian hieroglyphs (Campbell, 2006). Though the Adinkra is defined by some scholars as

a set of symbols, it has been transformed into a more concrete form of communicative practices

through idiographic writings (Arthur, 2001). Many African communities acknowledge and

celebrate knowledge making as a communal and community practice. Because knowledge

borders on communal living and community, many African cultures prioritize the collective

participation of people in knowledge production. In essence, knowledge is produced from the

lived experiences of all people. This approach to knowledge emphasizes collaboration and

collective participation—hence, learning is participatory and intergenerational. This

understanding foregrounds emphasis on community as one the characteristics of African rhetoric.

The practices of knowledge making in African contexts recognize that knowledge is

locally constructed, as it is rooted within the everyday life experiences of people. Though

ancestors and elderly people are considered in most African societies as makers of knowledge,

everyone has the opportunity to participate in knowledge making practices. Knowledge is grounded in culture, just as culture is also grounded in knowledge, among most of the African communities. That is, cultural beliefs and values heavily impact what and how knowledge is produced.

In Western contexts, knowledge making practices happen in institutionalized formal education, written discourses, where learning is often decontextualized from everyday life—leading to the institutionalization and ownership of knowledge. However, African knowledge is co-created and continually renewed, and this practice happens outside of formal institutions.

Difference in Values—Cultural, Religious, and Societal

Another way to contextualize the difference between African ways of life and Western worldviews is through values and a set of beliefs that are foundational to their comprehension of the world. In the Western world, individualism and autonomy are emphasized, especially in Western traditions heavily influenced by liberalism and utilitarianism. Unlike the Western world, African value systems prioritize communal harmony (as articulated in the Ubuntu philosophy), reciprocity, respect for elders and ancestors, and the sacredness of life. African values are crucial in defining ethics and morality as well as what counts and what does not count as ethics and moral good. The moral good derived from the African value system sustains societal, cultural, communal, environmental balance and interdependence. This demonstrates why African rhetoric is characterized as emphasizing morality and recognition of context.

Indigenous African Thought

African thought conceptualizes knowledge, culture, education, family, and life through a distinct relational and communal lens, differing significantly from Euro-Western frameworks. In many African communities, collectivism is foundational, exemplified by philosophies like *ubuntu*,

which centers humanity, interdependence, and the common good. Life is viewed as inherently relational—everything that has life is "interconnected and interdependent" (Tedla, 1995, p.41). This worldview underpins recognition and reverence for human and non-human relationships, where communication and literacy practices are vital. In these contexts, rhetorical, literacy, and communicative practices—such as writing, composing, and designing—are cultural, embodied, and deeply embedded in everyday life.

According to Karenga (1997), African thought conceptualizes culture as "a unique and instructive way of being human in the world and a fundamental framework for self-understanding and self-assertion [as a communal entity, a relational being, and a …] in it" (p.4). This framing underscores culture not merely as tradition but as a living epistemology that shapes how individuals and communities understand themselves and engage with the world. African thought, through its emphasis on relationality and communality, poses critical questions that challenge researchers to pursue "answers to the fundamental and enduring concerns of humankind" (Karenga, 1997, p.4). In this context, Indigenous research plays a vital role in articulating and deepening our understanding of African knowledge systems and lifeways. A decolonial approach—rooted in these systems—offers African peoples and diasporic communities a pathway to reclaim and restore culturally grounded worldviews, practices, and values. Embracing such an approach positions African epistemologies not at the periphery but at the center of research and educational discourse globally.

In advancing the argument for the legitimacy of African thought, Tedla challenges critics by saying:

African thought has a great deal to offer not only to Africa but to the whole world. For those who refuse to accept that there is such a thing as African thought or philosophy

without taking the time and effort to examine and understand it, what is the basis of their refusal? If it is on the ground that it does not fit Western philosophical ideas, lines of inquiry, categories and methodology, when and how will African thought be known on its own terms? If the basis of the refusal is on some other ground, what is the cultural basis or context of this other ground? (p.5)

Drawing from Tedla (1995), my contention is that it is problematic to employ any framework rooted within a vastly different worldview to examine any phenomena grounded in another worldview. In essence, to better understand any phenomena in African contexts requires the use of frameworks rooted within African worldviews or thought.

To sum up this chapter, it is clear that there are serious fundamental differences between the African world and the Western world, as how people from these worlds understand the world around them are different. I have explained the epistemological, ontological, praxis, and axiological differences that characterize both worlds. It is also evidently clear in this chapter that the conceptualization of rhetoric and writing in African contexts is different from that of the Western world. As I explained why it is problematic and inappropriate to use a methodology rooted within Western philosophy, I use the next chapter to offer a more appropriate methodology rooted within decoloniality. This will shape the lens of my investigation into the rhetorical dexterity of kente and kente weaving as an African practice.

Need for Africentric Research Frameworks

From the discussion in the above sections, it is important to understand that every culture approaches their identity, practices, and knowledge differently and in ways that are grounded in their cultural traditions and worldviews, informed by their epistemological and ontological perspectives and experiential knowledge of the world. In essence, the conceptualization and

comprehension of writing and rhetoric by scholars and rhetoricians in the Western world is not

universal to other worlds, such as the African world. Putting this understanding at the back of our

minds as scholars and students of the field will help us to fully recognize, acknowledge, and

respect the writing and rhetorical traditions and practices of Africans and Indigenous

communities at large. To buttress this point, Kermit Campbell (2006) claims that because "the

roots of Africa's rhetorical tradition are variegated and deep" (p.258), they cannot be contained

in a disciplinary cage rooted within Euro-Western worldviews, as "they defy simple

categorization and judgment" (p.5). Therefore, insisting on using Euro-Western frameworks or

restricting the examination of any phenomena in African contexts is highly problematic and will

smack of a form of neo-colonialism. Identifying the dangers of using Western frameworks to

examine non-Western ways of life, Hum and Lyon call upon scholars, especially scholars with

non-Western backgrounds, to not engage in a research approach which they identify as

coloniality (p.154).

In bringing ethical dimensions to doing research in cultures and with peoples historically

marginalized or colonized, such as Africans and their cultures, Robert Shuter explains that it is

ethical for such studies to be grounded within the culture that birth and nurture the rhetorical

traditions (p.11). Valuing African epistemologies requires more than inclusion or diversity; it

demands a rethinking of what counts as knowledge—by extension what counts as rhetoric, who

produces it, and how it is transmitted. It also invites scholars and educators to design holistic,

embodied, and spiritually grounded pedagogies that reflect plural epistemic worlds.

Chapter Conclusion

To sum up, African and Western knowledge systems represent fundamentally different

worldviews. While the Western tradition is marked by individualism, rationalism, and linearity,

African traditions emphasize relationality, spirituality, and communal harmony. Recognizing these differences is essential for decolonizing research as well as honoring the full richness of human knowledge and rhetorical practices. Ultimately, the path forward lies not in the replacement of one system by another, but in creating space for the cultivation of plural, just, and interconnected epistemologies and practices that restore balance and dignity to all forms of life.

CHAPTER 3: LAYING THE WARP: BUILDING SANKOFA METHODOLOGY

In studying a phenomenon and/or experience rooted within decoloniality and in the context of the Indigenous African world, it is crucial to use a framework that acknowledges and emphasizes the value and significance of African worldviews. Positioning myself in an Indigenous epistemology and realizing the lack of adequate relevant Indigenous methodological frameworks to examine African Indigenous practices, I decided to build my own methodology that could be employed by decolonial and African researchers and teacher-scholars. I understand that Euro-Western frameworks fall short of interrogating phenomena in African and Indigenous contexts (Chambers, 1997; Chilisa, 2005; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Nitza, Chilisa, & Makwinja-Morara, 2010).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how to employ sankofa principles to design a research methodology grounded in decoloniality. *Sankofa*, an element of the *Adinkra* system of the Akan people in Ghana, reminds us of who we are, what we had, what we have now, what we should have, and our past/histories in relation to our belonging, practices, values, knowledges among others. Sankofa concept is rooted within African Indigenous worldviews. I must add that a major goal for this dissertation is to design a decolonial methodology, which I name *sankofa methodology*, to analyze *kente* weaving rhetoric, an Indigenous West African rhetorical practice. This methodology is interdisciplinary in approach, as it could be employed by researchers, practitioners, and teacher-scholars from diverse fields in the sciences and humanities. In this chapter, I use the first few sections to provide the foundations for sankofa methodology and discuss its root in decoloniality and Indigenous research. In the sections that follow, I show what the sankofa methodology looks like, how it can be used in research, and how I use it in this study.

Decolonizing Research

Many communities, especially indigenous communities, had and still have a lot of their ways of knowing, being, and doing kept in the margin. Many scholars across the globe acknowledge the debilitating and harmful effects of Euro-Western imperialism and colonialism on Indigenous knowledges, practices, identities, and realities of people whose worldviews are different from those of the Western world. Globally all the communities or groups of people who have experienced colonialism or some forms of Western oppression have had some element of their understanding of the world and meaning-making practices marginalized, erased, or misrepresented. Indigenous peoples and many other communities of people of color have left behind some practices that are relevant and invaluable to the contemporary world – the present and the future. Because of the significant value of these practices, there is a greater need for them to be reclaimed.

It is becoming clear that some erased, marginalized, and missing meaning-making practices are invaluable to contemporary worldviews and ways of life. The idea of decolonizing research (Gaudry, 2011; Tedla, 1995; Smith, 2021) is grounded within the decolonial agenda that calls upon researchers and teacher-scholars to challenge the dominance of Euro-Western approaches and practices that undermine the knowledges and practices of Indigenous peoples. The call to adopt decolonial approaches extends to communities or groups of people whose ways of life and knowledge systems do not align with Euro-Western views. Decolonial practices embrace and engage any frameworks that seek to carry out the decolonial agenda even beyond research. Decolonial approaches become exigent in intercultural or transcultural contexts. The exigence of adopting decolonial approaches is connected to reasons such as the ever-increasing pace of change in knowledge making and educational practices across the globe.

Godwin Agboka (2014), recognizing the needs for decolonial approaches in research, calls upon scholars to develop "a coherent body of new methodologies" (p.298) that can make space for research methods grounded in the ontologies, epistemologies, and philosophies of Indigenous and other marginalized communities. Embracing decolonial approaches leads to enacting social justice, empowerment, and transformative change. Employing decolonial approaches in research is crucial for several reasons. One reason is that decolonial approaches provide appropriate frameworks for examining phenomena in Indigenous contexts. This is because these approaches are built taking into consideration the worldviews of Indigenous peoples. Another reason is that it emphasizes researching with and for Indigenous communities and results in the production of knowledge that is useful and meaningful to the communities (Smith, 2021; Marovah & Mutanga, 2024). While considering the methodological approach for my project, I realize the lack of any appropriate decolonial methodology to use. This inadequacy is partly as a result of gatekeeping practices that discourage many decolonial scholars from designing frameworks and methodologies rooted within decoloniality and Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being. Finding myself in this situation makes it necessary for me to design a new methodology that is decolonial and can help me better interrogate knowledges and rhetorical practices in an African Indigenous context.

Survivance as Decolonial Lens

While many African rhetoricians and scholars tend to situate their work within classical (Greco-Roman) frames, I use survivance as a decolonial lens through which I see and understand the Indigenous African rhetorical practice I analyze in this project. Taking cues from scholars such as Vizenor (2008), Driskill (2016), and Tedla (1995), I explain survivance as purposeful social and political reactions to practices and ideologies that cause harm to the cultural knowledge and

memory of Indigenous peoples through direct and/or indirect systemic attacks on their rhetorical and knowledge-making practices. The decolonial lens of survivance helps bring out minoritized, marginalized, and/or colonized Indigenous rhetorics from the margin to the center of disciplinary discourses and conversations within and beyond academia. Decoloniality highlights, demonstrates, and emphasizes the significant contributions that Indigenous rhetorics, in this case Indigenous African rhetorics, can make to the field of rhetoric and writing studies. For instance, how we define rhetoric to be pluriversal; how we do rhetoric; how we teach rhetoric to be culturally inclusive/responsive.

I am motivated by scholars such as Gabriela Rios (2015); Angela Haas (2007; 2015); Damian Baca (2008); Qwo-Li Driskill (2015; 2016); Kristin Arola (2012; 2018) who use their scholarship to bring attention to rhetorics and rhetorical practices associated with their Indigenous communities. In my dissertation, my goal is to respond to the call to center Indigenous rhetorical practices of people, communities, and cultures with which I am associated in conversations within the field. Many of these rhetorical practices have been relegated to the background, hence having received little or no attention in mainstream academic conversations. Historically, Africans and their ways of knowing, being, and doing have been subjected to oppression and neo/colonialism. As a result, there have been certain false identities created through colonial and imperial frames about who Africans are, what knowledge systems they have, and how they can be "saved."

Considering the criticism that many African rhetoric scholars tend to depend heavily on Euro-Western frameworks in their work, survivance presents itself to me as an appropriate lens for reclaiming Indigenous African rhetorics through Sankofa methodology (which I explain further in the subsequent sections). This decolonial lens empowers me to design a critical

interdisciplinary methodology to examine the rhetoricity of kente weaving among the Ewe people of Ghana in West Africa. The Ewe people are a culturally and linguistically homogeneous group of tribes that are located in the following countries: Ghana, Togo, Benin, and some part of Nigeria. About my Indigenous and cultural identity as an African, I was born and raised in an Indigenous cultural community of the Ewe people of Ghana, where I received Indigenous education and participated in their rhetorical and meaning-making practices.

Through the lens of survivance, I use my project to empower African rhetoric and writing scholars and students by validating their (including mine) cultural and rhetorical practices and the contributions of these practices to the field. Survivance empowers me and other scholars to project and present more accurate representations of our respective cultures and Indigenous rhetorical traditions and practices, which have been under-researched and missing in academic discourses. Another reason for choosing survivance relates to 1) my positionality as a scholar of multiple marginalized identities and 2) issues of minoritizing faced by the Ewe people and their culture, especially in Ghana. Therefore, focusing on Indigenous rhetorics of the Ewe people of Ghana engages survivance on both local and global fronts.

Why Indigenous Research Frameworks Matter

In Western academic and research communities, there have been contentious claims about Indigenous research practices, especially methods and methodologies. Many Western academics and scholars claim that Indigenous research frameworks are not legitimate data gathering tools in research (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). A big misconception fueling this notion held by many of these scholars and academics is the fact that Western frameworks are fit enough for researching any phenomena, even those rooted within Indigenous cultures and worldviews.

Many conflicts arise from the use of Western-based research methodologies in Indigenous contexts. While some Western scholars or Western-trained scholars (Tedla, 1995) attempt to devalue the need for Indigenous research methodologies, they seem to be oblivious of certain important facts about the inadequacies related to the application of Western theories and methodologies to Indigenous ways of life and experiences. According to Chilisa (2011), research methodologies rooted within the knowledge systems of Euro-Western thoughts often lead to the exclusion of "the knowledge system of formerly colonized, historically marginalized and oppressed groups" in academic contexts (p.1-2). Walter Mignolo (2005) also raises serious concerns about the practice of employing Euro-Western frameworks in studying phenomena in non-Western contexts. He posits in his paper, "Prophets facing sidewise: The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference" that employing Western knowledge in an attempt to comprehend non-Western worlds amounts to colonization. This position acknowledges the fact that Indigenous worlds and the Western worlds are built on different epistemologies, philosophies, and ontologies.

For ethical considerations, it is problematic to use Euro-Western frameworks, which are evidently narrowed and skewed toward Eurocentrism, to examine rhetorical traditions and writing/composing practices of peoples whose worldviews differ. This among other reasons encourages many scholars of African rhetorics to design terminologies and theories that are rooted within the African ways of life (Shoen, 2018; Blake, 2009; Collins, 2001), though there is more work to be done, especially in the area of designing research methodologies. For most Indigenous people, there is a serious underutilization of their knowledges, especially in relation to how the past relates to the present in order to build a better future. Research reveals that dominant Western knowledge —Western thought— evidentially falls short of comprehending

the world around us globally. This leads to an increasing realization that epistemologies, theories, and research methodologies grounded within Euro-Western worldviews have significant limitations in capturing and addressing the experiences of the colonized and marginalized othered people (Chambers, 1997; Chilisa, 2005; Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010; Nitza, Chilisa, & Makwinja-Morara, 2010).

Even though some Western research frameworks might work well for examining some Indigenous phenomena or experiences, there is the need for academics and scholars to understand that experiences and/or phenomena grounded in Indigenous ways of life should not be seen as experiences and/or phenomena devoid of inherent cultural and embodied identities of the Indigenous people. No matter how insignificant these experiences and/or phenomena might be to someone outside the Indigenous cultural and meaning-making circles, the Indigenous people have their own ways of seeing, understanding, and celebrating the significance of these experiences. In effect, the Indigenous African communities appreciate even the smallest actions, experiences, or phenomena because they understand how these small things both complicate and simplify the complexity of human knowledge and knowledge-making practices that feed the future to grow through interactions and relationship building.

Many potential research participants from marginalized communities, communities of color, or formerly colonized communities have become aware of the harm that Euro-Western research traditions have caused to them—to their cultures and their ways of life (Tedla, 1995). As a result, they are becoming increasingly skeptical and refusing to participate in research projects. Many of these research projects grounded within Euro-Western frameworks potentially further contribute to the marginalization and oppression of the communities (Chilisa, 2009). Thus, it is clear that there is the need for researchers to design and adopt research frameworks,

approaches, and traditions grounded in the cultures, philosophies, epistemologies, histories, and politics of the Indigenous communities. This point reminds me of an Ewe sage that goes "*Nunya, adidoe. Asi me tu ne o*." —which loosely translates as "knowledge is like a baobab tree. One arm cannot fully encircle it." This means that it is gravely erroneous to assume or believe that Euro-Western knowledge system and worldview is *the way* of understanding the world around us.

Shawn Wilson (2008), an Indigenous research scholar (specifically Opaskwayak Cree from northern Manitoba, Canada), argues that Indigenous research is not about "validity or reliability" but about relational accountability —that is, accounting for the relationship humans have with ideas, concepts, environment, and cosmos, as the systems of knowledge of Indigenous people are grounded on relationship building (p.117). While not all Indigenous people are the same by any means, there are many similarities across groups insofar as Indigenous peoples almost always define themselves in relation to belonging to a specific land base. The call for relational accountability, then, resonates with the African philosophy of Ubuntu. In celebrating the value of Ubuntu philosophy, Dani W. Nabudere (2005) explains:

> In fact Ubuntu philosophy, in its different settings, is at the base of the African philosophy of life and belief systems in which the peoples' daily-lived experiences are reflected. In their struggles to survive and exist as a human society on this planet, Africans have had the longest experience since the Homo sapiens had his first home on this continent. The philosophy is used on a daily basis to settle disputes and conflicts at different levels on the continent and is therefore central to the idea of reconciliation. This testifies to the dynamism and vibrancy of this philosophy in whatever African linguistic expression it may be expressed. (p.1)

In addition to emphasizing relationality as integral to Indigenous research, it is quite clear in the above quote that Indigenous African frameworks serve as the most appropriate frames to examine Indigenous African ways of life, especially knowledge making practices. From Indigenous African contexts, Tedla (1995) emphasizes:

> It is this African understanding of everything being bonded and belonging to the community of life that enables Africans to transcend dichotomies and polarities. For example, they perceive no dichotomy between the visible and invisible worlds. The two worlds are continually communing and are connected by the cycles of birth and death. While birth represents entrance from the invisible to the visible world, death is the entrance from the visible to the invisible world. In between the two points of the cycle of life, the various forms of life are communing with each other (p. 26).

Therefore, drawing on Wilson (2008), Chilisa (2012), and Tedla (1995), I understand relational accountability as an invitation to everyone —not only the Indigenous peoples— to pause, think, reclaim, rebuild, and reconnect while moving forward as one people with a common destiny. This invitation underscores the significant role that the past plays in understanding the present in order to plan a better future. In the Indigenous contexts, survivance helps reinforce the relationality in knowledge production.

Moving Toward *Sankofa* as an Indigenous Research Methodology

As Audre Lorde argues, the master's tool is not an effective tool for dismantling and decolonizing the colonizing structures and systems built by the master (Lorde, 1984). In this light, it is vital for scholars like me who subscribe to the decolonial agenda to intentionally design new tools and to reconstruct existing tools and methodologies rooted in Indigenous worldviews. These tools and methodologies need to be able to reclaim, recover, and/or revitalize

Indigenous knowledge systems, traditions, and meaning-making practices that have been marginalized, colonized, and erased in some cases.

Engaging in any scholarly work aimed at examining the situatedness of Indigenous African rhetorical traditions and practices in the field and investigating the significant contributions to the field requires the application of a research methodology that can ground the need to reclaim rhetorical and writing traditions of peoples who have been marginalized through colonial and imperial systems. For the purposes of reclaiming the Indigenous rhetorical practices associated with the Ewe people of Ghana, I design and implement a methodology by drawing on the sankofa wisdom and knowledge system. I want to state that designing this methodology — sankofa methodology— is a major goal for this dissertation. Designing this methodology is a demonstration of subversive enactment that recognizes knowledges produced by marginalized people and "communities upon which knowledge is imposed, denied, not even when they are subverting power and risking their lives" (Martinez-Cruz & Vasquez, qtd in Smith, 2012, p. xiv). Moreover, designing sankofa methodology is a critical stance that encourages the creation of space for examining and exploring diverse ways of knowing, being, understanding, and doing which broadens the scope of what academia rooted within Eurocentrism produces.

The Sankofa Concept

Sankofa is an Indigenous concept from rhetorical and cultural practices associated with the Akan people who are found in Ghana and the Eastern part of La Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa. Just like many of the African ethnic groups in Ghana, the Akan people are a culturally and linguistically homogeneous group of tribes that have rich culture and meaning-making practices. The tribes that form the Akan ethnic group include Asantes, Fantes, Akuapim, Akuamu, and Akyem.

Figure 3.1 The Bird Representing Sankofa Wisdom (Source: Etsy)

Sankofa, as shown in Figure 3.1, is an element of the Adinkra knowledge and communicative systems embedded in the ontologies, epistemologies, and philosophies of the Akan people. In the Twi language of the Akan people, *san* means to return; *ko* means to go; and *fa* means to take/pick it. The Akan people use a folktale to explain what *sankofa* is, and there are many versions of the sankofa folktale. K. Opoku-Agyemang (2017) explains *sankofa* in one of the versions of the folktale:

> The story concerns the Sankofa Bird, who leaves her village without informing anyone (an action that is considered disrespectful of norms) and promptly gets lost in a nearby forest. While wandering through the forest, she meets another bird who insults her. This confrontation births self-doubt in her. She then manages to find her way back to her village where her community helps rebuild her self-confidence after which she returns to the forest again, this time informing the elders of the village. She meets this other bird

again, but this time overcomes its antagonism due to a renewed sense of self-worth–

ostensibly gained from embracing the communal spirit of her village. Her first attempt to

leave her village is seen as disregarding communal custom and tradition, and after her

exploits in the forest are made public, a statue is carved with her neck turned backward so

as to warn others of the dangers of forgetting or abandoning their roots (both in terms of

disregarding custom as well as leaving home surreptitiously). (p. 59)

While there are various versions of the story behind *sankofa* and various depictions of the

sankofa bird, the conceptual meaning remains the same – *Going back to the past to take it* (a

valuable thing)*. This concept is often depicted in the story as a bird picking up an egg from

behind while moving forward, and I am interpreting the egg as turning to the past to pick up the

valuable things left behind (Kwarteng, 2018; Talpade & Talpade, 2016). For A.K. Quarcoo

(1972):

Sankofa relates to an ability to learn from or build on the past. Pick up the gems of the

past. [It is a] constant reminder that the past is not all shameful and that the future may

profitably be built on aspects of the past. Indeed, there must be movement with the times

but as the forward march proceeds, the gems must be picked from behind and carried

forward on the march. (p.17)

For the purposes of my project, I use this *sankofa* version because I understand the egg has a

rhetorical significance that can be applied to my research project in terms of its goal of

reclaiming or recovering the rhetoricity of an Indigenous African meaning-making practice. The

Akan people, being mindful of the importance of doing reclamation work, use the concept of

sankofa to invoke a sense of revisitation to the past to pick up valuable things (including lessons,

knowledge, meaning-making practices, etc.) to engage productively with the present for a better

future. As people in general, we all have lived experiences and his/herstories that demand the use of *sankofa* concept to unravel our situatedness, positionalities, and relationships in knowledge production.

Sankofa is one of the elements in the adinkra system among the Akan people. Though some people consider the adinkra as a system of symbols (Lamptey, 2023), paying more rhetorical attention to the system will reveal that the functionality of the adinkra system transcends that of symbols. The elements in the adinkra system have hidden meanings that require technical knowledge or education for an ordinary person to comprehend at the surface level.

The *sankofa* concept reminds us of the fact that there are significant inspirational lessons and treasures that the present and future generations can bank on leaning toward the past. This is relevant and true with education and knowledge making practices, hence challenging researchers to undertake research with the goal of reclaiming and recovering relevant knowledges and practices. As Lamptey (2023) contends, *sankofa* concept does not argue for "a [complete] return to Indigenous ways of the past" (p.35), my contention is that there are important Indigenous practices, including knowledge making processes and practices that can broaden the scope and depth of education and meaning making across all fields. Toyin Falola (2022) argues that the comprehension of the past is foundational to our knowledge and understanding of the present. He further states "[t]he anticipation of an uncertain future, and the importance of having this ability to the survival of humans and their humanity, created and necessitated the need to understand the past" (p.70).

The rhetorical functionality of *sankofa* as an Indigenous practice is part of what my work seeks to tease out in designing a research methodology. As researchers, teacher-scholars,

educators, and practitioners, *sankofa* reminds us that we cannot make a meaningful change in the present toward the future without embracing the significant role that the past also plays. In many situations in life, we employ a sankofa methodological approach iteratively and un/intentionally. Iteratively we move our bodies, minds, and selves whether imaginary or real within the temporality of past, present, and future.

Many groups of people, especially minority groups, have seen some valuable practices and knowledge displaced and decentered through marginalization, colonialism, and Euro-Western imperialism. For instance, Indigenous African people have been using drumming and dancing to not only express their identity but also educate themselves and others from generation to generation. However, the African drum-dance rhetoric has been reduced to primitive entertainment by master narratives. Many contemporary scholars across different disciplines and fields are now realizing the importance of making space for invaluable knowledges, practices, and frameworks of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities. Scholars, having realized the significant contributions that many of the marginalized, erased, or colonized knowledge, practices, and processes can make to research, pedagogy, business, and health, have begun to use their research or scholarly work to reclaim these important practices and knowledges. For instance, scholars such as Lamptey, Chilisa, Haas, Baca, and Driskill have engaged in research that sought to reclaim invaluable Indigenous knowledges and practices of their Indigenous communities. Engaging in such important research work recognizes and acknowledges the importance of and the need for sankofa methodology. My work, especially in this chapter, seeks to not only give a name for this Indigenous framework but also position it as a legitimate research methodology to do groundbreaking research in academia.

Building *Sankofa* as a Methodological Framework

Sankofa as a concept has been used in several ways in scholarship. I categorize the ways *sankofa* has been used into epistemic orientations, philosophical orientations, and pedagogical orientations. Theorizing the past, it is like a rose plant. That is, it has thorns and beautiful flowers—the thorns signify pains and bad memories, while the beauty signifies good memories. So, no matter the pleasures or pains that the past holds (Jones and Leitner, 2015), sankofa theory holds the claim that the past is crucial to building meaningful relationships with the present and the future. The past is very critical to have a better understanding of the present, leading to designing and planning a meaningful and productive future. With the understanding that the search of meaning and knowledge in every life endeavor is a lifelong process, *sankofa* is used for epistemic orientations to "reify the past to theorize the future" (Osei, 2020, p. 382). For the purposes of philosophical orientation, *sankofa* reminds us that we cannot just discard the past on any basis. Despite the painful memories that it might carry, there are some treasures that it stores for use in the present to design a better future. Philosophically, the past can be used through *sankofa*, by remembering prior experiences and practices, to "heal the present and change the future" (Slater, 2019).

Sankofa methodology as a framework is foregrounded by four critical themes which are represented by the egg, the neck, and the body, as shown in the figure 3.2 below.
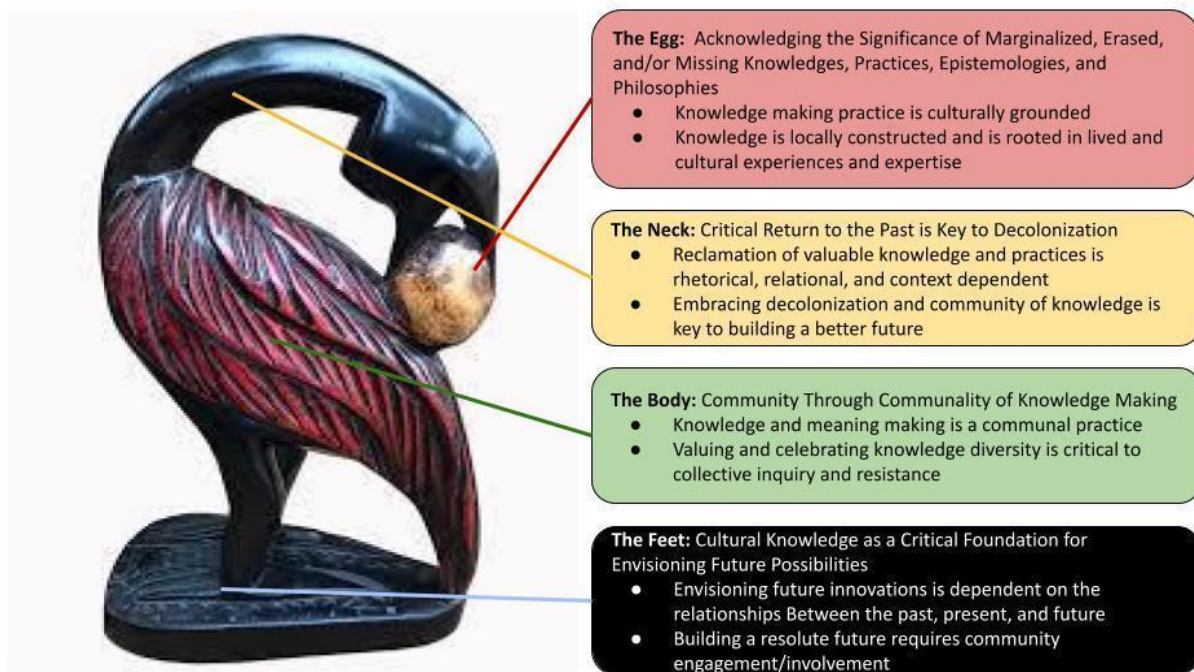
The Sankofa Framework

The Egg: Acknowledging the Significance of Marginalized, Erased, and/or Missing Knowledges, Practices, Epistemologies, and Philosophies
- Knowledge making practice is culturally grounded
- Knowledge is locally constructed and is rooted in lived and cultural experiences and expertise

The Neck: Critical Return to the Past is Key to Decolonization
- Reclamation of valuable knowledge and practices is rhetorical, relational, and context dependent
- Embracing decolonization and community of knowledge is key to building a better future

The Body: Community Through Communality of Knowledge Making
- Knowledge and meaning making is a communal practice
- Valuing and celebrating knowledge diversity is critical to collective inquiry and resistance

The Feet: Cultural Knowledge as a Critical Foundation for Envisioning Future Possibilities
- Envisioning future innovations is dependent on the relationships Between the past, present, and future
- Building a resolute future requires community engagement/involvement

Figure 3.2 The Sankofa Framework

The Egg: It is factual with historical and contemporary evidence that certain ways of being, doing, and knowing have been subjected to marginalization, colonization, neo-colonization, and erasure. The rhetorical representation of the egg invites us to acknowledge that marginalized, neo/colonized. Erased, and missing epistemologies and knowledges hold significant values. One of the foundations of this understanding is that a knowledge-making practice is culturally grounded. How and why we engage in a knowledge-making practice is heavily influenced by our culture—cultural identity, beliefs, and values. Another foundation of this thematic representation of the egg in the sankofa methodological framework is the understanding that knowledge is locally constructed and is rooted in lived and cultural

experiences and expertise. As Barbara Christians claims that theorizing is an everyday experience for many people, it is clear that our ways of knowing are inherently impacted by our everyday experiences and cultural practices.

The Neck: Within the sankofa principle, reclamation of valuable knowledges and practices is understood as a deeply rhetorical and relational act—one that is grounded in specific cultural contexts and histories. By turning to the past to retrieve what was marginalized or erased, *sankofa* affirms that knowledge is not only contextual but also communal. Embracing decolonization and the collective nature of knowledge-making becomes essential for imagining and building more equitable, future-oriented educational and research practices.

The Body: Sankofa principle guides this framework in framing knowledge reclamation as a rhetorical and relational act rooted in specific cultural contexts. It affirms that knowledge and meaning-making are inherently communal practices shaped by shared histories and lived experiences. Embracing decolonization and celebrating knowledge diversity are essential to resisting the subjugation of marginalized ways of knowing. In doing so, we not only recover what has been erased but also create space for more just, collective forms of inquiry and future-making.

The Feet: Sankofa principle reminds us that envisioning future innovations requires an active relationship with the past and present. A resolute and just future is not imagined in isolation but built through deep engagement with community knowledges, histories, and practices. This interconnection emphasizes that sustainable transformation depends on communal involvement and the wisdom inherited across generations.

In a relational world, our lived experiences across temporal and spatial spaces make our lives and the interconnectedness of past-present-future critical in sensemaking and gaining insights into the world around us. As I demonstrate in figure 3.3 below, there is a recursive intricate relationship between the past, present, and future in relation to sensemaking and knowledge production.
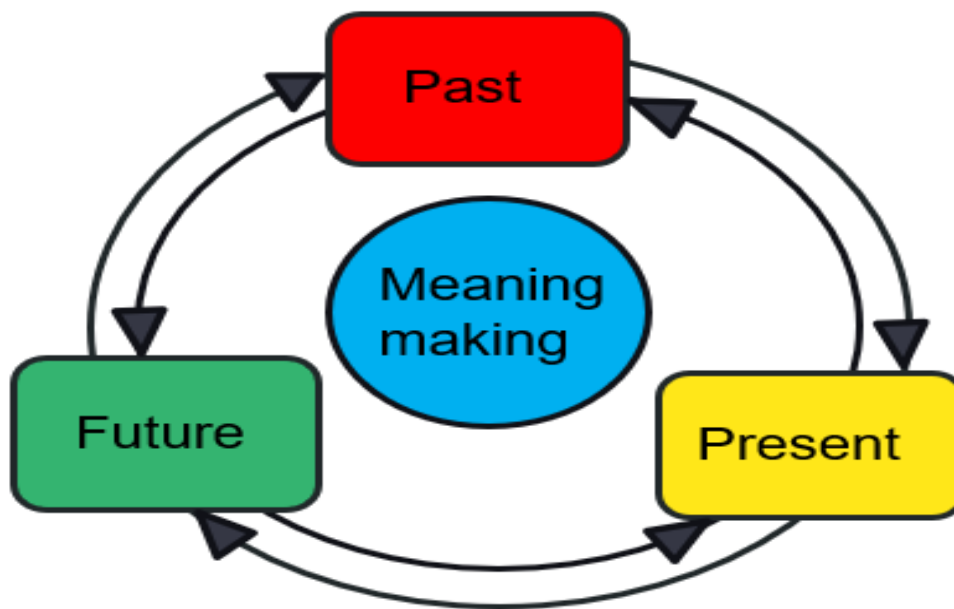

Figure 3.3 Recursive Relationships Between the Past, Present, and Future (weaving it with influences from culture and lived experience)

I must be quick to add that I am not using *sankofa* to contend that everything in the past is significant to the present in designing the future. As the concept of *sankofa* focuses on only things that hold immeasurable value to the present and future, it becomes the responsibility of scholars to interrogate the past to unearth the things from the past that are invaluable to the present, leading to a transformational change in the future.

Sankofa methodology underscores the Indigenous paradigm's claim that "knowledge is relational …. [and it] is shared with all creation" (Wilson, 2008, p.176). Furthermore, this paradigm empowers the methodology I design to emphasize the communality in knowledge production in Indigenous African contexts. That knowledge making is communal is better articulated and understood through ubuntu philosophy, which addresses the issue of power dynamics—promoting empowerment– in knowledge production.

Using *sankofa* for methodological orientations has received little or no attention in academia and in scholarly work. For many Indigenous African cultures and communities, the application of *sankofa* toward a methodological framework in research is crucial to doing any research that borders on reclamation and rebuilding. Employing *sankofa* for research methodology orientations helps us to examine the trajectory of our knowledge and meaning-making practices and processes. Sankofa methodology also helps us to understand why and how we have got here in the present (Webb-Johnson, 2007). Through this examination and critical reflections, which *sankofa* calls us to do, we will be well positioned in designing how we expect the future to look like.

Sankofa Research Methodology

The quest to reclaim valuable Indigenous African practices and knowledges is grounded within the sankofa concept and the understanding that reclamation is a practical and effective way of undoing some of the effects of colonialism, marginalization, and erasure of Indigenous African ways of life (Osei, 2020). Reclamation through *sankofa* is critical for knowledge and meaning making in academia and beyond. Since *sankofa* affords us the opportunity to examine processes and practices to understand the relationships between our past, present, and future, sankofa methodology serves as an appropriate frame to purposefully and intentionally reclaim valuable

knowledges and practices left behind as result of direct or indirect marginalization, colonialism, or any form of subjugation.

Sankofa methodology is an interdisciplinary methodology that can be employed and utilized by researchers across disciplines such as anthropology, African studies, Indigenous studies, arts and designs, history, communication, rhetoric and writing studies, and literary studies. An important feature of sankofa methodology is that it can operate as an umbrella methodology —comprising methodologies such as storytelling, counter-storytelling, and historiography. Sankofa methodology helps researchers to go back to recover and/or reclaim undervalued practices and knowledges which have been distorted, marginalized, silenced, and erased, in some cases, by colonialism and Western imperialism.

Many of the Indigenous groups and communities had their histories distorted and misrepresented through frameworks rooted in Western imperialism (Smith, 1999). Smith further claims that imperialism is still alive and it "...still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly" (p.21). This claim is supported by the presence of many gatekeeping practices that are established and continue to be upheld as *the* "standard" practices in academia and scholarship. Because of colonial and imperialist legacies, many Indigenous people/scholars are coerced into taking up different identities and using Western frameworks, theories, methodologies among others to define and explain their cultures, practices, and worldviews (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Their cultures and traditions are relegated to nothingness, in some cases, as their value systems and knowledge production practices are portrayed through misrepresentation as substandard to cultures and practices of Euro-Western people. Thus, building and using a sankofa methodology is an answer to the call for scholars, especially

Indigenous scholars, to build and integrate into research and teaching Indigenous concepts, theories, methodologies that empower alternative practices and knowledges.

Sankofa methodology does not define research as being only about discovery, but also about recovery. This contention has far-reaching implications for research, teaching, and practice, including administration. In other words, sankofa methodology challenges the research world to reconsider how it understands the scope, focus, and purpose of research, as this methodology draws our attention to research being both discovery of new knowledge and recovery of knowledges and meaning-making practices left behind. Through sankofa methodology, researchers can use their scholarly work to reposition Indigenous research approaches and practices from the margin to the center.

Another important goal for designing and using *sankofa* as an Indigenous methodology is to conduct this research to not only center Indigenous ways of knowing and meaning-making practices but also demonstrate that research into these practices in this contemporary era is tied to the survivance —survival, resistance, progress– and communality— of Indigenous African rhetorics (Lamptey, 2023). In addition to the goals of my dissertation, I see survivance and sankofa methodology can powerfully interact with and complement each other for the purposes of doing reclamation work. Just like survivance, sankofa methodology commits to empowering alternative knowledge making practices. It also recognizes the effects of colonization and oppressive practices and ideologies that result in the destruction to and attacks on Indigenous rhetorical practices (Driskill, 2016).

Moreover, this methodology commits to political projection of Indigenous practices and worldviews in mainstream culture. As I explained in chapter two, many Indigenous knowledges and sensemaking practices have suffered from political actions. To address the effects of these

political actions, this methodology invites all researchers, teacher-scholars, and practitioners who value diversified and inclusive approaches to arrive at a holistic understanding of the world around us. Sankofa methodology acknowledges that our approaches to interrogating a phenomenon as a way of knowledge making is heavily influenced by our culture and lived experience. Hence it is detrimental to research, teaching, and development, if sensemaking practices associated with a minority group of people are relegated to the background or treated as illegitimate unlike similar practices associated with dominant groups of people.

Sankofa methodology supports the decolonial commitment of dismantling oppressive and colonizing systems and structures in academia and beyond. This is because this methodology recognizes the need for Indigenous people to re/tell their own stories about their rhetorical practices as a purposeful and political reaction to their absence in larger conversations in the field. Another critical feature of this methodology is that it not only creates space for diverse approaches to knowledge making but also celebrates the beauty and diversity in gaining insights into a phenomenon, based on diverse ontologies and epistemologies. Like many decolonial methodologies, sankofa methodology pushes against dominant practices and narratives that intentionally or unintentionally privilege certain frameworks, theories, and approaches over others, especially the ones from marginalized groups of people.

Even beyond the issues of erasure, marginalization, and misrepresentation that happen as results of colonialism and/or direct and indirect oppression of a dominant culture, the desire to embrace "civilization" can also result in leaving behind some valuable meaning-making practices and knowledge systems. For many cultures and communities, the desire to become a *civilized* society can lead people to dissociate themselves from certain ways of life for the fear of being labeled as "primitive" or "uncivilized." The effect of this mentality is that people end up

stripping themselves of their original cultural identities and perspectives, as they take up other people's cultures, identities, and/or worldviews. It becomes necessary and exigent for some of these cultures and/or communities to adopt critical consciousness to address the fallouts of their quests and desires in this global world. This exigency arises when there is the realization that some valuable knowledge of the world and meaning-making practices have been left behind. For teacher-scholars and researchers who are interested in engaging in any research work aimed at digging deeper into the lost, missing, and erased invaluable knowledges and meaning-making practices, I contend that sankofa methodology is an appropriate research methodological approach to adopt.

Application of Sankofa Methodology in Research

Considering the potential form and functions of sankofa methodology, I see it to be able to address concerns about some methodologies as it can function beyond the scope of methodologies such as auto/ethnography, storytelling, and historiography. Many Euro-Western scholars in academia claim Indigenous methods and methodologies are "substandard," not "bonafide and authentic" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). In designing sankofa methodology, I realize this methodology has what it takes to challenge the erroneous notion in academia about the illegitimacy of Indigenous methods and methodologies, because it has space for qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods.

In the field of rhetoric and writing studies, sankofa methodology aligns well with the values that undergird many of the subfields. For instance, constellations, storytelling, decoloniality, and relationality are values of cultural rhetorics. These values align powerfully well with the goals of sankofa methodology and how it operates in research. Based on sankofa methodology's inclusive and decolonial perspectives in research, especially Indigenous inquiry

in rhetoric and writing studies, this methodology has profound possibilities and opportunities for diverse research projects. This methodological approach can be used for projects that are aimed at:

a. reclaiming community through community-engaged research.

b. reclaiming voices of marginalized communities through social justice work (research, practice, and teaching).

c. reclaiming, remembering, and recovering the past and doing memory work through archival research.

d. using stories to do history or rewrite history through historiography.

e. doing reflective research through scholarly person narrative (SPN) and autoethnography.

As this methodology profoundly emphasizes the concept of relational accountability, it could be used to examine the intricate network of relationships that form the being or identity and existence of any group of Indigenous peoples. Understanding how these relationships are formed and the significant role they play in knowledge production is key to understanding our experiences, identities, and interactions with the world around us. The Sankofa framework helps us understand the intricacies of relationality and the processes of examining how knowledge and knowledge production are embedded within relationality. This framework extends relationality to include relations with temporality, which supports the point that the past is as important as the present in planning for the future. Sankofa methodology underscores the significance of interrogating choices, circumstances, experiences, histories/herstories, etc. that have led to leaving invaluable things about a particular group's ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Research Methods of Sankofa Methodology

The interdisciplinary nature of sankofa methodology makes it possible for a range of methods to be considered for a particular research study. These methods include talking circles, autoethnography, ethnography, testimonios, counterstory, yearning, and narrative inquiry among others. Narrative inquiry fits well within the sankofa methodological framework. For instance, a researcher can ground narrative inquiry within sankofa methodology to examine their experiences and (rhetorical and meaning making) practices of a particular community by telling and living stories through narratives (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). In another instance, this narrative inquiry could be grounded in sankofa methodology to conduct a study aimed at reclaiming invaluable but marginalized, missing, or colonized meaning-making practices that are particular to a specific community. In phenomenological research, sankofa methodology provides adequate grounding for researchers to use any of the three research methods of phenomenology—descriptive phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology, and hermeneutic phenomenology— for reclamation/recovery work regarding lost, missing, colonized, or marginalized knowledge systems and meaning-making practices.

The sankofa framework can serve as an adequate methodological approach for ethnographic research which aims at building theories or producing knowledge about cultural patterns and knowledge-making practices that have not gained much attention in mainstream conversations about research and education. In addition, sankofa methodology creates space for using ethnography to identify emergent trends in contemporary research and knowledge production that values and tends to arouse interest among researchers to engage in research projects for reclamation and recovery purposes.

In terms of autoethnography, sankofa approach encourages a researcher to become an integral player in the research process and in the community under study. It allows the researcher to engage and interact with the invaluable marginalized, erased, or colonized knowledge production practices of a community that need to be reclaimed in the quest of advancing education and research. Through sankofa methodological framework, the ethnographer digs deeper and treats the personal experiences, impressions, and insights gained from the interactions and engagements of the practices of the community being studied, as relevant data for research (Poulos, 2013).

Applying Sankofa Methodology Through Survivance

For decolonial research, African scholars can, for instance, employ survivance as a lens through which to see and understand the Indigenous rhetorical practice I analyze in this project. Taking cues from scholars such as Vizenor (2008), Driskill (2016), and Tedla (1995), survivance is purposeful social and political reactions to practices and ideologies that cause harm to the cultural knowledge and memory of Indigenous peoples through direct and/or indirect systemic attacks on their rhetorical and knowledge-making practices. Decolonial lens of survivance helps bring out minoritized, marginalized, and/or colonized Indigenous rhetorics from the margin to the center of disciplinary discourses and conversations within and beyond academia. Decoloniality highlights, demonstrates, and emphasizes the significant contributions that Indigenous rhetorics, in this case Indigenous African rhetorics, can make to the field of rhetoric and writing studies. For instance, how we define rhetoric to be pluriversal; how we do rhetoric; how we teach rhetoric to be culturally inclusive/responsive.

Scholars such as Gabriela Rios (2015); Angela Haas (2007; 2015); Damian Baca (2008); Qwo-Li Driskill (2015; 2016); Kristin Arola (2012; 2018) who use their scholarship to bring

attention to rhetorics and rhetorical practices associated with their Indigenous communities serve as pathfinders for emerging scholars. In this dissertation, my goal is to respond to the call to center Indigenous rhetorical practices of people, communities, and cultures with which I am associated in conversations within the field. Many of these rhetorical practices have been relegated to the background, hence having received little or no attention in mainstream academic conversations. Historically, Africans and their ways of knowing, being, and doing have been subjected to oppression and neo/colonialism. As a result, there have been certain false identities created through colonial and imperial frames about who Africans are, what knowledge systems they have, and how they can be "saved."

This decolonial lens empowers me to design a critical interdisciplinary methodology to examine the rhetoricity of kente weaving among the Ewe people of Ghana in West Africa. The Ewe people are a culturally and linguistically homogeneous group of tribes that can be located in the following countries: Ghana, Togo, Benin, and some part of Nigeria. About my Indigenous and cultural identity as an African, I was born and raised in an Indigenous cultural community of the Ewe people of Ghana, where I received Indigenous education and participated in their rhetorical and meaning-making practices.

Through the lens of survivance, I use my project to empower African rhetoric and writing scholars and students by validating their (including mine) cultural and rhetorical practices and the contributions of these practices to the field. Survivance empowers me and other scholars to project and present more accurate representations of our respective cultures and Indigenous rhetorical traditions and practices, which have been under-researched and missing in academic discourses. Another reason for choosing survivance relates to 1) my positionality as a scholar of multiple marginalized identities and 2) issues of minoritization faced by the Ewe people and their

culture, especially in Ghana. Therefore, focusing on Indigenous rhetorics of the Ewe people of

Ghana engages survivance on both local and global fronts.

Using Sankofa Methodology for This Research

As I explained in previous sections, the use of Euro-Western systems to examine the ways of life

of Indigenous peoples has given rise to serious conflicts and harms caused to many Indigenous

communities. Research has shown that methodologies based on Euro-Western knowledge

systems and thoughts often exclude "the knowledge [and meaning-making practices] of formerly

colonized, historically marginalized, and oppressed groups" (Chilisa, 2012) from research and

academic practices. Therefore, designing sankofa methodology as a framework to examine an

Indigenous African meaning-making practice –in this case, kente weaving– is crucial and pivotal

for my research. Kente weaving is an Indigenous African knowledge making practice, which can

best be examined and understood by using a decolonial research methodology.

The other main goal of my project is to demonstrate the use of the methodological

framework I design. In piloting this sankofa methodology, I examine the rhetoricity and the in-

depth rhetorical functions of kente weaving, an Indigenous African practice in Ghana. In this

examination, I argue that engaging with and interacting with Indigenous African practices should

prioritize decolonial approaches that critically appreciate Indigenous African knowledge systems

and meaning-making practices, fostering a sense of communality, shared knowledge, and

decolonial encounters. The decolonial lens of survivance helps me to demonstrate how

interacting with kente weaving as an Indigenous African rhetorical practice emphasizes the

valuation of rhetorical memory and communal and cultural knowledge passed down for

generations. Based on my Indigenous educational experiences, the rhetorical practice of kente

weaving plays important roles in Indigenous African approaches to archiving and education. For

example, this practice is used to educate young people about their Indigenous epistemologies and cultures and to archive histories for generations among the Ewe people in Ghana.

Research Method

For the purposes of my dissertation, I employ a blended method – blending counterstory with talking circles, with storying at the intersection. Storying as a meaning-making practice emphasizes a culturally and linguistically nuanced way of knowing, surviving, and resisting. An important characteristic that makes my blended method well-grounded in sankofa methodology is that stories originate from oral traditions and are performed in a communal manner (Lamptey, 2023), just as *sankofa* which originates from the Akan oral tradition. As stories serve as a vessel for passing along teachings … [histories] and practices" (Kovach, 2009, p. 95), a blended method rooted within sankofa methodology and survivance provides me with the necessary tool to critically examine, recover, and reclaim rich rhetorical nature and functions of kente weaving, and Indigenous African practices, interrogated in my project.

Talking Circle as method

Approaching my project from a decolonial lens, I adopt a talking circle strategy. This method is similar to the interview method, but it is more dialogic than the interview method. An important feature of this method is that it can be used for qualitative research as well as quantitative research. For quantitative purposes, it can be used to gather Indigenous peoples' stories and counter-stories as data. I tend to place this method at the intersection of storytelling and counter-storytelling methods. Peter Rothe, Patricia Makokis, Lorna Steinhauer, William Ahuiar, Lena Makokis, & George Brertton (2006) explain talking circles method as:

> [being] consistent with the Indigenous philosophy of sharing, supporting and respecting life experiences through the use of oral traditions, personal interaction and group

consensus. Narrative inquiry through Talking Circles has previously been used to document the Indigenous story, teach culture and tradition, promote health, provide spiritual counselling and healing and instill restorative justice. (p.349)

Counterstory as Method[1]

Using counterstory is critical to both sankofa methodology and survivance as a decolonial lens. For this and many other reasons, this method requires a commitment to social justice, which is an important feature of sankofa methodology. Counterstory promotes narratives that offer alternative perspectives to dominant ones, particularly those centered on minoritized individuals and marginalized communities. In essence, sankofa methodology allows counterstory to perform its function of promoting "a rhetoric of transformational resistance" (Martinez 2012, p. 33). Incorporating counterstory as part of my blended method for reclamation and recovery research requires a deep understanding of the cultural epistemologies of Indigenous African ways of life. This understanding is crucial for recognizing and fully appreciating the depth and richness of Indigenous African rhetorics and communicative practices. In emphasizing the importance of counterstory method, Lamptey explains:

> Counter storytelling is both a method of telling stories that are not often told as well as analyzing and challenging stories of those in power who have arrogated to themselves dominant narratives/discourses that obscure those of the marginalized (Delgado, 1998).

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[1] While counterstory is a larger method rooted in Critical Race Theory (Delgado, 1995; Martinez, 2019), this study adopts a broader approach that aligns with the Sankofa methodology. Rather than focusing solely on race-based counter-narratives, I use counterstory as a tool to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim overlooked or dismissed knowledges. Within this framework, counterstory becomes a method of recovery—retrieving and revaluing the rhetorical and technical communication significance of kente and kente weaving. These stories are not necessarily responses to racial misrepresentation but rather to the epistemic neglect and underappreciation of African rhetorical practices. Thus, applying counterstory through *Sankofa* allows for a more expansive reclamation of meaning, value, and practice beyond the constraints of traditional CRT applications.

Counter storytelling makes visible the obscured practices in ways that project their

identity and to restore cultural relevance. (p.38)

Lamptey's position corroborates the claim that counter-storying method can be analytical in

approach (Medina-López, 2018). Extending this position to my research, counterstory helps me

to analyze the rhetorical nature and functions of kente weaving as an Indigenous African

rhetorical practice. Through counterstory, I magnify Indigenous African rhetorics among the

Ewe people of Ghana. Using stories with the goal of countering dominant problematic narratives

is critically important for a research project aimed at reclaiming valuable rhetorical practices

which have been kept in the margin for many years. In this project, I demonstrate how kente

weaving acknowledges and carries the richness of African cultures, languages, and traditions —

thereby offering counterstories to the representation of Africans and their worldviews through

colonial lenses.

By blending talking circle and counterstory into one method—as informed by

decoloniality, I collect counterstories about kente weaving and analyze its rhetoricity and

functions arising from Indigenous people's experiences, observations, and relationships –

physical, spiritual, political – with humans and nature. Through this blended method, I do a deep

dive into the rhetoric of kente weaving—for example, how visuals, materials, and patterns are

used to tell stories and cause rhetorical effects on the audience. I select my participants

purposively based on their Indigenous identity, their knowledge of these rhetorical practices, and

their knowledge of the Indigenous knowledge systems and the histories of the Ewe people. I

adopt this blended approach to listen to counterstories from experts of kente weaving in the face

of globalization and the pressures of neo/colonialism.

Based on my background and positionality and as discussed in academic settings (Chilisa, 2020; Martinez, 2022; Rothe et al., 2006), talking circles and counterstories are peculiar to minoritized and/or underrepresented people and communities who have experienced some form of marginalization, colonialism, and oppression. The guiding questions cover how these rhetorical practices serve as communicative practices, archives of histories, tools for Indigenous education, and embodiment of culture and identity construction among others.

Data Collection

To gather relevant data for this study, I drew closer to kente weavers among the Ewe people of Ghana. I was privileged to have Weaver Agbemehia, Weaver Kudoda, and Weaver Fiator as my research participants. The participants have good knowledge of kente weaving and of their culture, as they had woven kente actively and on a commercial basis for over a decade. I organized talking circle sessions—some one-on-one sessions and some group sessions—where the participants shared their experiential, technical, and cultural knowledge of the practice and process of kente weaving and its rhetoricity. To ensure a smooth and structured process of sharing their experiences and knowledge, I used a set of questions to guide the talking circle sessions. Some of the questions asked participants to share their knowledge on technical and technological knowledge required to engage in kente weaving, as well as their knowledge on the roles kente play in areas such as communication, history, indigenous education, and rhetoric.

In the course of the talking circle sessions, I asked follow-up questions that gave the participants opportunities to counter narratives that limit kente and kente weaving to just fashion, textile, and artwork. Thus, participants offered alternative perspectives regarding how kente and kente weaving need to be appreciated and analyzed as rhetorical. Though I am the researcher, I also had the opportunity to share my experiential and cultural knowledge of kente weaving, since

I am a kente weaver as well. I chose to participate in the talking circle sessions to build trust with participants, enhance communication, and build a sense of community among the participants. To encourage a free flow of participants sharing their experiences and knowledge, I got their permission to audio/video-record the sessions, which I later transcribed.

Data Analysis

During the process of transcription and extraction of information from the data, my complicated identities of being a practitioner of kente weaving, a rhetoric and writing scholar, and an Indigenous Ewe person (and speaker of the language) has impacted how I conduct the talking circle and engage in translating portions of the data (counterstories) that are in Ewe. Since this study is rooted within decoloniality and African thought, I provided the opportunity for my research participants to code-switch or code-mix. Thus, I have to do translation for portions of the talking circle results that are in Ewe language. In order to capture the accurate meanings embedded in the data, I am challenged to leverage all my "repertoires of communication" (Gonzales, 2018, p.2), knowledge, understanding, and practice of kente weaving. This demand, especially in the area of translation, leads to what Laura Gonzales (2018) calls "translation moments." According to Gonzales, translation moments occur:

> … when individuals pause to make a rhetorical decision about how to translate a word or phrase from one named language to another (Gonzales and Zantjer). Translation moments do not refer to the entire process of translation. Instead, translation moments are those instances when we pause to ask, Should I use this word or that word? What word or phrase would be most appropriate in this context, for this audience? Should I use a word at all, or would a picture be more useful? Signaled by a pause, translation moments are instances of rhetorical action embedded in the process of language transformation. (p.2)

Chapter Conclusion

In the process and practice of translating, I engage in *sankofa*, as I was challenged by the language and languaging utilized by the research participants. During the talking circles, the participants use simple language and terminologies (in Ewe) to describe the process and practice of kente weaving and to articulate the deep-seated rhetorical nature and functions of kente and kente weaving. Translating these simple language and terminologies requires me to go back to the past—the past in my life when I was weaving kente—to fetch my valuable knowledge and understanding of the process and practice of kente weaving in order to translate the message of the participants in a manner that is clear and reflective of the rhetoricity of kente weaving, as a meaning-making practice.

CHAPTER 4: WEAVING: RECLAIMING RHETORICAL DEXTERITY OF KENTE

African societies, being collective in nature and form, draw heavily from stories in action to do many things—such as constructing their identities, educating themselves and the younger generations, preserving their cultural practices and histories, among others. Stories about the everyday experiences and interactions of Indigenous African people impact the theorizing and understanding of the world around them. Just as Thomas King claims that "stories are who we are" (p.1), African societies employ stories to project who they are to themselves and people outside African communities. Just like water which can serve good or bad purposes, so are stories. Stories can be used to achieve various objectives. While some people may use stories to construct a more positive identity and representations of a particular community, some people can use stories to construct a more negative or disparaging identity and representations of a community and their ways of life. It is clear from scholarship and everyday experiences that stories can be used to achieve oppressive, neo/colonizing, and/or hegemonic outcomes. Drawing from this understanding, it is important that people, including scholars, tune their minds to how we employ stories, especially about things, peoples, communities, and worldviews of which we have no or very little understanding.

In Ghana, there is a wise saying that an animal that does not tell its story will have the hunter to tell its (the animal) story. Drawing on this wise saying, it is incumbent on us, scholars who understand and engage in certain meaning-making practices rooted in the African worldview to tell our own stories. In doing this, we embrace counterstories to, first of all, deconstruct any negative or disparaging narrative/stories about our meaning-making practices. Second, we employ counterstories to construct and project a truer identity and representations of our knowledges and rhetorical practices.

For the purposes of this study, I engage in a cultural rhetorical practice of using counterstories to affirm the rhetorical dexterity of kente weaving and resist any stories or narratives that intentionally or unintentionally seek to misrepresent the rhetorical importance of the rhetoric of kente weaving. Through sankofa methodological approach and based on the data gathered for this project, the goal for this chapter is to do two main things:

1. to illustrate how Indigenous communities (focusing on the Ewe people) make meaning and promote culture and identity in the face of colonialism and globalization through kente weaving, and

2. to show how kente weaving is a rhetorical and technical communication practice and thus has a lot to offer the fields of rhetoric and technical communication."

Kente Weaving Among the Ewe People in Ghana

Among the Ewe people in Ghana, communities such as Kpetoe, Agbozume, Hohoe, Ho, and Amedzofe are noted for kente weaving. However, historically, Agbozume (and now Kpetoe) is noted for kente weaving on a fulltime job. According to Kate P. Kent (1971):

> It [referring to kente weaving] is still woven as a part-time pursuit by men working independently, and by groups of men, or "sheds," at Ho, Hohoe, Kpetoe, Amedzofe and Agbosume. The last named center (Agbozume), on the Accra-Lome Road, is a town of fulltime weavers making most of their living from the craft. Every four days a cloth market is held at Agbosume, opening before dawn and continuing through the morning until most of the cloth, strip weave smocks, weaving tools and yarns have been sold. (p.35)

Kente weaving among the Ewe people in Ghana predates the arrival of the Europeans (Kent, 1971, p.35). Though kente weaving is stereotypically claimed by some people as a male's

enterprise, some females have and still engage in it. In an attempt to provide useful information about the origin of kente weaving among the Ewe people in Ghana, Weaver Fiator traces the practice of kente weaving to the 16th century with the Keta people. He says:

> Actually, we're told that in the 16th century, it (referring to kente) was with the Keta people. And that was the zone for kente in those years in the 16th century before the Ashantis (referring to the Asante people) also came in to, actually, have some knowledge about it, and they also attribute it to their culture.

For John Gillow (2003), Ewe kente weavers are celebrated as "some of the most skillful weavers in West Africa. Indeed, they are in such demand that they can be found working as far away as Lagos and Ibadan in Nigeria" (p.38). Ewe weavers are skillful and can quickly adapt to the technicality in weaving kente for users from any part of the world. Their expertise allows them to be able to incorporate designs and patterns from other cultures or cultural communities into their kente. Ewe weavers engage in kente weaving for various reasons, especially for commercial purposes. However, from the Ewe cultural perspective, "kente has thus become a visual representation of history, oral literature, philosophy, moral principles, religious beliefs, and rules of social conduct" (Kwakye-Oppong, 2014, p.155).

Establishing My Identity as Kente Weaver

I identify myself as a member of the Ewe ethnic group from Ghana, in relation to both sides of my (maternal and paternal) lineage. I am a kente weaver. I started weaving kente for commercial purposes when I was in grade 4 (that will be when I was 10 years old). Weaving being a lucrative enterprise and a major source of livelihood for many people in Agbozume, it has been a means to an end for the younger generation. Just like many older children and adolescents who aspire to

climb the social ladder through the acquisition of Western education, I engaged in kente weaving to raise money in support of my parents' efforts in raising me and my younger brother.

In learning the practice of kente weaving, I had to understudy older and professional weavers to gain knowledge of the moves and choices they make and why they make those choices and moves. For instance, I needed to learn about colors, design making, and how to meet the needs of potential buyers. In the process, I was expected to employ multiple approaches to learning—i.e. observation, demonstration, quizzing and responding to scenarios—which are dependent on the aspect of the weaving practice that I was learning. For example, I learned by moving from one professional to another and observing how each of the kente weaving processes is carried out—the steps involved in each process, the decisions made at every step, what to avoid, and how to address a problem if one occurs at every step. Some basic activities at the initial stages are the ones that learners like me were allowed to participate in. At the beginner's stage, my task includes passing around tools, rolling yarn on wooden bobbins, and spreading and folding up the bulk warp early in the morning or late in the evening.

In effect, my learning was happening in a manner described by Qwo-Li Driskill as "...learning happen[ing] through our bodies, through embodied practice, through doing" (p.57). As complex as kente weaving is, it requires a serious teaching and learning process. This shows that this practice is not one that anyone can just learn on their own; it requires a teacher and a learner. The practice of kente weaving is a life that one must live. And living this life is connected to different nodes in a person's life, irrespective of their social, cultural, economic, and political background. Kente weaving is one of my experiences where I had to receive an intense life education.

Rhetorically, navigating the complexity of kente weaving and its processes prepares weavers, like me, to see real life situations as similarly complex, which need mindfulness, intentionality, and strategic navigation. While other weavers and I apply rhetorical strategies, concepts, and theories regarding how we approach kente weaving, many of the weavers are not preoccupied with the idea of documenting these theories, concepts, and strategies.

Sankofa Approach: Weaving Counterstories and Ideas

Guided by a sankofa methodological approach, I chose to collect counterstories that address the limited understanding of kente and kente weaving a rhetorical and knowledge-making practice. Many people have only appreciated kente through the lenses of fashion and textile. Even some scholars, such as Thirumurugan N. Nevetha (2019), have predominantly focused their examination of kente weaving as a textile practice and kente as a textile product. Other scholars, such as Ken O. Fening (2006) and Toyin Falola (2022), examine kente (Aso Oke, as it is known among Nigerians) from the lens of African arts. While it is not my intention to undermine the significant contributions these scholars have made in relation to kente and kente weaving, my study invites both scholars and non-scholars to reimagine how they examine and appreciate kente and kente weaving beyond fashion, textile, and arts through the sankofa framework. This kind of examination requires the application of rhetorical strategies. As I indicated in the methodology chapter above, I did this examination by analyzing counterstories collected from weavers, including myself, among the Ewe kente weaving community. I decided to draw closer to the Indigenous weavers of kente, as I contend that collecting counterstories requires researchers to get proximate with the relevant community where a knowledge making practice happens. The Indigenous weavers tend to have a better understanding of the rhetoricity of their weaving practice.

In analyzing the counterstories, I decided to organize them according to topical areas. The goal for this analysis is to unearth and demonstrate the deep-seated rhetorical dexterity of kente and kente weaving as a knowledge making practice among the Ewe weaving communities, specifically Agbozume. In addition to the counterstories, I draw on relevant research on kente weaving to contextualize the connections related to the impacts of kente weaving on African and global Black cultures, and the rhetoricity of the practice and its contributions to the field of rhetoric and writing and its related fields. In the subsections that follow, I explain some relevant rhetorical concepts that emerge in the practice of kente weaving.

Cultural and Historical Significance of Kente Weaving

Embodiment

The beliefs, identities, cultural ideologies, and relationships of the weavers and, to a large extent, the user play important roles in determining many choices that go into the practice of kente weaving. As humans as we are, our actions, thoughts, silences, decisions, and knowledges derived from our beliefs which we form through our social, political, and cultural engagements. Communicating and articulating these beliefs, cultural ideologies, and relationships are very integral and important to identity construction and projection—which includes identity enactment, maintenance, and re-construction. As a result, the practice of kente weaving becomes the embodiment of these beliefs, identities, practices, and knowledges, while the product—kente–becomes the medium of communicating and articulating them. The kente pieces produced by the weavers significantly portray relevant identities of the weavers as well as the users. Rhetorically the weavers also incorporate their knowledge of their beliefs, identities, and cultures of their potential buyers—a category of their audiences. This usually emerges when color choices, color combinations, pattern designing, and types of kente pieces. For instance, there are

some specific types of kente pieces, specifically based on designed patterns and colors, known as Ashanti kente (which means these types of kente are peculiar to the Asante people of Ghana). Below are examples of Asante kente designs.

Figure 4.1 Examples of Kente Designs Peculiar to Asante People in Ghana (Sources: Maryte Collard; Abbiexpress)

The kente products also serve as an embodiment of the users' beliefs, identities, and politico-cultural ideologies. Though the weavers most often decide the designs and the patterns to be included in the kente that they weave, users sometimes make specific requests in relation to the designs and patterns. For instance, the kente stole that many Black students use are woven according to the requests of users. For most Black people in the diaspora, they request kente weavers to design an African map or the design of any cultural artifacts that represent their African root or connectedness to African values and worldviews. The designs are mostly accompanied with varied messages of alphabetic inscriptions in the kente pieces. These kente designs are preferred by users to be kente stoles instead of sewn as a cloth or an attire. Here are some examples:

Figure 4.2 Examples of Kente Stoles Containing Alphabetic Inscriptions and Symbols (Sources: Sankofa edition; African Heritage Collection; Graduation Stoles)

Relationality

The act of weaving is instrumental in building and improving our relationality with the world around us, including our past, present, and future. Kente weaving affords the opportunity to weavers to push against boundaries that frustrate our interactions with people, the environment, cultures, and beliefs. Relationality of the past, present, and future —as supported by the meanings associated with the names of some kente designs and the meanings/lessons embedded in some of the designs, patterns, and inscriptions woven in kente. For the Indigenous African, the past cannot be separated from the present, it holds lessons that are needed in the present to work toward a better future. According to Wilson (2008), "relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality" (p.7). Applying this understanding to the relationships that exist between the past, present, and future, our experiences and knowledge of or from the past forms realities that we can explore while we work in the present to plan the future we desire. In so doing, kente weavers have sine specific types of kente products and designs that represent the past. Many of

these types of kente products/cloths are used by people who hold pan-Africanist ideals—hence using these kente products rhetorically for political purposes.

The concept of relationality is also encouraged through participation in activities involved in the kente weaving practice. This can be understood at two levels. The first level is the relationality between the weavers and the users. Both weavers and users make significant contributions to how the product of the weaving practice should look like. Users make their contributions through the demands and expectations of the kind of kente, in terms of design and patterns, that they want, while the weavers make the kente types as demanded by the users. Weavers who make kente types for the open market make their contributions by analyzing the needs and expectations of their potential users/buyers. The second level concerns the relationality that exists among weavers. Weavers form a strong relationship among themselves regarding what needs to be done at different stages of the weaving process through sharing of expertise and ideas. The section that follows sheds more light on the relationality among weavers from the perspective of communality in knowledge making.

Communality in knowledge making

The concept of communalism based on African philosophical grounding considers a person being an integral part of the whole or a community—being interdependent and owing duties to see to the well-being and good of all. In traditional African settings, emphasis is placed on the connectedness and communality of the members in communities. The practice of kente weaving invokes the spirit of communalism among weavers and non-weavers alike. Kente weaving has always been communal as it invites active engagements of many people at the various stages of kente weaving. Though this practice can be done by an individual, the involvement and engagement of other people makes it more fulfilling. In promoting communality, two or more

people can help a weaver with tasks such as rolling yarn, loading the rattle, loading the heddles, and preparing the warp. The figures below show some examples of kente weaving processes.

Figure 4.3 Weaver Loading or Threading the Heddle

Figure 4.4 A Weaver Loading or Threading the Reed/Beater

Based on my experience and the experiences of my research participants, teaching a beginner how to weave kente is a communal task, even when there is one person in charge of the learning process. When I was learning the processes of weaving, I was exposed to several people who

taught me how to perform a weaving-related task throughout the processes of weaving. The site of learning is not fixed as beginners are able to learn from any wherever they find one.

Beyond the communality in teaching and learning associated with kente weaving, another way of promoting communality in kente weaving concerns deciding kente designs and making of kente types. While weavers can individually make design choices in kente weaving, approaching design thinking and choices from a communal point of view is highly encouraged and appreciated. Weavers collaboratively make choices of designs, patterns, and colors. Kente designs are not individual property, as they are open to other weavers to use or even adapt into new designs and patterns. During the design process, weavers provide their expertise and critical feedback on a weaver's strategies, choices, and rhetorical moves.

Shaping Culture and Identity through Kente

The culture of naming: kente names

Besides the knowledge and meanings associated with kente designs, patterns, and colors, the act of naming is rhetorical as well. A kente is named based on several factors such as designs and the meanings and/or knowledge associated with a particular design. Names and naming as a practice is rhetorical as it holds significant cultural values. The naming practice in general among the Ghanaian communities, especially the Ewe people, reveals the rich cultural knowledge and the practical application of relationality that we embed in names and their meanings. For Ewe people, names are not just mere names, they mean a lot because they carry lots of embodied stories, emotions and histories. The practice of giving names to kente designs and patterns, by large kente cloth, is one of the ways kente and kente weaving upholds its rhetorical dexterity. Names given to some types of kente underscore embodied experiences, knowledge, and relationships that move through culture as a vehicle from generation to generation. Some of the

names, through relationality, celebrate the relationships that exist between humans, supernatural beings, and objects. Shawn Wilson argues that "we are the relationships that we hold and are part of" (p.80). Extending Wilson's argument, it is not surprising how cultures that hold dear relationships prioritize community building and communal living. The names of some of the kente types include *matsimata (adapted as Achomota)*, which means mending pieces together; *takpekpe,* meaning meeting; *kpero;* Easter Sunday; *fiawoyome; korsorkorsor; kpe'vi,* meaning two heddles; and check-check.

Figure 4.5 Names of Some Kente Types or Designs (from left to right: kpe'vie, korsorkorsor, check-check, and matsimata)

Public Portrayals of Kente through Festivals and Events

Kente is predominantly employed as a rhetorical tool for identity and representation among Black Africans and Black people in the diaspora. Many people who identify with any specific Black community local or global use kente rhetorically to project their identity. This can clearly be seen in the public portrayals of kente through festivals and events, locally and/or internationally. Examples of festivals where kente is employed mostly include national and

cultural festivals. In terms of events, these include marriage ceremony, naming ceremony, presidential inauguration, school graduation, and year of return program.

Research participants emphasized the cultural significance of kente and kente weaving and its roles in traditional and national events and ceremonies in Ghana. Weaver Agbemehia states:

> Now we use it [kente] when we are going to marry, among the Ewes. One of the most important things asked for as part of the bride price is kente. Among the Ewes or among the Agbozume people especially, when your wife gives birth, you need to give her one cloth, which she will use to carry the baby. Now, when we have funerals, kente is also used there.

In support of the point about the functions of kente, Weaver Fiator provides further explanation about the use of kente in cultural and religious contexts among the Ewe people of Ghana:

> It [kente] has so many functions. There are some that we use for only naming ceremonies, and you must make a request for that particular one for a naming ceremony. Anytime you put it on, people will know that, yes, this particular family, they are from a wedding. [There are some you use] when [you're attending] naming ceremonies. There are some you send for weddings. There are some that you send for only Easter celebrations. That's for only Easter festivities, and we call it Easter Sunday. That one goes with blue and white background, and one moving is nice with you. Then there are some that are purely for chiefs, where you have some animals and some items being drawn in it.

Black Africans in the diaspora usually use kente to project their identity and representation through festivals and events that they organize. The Council of Ewe Associations of North

America (CEANA) is a group of people from the Eweland in West Africa, specifically located in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and some parts of Nigeria. At every annual festival/event display different artifacts of kente (in the form of dresses, cloth, handbag etc.) in celebration of an Ewe culture that they identify with and represent. The visual texts below illustrate how they use kente to project their identity and cultural representation.

Figure 4.6 A Group of CEANA Members in Kente & CEANA Event Ads

Rhetorical Significance: Kente as a Repository of Indigenous Knowledge, History, Culture, and Communicative Practices

Repository of Knowledge and Education

Kente weaving is a knowledge tradition that Ewe people and many other kente weaving communities cherish and sustain over the years. Considering the conversations in the field of writing studies and its related fields about what is writing, I use this project on the rhetorical dexterity of kente and kente weaving to complicate the conversation further. It is common in the field of writing studies that writing is social, political, and personal. While I agree with this assertion, I want to direct scholars' attention to the impacts of culture on writing and rhetorical

practices—to a large extent literacy practices. To this end, I contend that writing is cultural as well as social, personal, and political. Kente weaving is writing practice; hence kente is writing.

A critical analysis of kente and kente weaving as writing—beyond fashion and artistry work—reveals that kente weaving serves as a repository of knowledge of the any Indigenous African communities which engage in kente weaving. One of the ways kente and kente weaving performs this function is through the designs, patterns, types of kente, and the names associated with them. The knowledge—i.e. meanings, messages, stories—is mostly embedded in the patterns, designs, and the names given to them, including the names of kente types. Various cultural groups in Ghana use totems and knowledge systems, which they pass down from generation to generation. These knowledge systems hold significant understanding of the people about the world around them. Understanding the serious importance of passing down generational knowledge, kente weavers employ weaving as a tool to preserve these knowledge systems and to teach the younger generations more about their identity and culture. For instance, Ewe people have a kente type that is called *fiawoyome* (king/chief's retinue). *Fiawoyome* (see figure 4.7 below) holds relevant knowledge about the sacredness of chieftaincy.

Figure 4.7 Fiawoyome Kente Type

Apart from the prestige associated with a person being a member of a chief's retinue, *fiawoyome* holds the knowledge that chief's retinue plays crucial roles in relation to the safety, security, and development of a particular community. The chief's retinue is responsible for providing spiritual support, protection, and other services to the chief. According to kente experts, the general design of this kente is a representation of values such as social security, progression, sustenance, and desire to serve (Ahiagble 2004).

Another way kente and kente weaving serves as a repository of knowledge among kente weaving communities, among the Ewe people, is through lifelong learning and education. Knowledge in the areas such as business, arts and design, and mathematics are embedded in kente weaving. Through kente weaving, the younger generation is educated in entrepreneurship and making prudent business decisions. A common way this happens is by letting younger weavers own their kente business, where they are guided to make informed and sound business decisions with the aim of expanding their kente business. Thus, young weavers gain adequate practical knowledge in doing business and being entrepreneurs. Even young weavers who are in formal education are able to transfer their practical knowledge into understanding the theories of business-related courses in school.

Kente weaving is used to teach younger people knowledge in the area of art and design. As cultural ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge systems are transmitted through fine arts (e.g. in the forms of songs, and stories) and artistry arts (e.g. sculpture, kente weaving, and bead making), passing down practices of arts and design is done a system of critical education. In the case of kente weaving, the designs and patterns become hyperlinks of the various histories and/or cultural knowledge of the people that kente and kente weaving holds that can be passed down from generation to generation. Among weavers, effective artwork and design practice rest on

adequate education in application of critical thinking and knowledge in color combinations. Arts and design education is also grounded in the cultural knowledge of potential buyers/users (audiences) of kente. A learner of kente weaving who has not gained much education in the principles of design and artwork struggles to impress their kente users (audience) with their designs and the artistry component of kente weaving. Young weavers who are students in the formal education system transfer their knowledge in arts and design from kente weaving to subjects or courses in fields, such as graphic design, clothing and textile, and technical communication. Weaver Fiator reveals:

> Fortunately, our education system, when we were schooling, had something (a subject/course of study) we called Life Skills which later changed to Vocational Skills. Now it is called BDT—Basic Design and Technology. Now, in the BDT course itself, when you are going for textiles or clothing and textiles, there's a portion that they teach the children (referring to students) how to weave—they teach the children how to prepare the yarn and how to carry out the weaving process. Then, at the secondary school level too, there's a course called Visual Arts, and that course is purely for arts courses, [including] weaving, basketry, jewelry and stuff. So even in the final year, you will be asked to do weaving for a particular occasion, where they describe the occasion and you must weave to fit that occasion.

Similarly, kente weaving upholds mathematical knowledge, which is taught to younger weavers. This weaving practice requires knowledge in at least basic mathematical principles. Weavers engage in mathematical calculations at almost every stage of kente weaving. Some of the factors that demand this knowledge from weavers include getting the desired number of kente stole, the desired length and width of kente stole and (sewn) kente cloth, among others. Mathematical

principles common in kente weaning include geometry, pattern repetition, ratio and proportion. With respect to color use in kente weaving, weavers are required to apply their mathematical knowledge in color sequencing. To be successful in producing kente pieces that appeal to their audiences or users, they have to learn how to use color sequencing in creating desired color patterns by alternating selected varied color threads. In weaving some types of kente, weavers employ the knowledge in basic geometry (examples, triangles, pyramid, bars, and squares) to create patterns and designs in a kente. Some of these geometric shapes are sometimes combined and layered critically to create complex designs in some types of kente. Knowledge in mathematical principles no matter how basic, it might be, can be valuable to a young kente weaver in a formal education system, especially in a mathematics class. Below are some kente designs that require the application of mathematical principles in formulating the design and patterns during the weaving process.
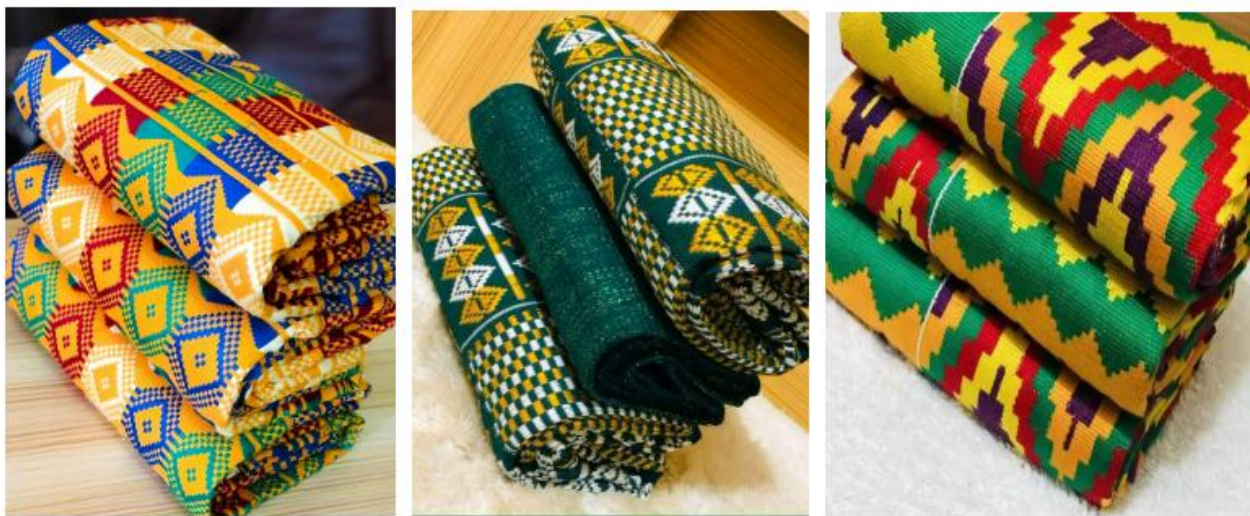

Figure 4.8 Examples of Kente Designs Requiring Application of Mathematical Principles (Sources: Adanwomase; MGKente)

From the above discussion, it is clear that apart from Indigenous educational practices that happen in kente weaving, there are rich knowledges and learning practices that are passed down

from generation to generation. For instance, knowledge in design and pattern-making in kente are vital to contemporary education in design thinking and rhetoric studies. Therefore, application of the framework of *sankofa* in this work demonstrates how an Indigenous African epistemology can be reclaimed through the practice of kente weaving.

Repository of History and Culture

Apart from kente performing the rhetorical function of shaping culture and identity, it also serves as a repository of history and culture. History is an integral part of a cultural community's heritage. Among many kente weaving communities, such as the Ewe people, the writing and rhetorical practices embedded in kente weaving have not been better understood. It is worthy of note that many knowledge systems and practices Indigenous communities have been subjected to examinations through problematic research practices and frameworks that are rooted within a worldview different from the Indigenous worldview. My point here is that kente weaving is a writing practice that reposits history and culture for new generations.

Figure 4.9 Takpekpe le Anloga Kente Type (popularly called Takpekpe) (Source: Amazon)

A kente type that my research participants mention as an example of how kente is used to keep a community's history and culture alive is the kente called *Takpekpe le Anloga* (which means "meeting/conference in Anloga") which is labeled figure 4.7. *Takpekpe* holds the history of a special conference organized by a colonial governor of the Gold Coast (present day Ghana) in 1950. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the governor's imposition of additional levy on the local colonized people. The colonial governor's decision was overwhelmingly rejected by the people. To preserve the memory of this historical event, it is believed that master Weaver Atsu Gobah Tengey Seddoh designed this kente type to commemorate the conference. Thus, younger weavers who are taught how to weave this kente type are first of all told this history. For those who know about this history, even the name and/or the sight of this kente type reminds them of such a historical event that happened during the colonial days. This kente cloth type or design has carried forward a history that is more than 70 years old.

Medium of Communication and Storytelling

Communication of messages and sharing stories that have been embedded in kente designs, patterns, and colors. In practical terms, these designs, patterns, and colors function as hyperlinks to the stories and messages in the form of proverbs that articulate and emphasize people's knowledge and their relationships with other people, God and cosmic elements, living and non-living things among others. Interpretation and comprehension of these stories and messages require technical communication expertise and cultural knowledge in which the designs, patterns, and color usage are grounded. Weaver Kudoda sheds light on how a kente piece can be used for communication purposes:

> Yeah, kente communicates. When you see somebody wearing the black one, it means a
> person is mourning. If you see the person or a woman in full regalia, from top to down,

wearing kente, maybe white, yes, it means he's going to a place of happiness. So, it communicates. You can see somebody in the black one –say a friend of yours. Then you ask the person: Why are you in black? You tell your friend is bereaved or he's going to the funeral, or whatever.

Weaver Fiator:

So, the design can communicate [about] status, about wealth, about family. If you're from a royal family, they also have a particular [kente] cloth that they use. And we also have an ordinary [kente] cloth that anybody at all can use. And some (referring to kente types) are reserved for specific festivities.

As I explain in the section on the rhetoricity of kente designs and patterns, anyone who puts on any attire of kente with designs on it is communicating a message or telling a story. Again, the ability of anyone to understand the message or story is heavily dependent on the person's expertise in the cultural knowledge within which the designs and patterns are rooted and expertise in interpreting such coded messages or stories. Proverbs are the commonest vehicle through which the messages or stories are conveyed. Below, in Figure 4.10, is an example of how Ghana's current president, H.E. John Dramani Mahama, employed kente to communicate important messages and stories during his presidential inauguration.

Figure 4.10 Image Revealing the Symbolism of President John D. Mahama's 2025 Inauguration Outfit

President John Mahama, the current president of Ghana, was inaugurated as a second-term president in 2025. He was defeated by former president Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo in 2026 and 2020. A careful reading of the designs and patterns employed in the attire hold stories about his second coming as president of Ghana. The designed kente cloth is called in Twi (a local language in Ghana) "*emmere pa da w'anim*" (Amoako, 2025), which means "better days await you." Contextually, the people of Ghana voted out the ruling party because of serious mismanagement of the economy. So, President John Mahama is communicating his message of hope to the Ghana people through kente. Though the other designs are not in the kente (it could have been woven in the kente though), each of them carries an important message to Ghanaians.

The Rhetoricity of Patterns and Designs in Kente

The patterns and designs woven in a kente carry meanings and messages. These meanings and messages are conveyed through a coded language that requires technical knowledge in interpreting this language. These messages and meanings usually originate from the kente weaver. However, sometimes users who employ the services of the kente weavers determine which meaning/s or message/s to be conveyed in their woven kente. Just as it is common among cultures and communities in the West African subregion, the patterns and designs represent "objects, historical events, mythological subjects, real and human subjects, and proverbs" (Rovine, 2001, p.22). Apart from the beauty of the cloth, the most important factor that drives the appreciation and recognition of its deep-seated rhetorical dexterity is the linguistic functions and rhetoricity of the kente from different lenses, including cultural, political, decolonial, and technical communication lenses, especially regarding the coded meaning or message embedded in the kente.

The patterns and designs can be woven in either simple plain weave or in *adanuvor* (*adanudo*) —this "contains realistic unit designs in brocade" (Kent, 1971, p.36). The name for each design connotes a proverb (mostly), an event (e.g. historical), and a myth. Examples of the brocade designs among Ewe weavers include *yida* (comb), *safi* (key), *kuku* (hat), *fiazikpi* (chief's stool), and *trakpui* (steps/staircase). In figure 4.11 below are some examples:

Figure 4.11 Examples of Kente Designs (from left to right: Comb design, Chief's stool and key design, steps/staircase design) (Sources: Tien Chiu; WashU; Lamptey, 2025)

In thinking about designs and patterns to be woven, the weaver engages in audience analysis with the aim of understanding the expectations of the user and the rhetorical impact that the designs and patterns could have on the user. Sometimes, effective formulation of designs and patterns requires adept cultural knowledge (of the potential user) from the weaver. In my hometown, Agbozume, our target audiences (users) come from different cultures and communities, including people from Accra, Kumasi, Abidjan (in Ivory Coast), Lome (in Togo), Lagos (in Nigeria) and even the diaspora.

The practice of kente weaving emphasizes the claim that designs and design decisions are heavily influenced by culture and cultural knowledge. For kente weavers, to be able to weave a kente with brocade designs that receive great appreciation and recognition from not only the user by also expert weavers is a hallmark of an excellent technical communicator. Since expert weavers weave kente for people from different cultural backgrounds, they usually engage in transcultural literacy and writing strategies to be able to weave kente to meet the demands and appreciation of the users. To meet the expectations of the users who are Asante people mostly from Kumasi, the weavers in Agbozume need to know how to formulate designs and patterns

that are rooted within the Asante knowledge system. Figure 4.8 above shows examples of common designs and patterns woven by Agbozume weavers for Asante users. *Adanuvor* requires technical knowledge in design and expertise in formulating patterns and designs (*kaforfor*). Weavers who lack this technical knowledge engage the services of other weavers to help them to formulate the patterns and designs for them.

The Rhetoricity of Colors in Kente

Among the kente weaving communities in Ghana, the use of color—just like designs and patterns—have rhetorical implications. For the Ewe people in Ghana, they "prefer dark, cool tones—green, brown, dark blue, and black—sparkled by limited amounts of yellow and red" (Kent, 1971, p.35). This means that it is easy for a person who has technical knowledge in colors and how they are appreciated from cultural points of view to know where a particular kente is woven. This applies to the designs and patterns in kente, as many of them are motivated by the knowledge system of a particular cultural community.

The requirements for a weaver to possess knowledge in technical communication through colors and application of color rhetorically is profound. Thirumurugan & Nevetha (2019) recognizes the significance of these rhetorical practices when he says:

> "The patterns found in the weave are geometric shapes like rectangle, diamond, zigzag and square. The designs applied on the fabric are dramatic and visually stunning. But the designs and colors involved show a wide range of variations in the meaning. Those colors that are used in the cloth convey some message, proverb or the idea of the weaver. The cloth they weave symbolizes democracy, unity, responsibility, royalty, ingenuity, excellence, elegance, wealth, perfection and superior craftsmanship etc., the warp and

weft used in weaving kente cloth are uniquely woven and they have their distinctive names and meanings." (p.307)

To throw more light on Thirumurugan & Nevetha's position, kente making requires from weavers not only artistic or aesthetic knowledge in design, textiles, and craft but also strategies of applying rhetorical knowledge of how to create and design things for rhetorical effects—for instance, in appealing to the taste and expectations of potential buyers, who are usually the primary audience. Again, a weaver's education in transculturalism regarding color application and the meanings associated with colors help them weave kente types that keep them relevant in the market kente weaving business.

Kairotic Emergence: Navigating Pressures of Neo/Colonialism and Globalization

The use of Euro-Western framework to examine how African arts and textiles, leads to undervaluation of the expansive and rich knowledge and meanings encoded and embodied in African textiles. It also leads to misrepresentations of African knowledge systems and meaning-making practices associated with African textiles. Many scholars who deploy Euro-Western frameworks end up doing a shallow interrogation of African knowledge systems and the rhetorical dexterity of African Indigenous practices, leading to accentuating only the "cultural/stylo-aesthetic[s]" (Falola, 2022, p.282). Research reveals that frameworks outside of the African Indigenous worldview do not allow scholars to do deep-dive engagements with and interrogations of African textiles to understand the deep-rooted knowledge and meaning-making practices grounded in them (Falola, 2022 & Chilisa, 2009). While Falola's assertion that "Western presence [in Africa] has become a metastatic cancer eating away at centuries-old traditions and knowledge" (p. xv) in African communities is evidentially irrefutable, some communities have adopted strategies in preserving African cultures and knowledge systems or

forms. Kente weavers have adopted innovative and survivance strategies in preserving African

heritage and culture through kente and kente weaving. Colonialism and globalization put a lot of

pressure of Indigenous African communities. With the goal of sustaining the relevance and the

importance of kente weaving among the Indigenous Ewe weaving communities, weavers

respond to the pressures adapting to the use of materials and formulating designs and patterns

that appeal to the non-African user-population as well.

From material points of view, the Indigenous weavers mostly used cotton. However,

contemporary weavers employ silk and rayon in addition to cotton for different types of kente.

Concerning designs and patterns, contemporary formulate designs and patterns that are originally

Euro-Western. They adopt these strategies with the aim of maintaining and boosting the impetus,

credibility and the relevance of kente and kente weaving in the face of the pressures from

colonialism and globalization. These strategies have helped kente remain prestigious in

significant areas such as clothing and textile, fashion, and artistry. The sustenance of the

relevance and rhetoricity of kente and kente weaving have been extended to contemporary times,

as many users employ kente for various rhetorical effects—such as for racio-cultural political

purposes. In the section that follows, I examine some ways that kente is used in contemporary

times, especially among Black people in Africa and in the diaspora.

Using kente in the contemporary times

In some of the previous sections, I explained how kente is used as a communication tool in

establishing cultural identity and representation. In contemporary times, many African

communities and many communities of Black people, especially Black people in the diaspora,

employ kente for political purposes. Cultural politics and identity/racial politics are the two main

political dimensions in which kente is employed. These dimensions emphasize that

understanding kente and kente weaving goes beyond artistry and/or fashion and textile. There is no social event—such as festivals, marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies, funerals, and state functions—that you will go without seeing people in kente. Many people, especially people with the Pan-African mindset, always advocate for celebrating and holding in high esteem practices—such as dressing in kente—that function as representations of African identity. The belief is that colonialism has caused so much damage to the African way of life. Nowadays, it is common to see many people who are performing marriage ceremonies to use kente in Ghana. Even though Western marriage practice–wedding ceremonies–remains among Ghanaians, the traditional African marriage ceremony is also valued.

Figure 4.12 Images of Couples in Kente during Marriage Ceremony Events (Sources: AfricanBlooms; SeeAfricaToday)

This traditional African marriage ceremony is commonly referred to as marriage engagement, and as such is an event where kente is predominantly used to achieve the political purpose of cultural and identity representation. Thus, kente is used to preserve the traditional African marriage practice and values.

Similarly, wearing kente among journalists from some News outlets and Broadcasting Houses in Ghana is beginning to gain traction. For instance, News Anchors—e.g. TV3 News Anchors and Ghana Broadcasting Corporation—now wear kente on certain days in the course of their work, especially on set.

Figure 4.13 News Anchors in Ghana Wearing Kente on Set (Sources: GBC; TV3 Ghana)

For these journalists from the above News outlets and Broadcasting Houses, using kente is not just about fashion; it is more about cultural, national, and African-oriented identity and representation.

Beyond people using kente in African settings, some communities of Black people in the diaspora also employ kente at various events and ceremonies for cultural and identity political purposes. Members of these communities are Black people who are immigrants in the diaspora. Members of these communities do not include people Black people who are descendants of victims of forced migration—such African Americans and Black people in the Caribbean. It is crucial for me to make this distinction because how kente is employed politically is heavily dependent on positionality. For African Americans and Black people in the Caribbean, they

utilize kente for not only cultural political purposes but also identity and racial purposes. It is common to see many African American students at graduation events wrap around their neck kente.

Figure 4.14 African American Graduates Wearing Kente around their Necks (Sources: CADSS; Inside UNC Charlotte)

Beside the kente itself, the messages written in these kente stole in alphabetic texts are employed for political purposes. The kente stoles carry various messages written in alphabetic texts. The messages woven in kente by weavers include "Educated Black King," "Black Girl Magic," and "Class of 2025." Messages woven in a kente stole are decided by the users.

Even in the national political terrain in the United States, for example, some politicians use kente for various partisan political purposes. For instance, members of the Congressional Black Caucus sometimes put on kente cloth at some national events for political effects, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 4.15 Black Politicians (Congressional Black Caucus) Wearing Kente around Their Necks (Sources: The Root; Irenebrination)

It is worth noting that Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah—the man who led Ghana to independence from the British—was clad in kente when he met with the United States President, Dwight Eisenhower in 1958, as shown in the image below.
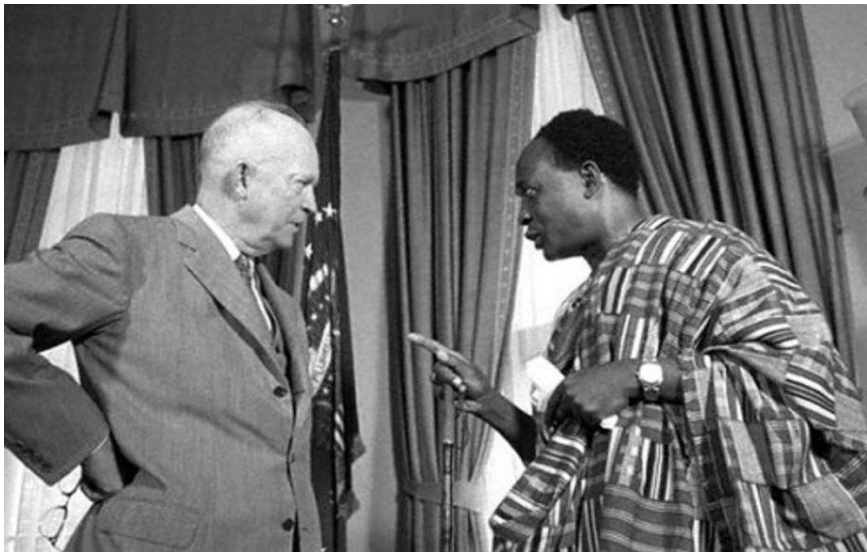

Figure 4.16 President Dwight Eisenhower (left) and President Kwame Nkrumah (right, and in kente) (Source: Inside UNC Charlotte)

Shortly afterwards, the organizers of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s adopted kente as a cultural-political symbol for Black Pride, leading to kente becoming an effective symbol for racial, cultural, and identity politics and representation among Black people in the diaspora. In the next chapter, I provide detailed illustrations of how kente weaving is used as a rhetorical and technical communication practice.

Wefting Rhetorical and Technical Communication Resonances

Scholars like Bokor (2016) make forceful claims about the deep-seated rhetorical dexterity of some Indigenous African meaning-making practices. I consider part of the purpose of the work of these scholars as an invitation to emerging scholars like me to undertake further research that expands better ways of appreciating and understanding the rhetoricity of certain meaning-making within African contexts. Any phenomena within African contexts are constructed by employing the philosophical and epistemological understandings rooted within the African worldviews.

According to Falola (2022), the ability to read African arts and textiles as texts and as "intelligence" or "a system of knowledge, a science, and a structure of interpretable signs" (p. 282) enables people to fully appreciate and understand the deep-seated knowledge and meanings that are embodied in the arts. This kind of examination of African textiles needs to be grounded within decolonial, specifically African-centered frameworks in order to achieve full and ultimate agency, appreciation, and comprehension of the claim that African textiles are knowledge systems and are rhetorical. Extending this point to kente weaving, it is worth noting that kente in itself as well as the practice of kente weaving is rhetorical. Kente and its rhetoricity has not received considerable attention in research. Drawing on Bokor's and Falola's scholarly work, I use the subsections to draw attention to the deep-seated rhetorical dexterity of kente and the practice of kente weaving.

Material Rhetoric Resonance

As mentioned earlier, Beckson (2020) calls attention to the "materiality of beads" as the examination of the rhetoric of beads will contribute to "redefin[ing] and negotiat[ing] the vital connection between objects and bodies." In furthering Beckson's argument, knowledge making vitally hinges on the relationality that exists between materials and humans as well as the actions, interactions, and decisions across temporality of relationality between humans and non-humans (materials).

As Driskill says, "We're not the ones who forget. We remember. … Our bodies hold everything we are told to forget" (qtd. In Haas 77), so does kente hold our embodied life experiences and stories in remembrance for us. As I extend Driskill's claim, material acts like kente making help us keep alive our culture, languages, embodied experiences and survivance experiences. Through kente, we, the makers who are predominantly from poor backgrounds, communicate our lives through the designs and names that we give to both the designs and the different kinds of kente that we make. We do this as our performance of remembrance of the (cultural and social) knowledges that our bodies hold; it serves as what Devika Chawla calls "guarding stories" (p.20). Kente, as guarding stories, is crucial to our quest not to forget the past while we breathe hopefulness in our performance of kente. We pride in giving out (obviously not for free) the "holders of our guarding stories" to people of wealth as we also aspire to make it in life -- for me, that is hope in survivance. Wilson (2008) argues that our relationships with non-human objects plays an important role in indigenous knowledge production and meaning making (p.86-88).

Technical Communication Resonance

The field of technical communication largely focuses on writing and communication approaches and practices that involve presenting complex information to specific audiences (groups of people) who need that information to accomplish a task or achieve a goal. One of the important components of technical communication is design thinking. According to Jason Tham (2022)*,* "Design thinking has become an increasingly common catchphrase among technical communication practitioners …" (p.261). In kente weaving, design thinking has always been about technical communication of information or a message and about addressing socio-cultural needs. Communicating a message, story, or information through designs and patterns demands application of technical knowledge of using kente to achieve that goal. The approach of design thinking from an Indigenous African perspective characterizes design as personal, social, cultural, and political, in similar way scholars in the field of rhetorical and writing studies have argued about writing. In kente weaving, design thinking is considered a non-linear path and a culturally specific endeavor (based on socio-cultural dynamics). In effect, design thinking in kente weaving underscores the imperativeness of technical communicators to embrace cultural inclusivity and knowledge in design work to avoid the chance of "racially biased and culturally ignorant designs" (Tham, 2022, p.272) hurting users, especially users from historically marginalized backgrounds. Kente weaving emphasizes the need to understand users—in terms of their needs and expectations, challenge assumptions through diversity, and promote innovation in design and design thinking through critical reimagination.

Beyond design thinking, design making in kente weaving is highly technical, therefore needs to be taught to anyone interested in weaving. Weaver Kudoda emphasizes the importance of a weaver undergoing:

Oh, the design. You have to learn it [how to make designs and patterns in kente]. Some [designs and patterns] are complex. Some are very simple, but you need to learn it. You have to be taught how to (switched to Ewe*) alesi ke na for ka hafi atenu awor adanue* [English: how to program the design and how to use it when weaving]. Sometimes some people would want to design an image in the kente, for example, a chief's staff or a chief's stool [a tool used by the traditional leaders of the Indigenous people]. You need to be taught how to be able to do all these things and use the relevant weaving tools, such as the flat board (bar), during the weaving process.

Corroborating from my personal experiences and expertise in kente weaving, programming a desired design and patterns during kente weaving requires adeptness in expertise in design thinking and application of mathematical and architectural knowledge. The application of technical communication in the area of architecture relates to the geometrical shapes that are designed by weavers. Examples include pyramids, conical shapes, among others.

Weaver Kudoda in highlighting this point says:

The kind of design you want to make in the kente also determines other tools needed to be used. It's a procedure (referring to design making in kente). If you do it about five or seven (switched to Ewe) *adanu si ke ne e ye awor, ne ekore tso gbantor dzia, ele be neva wu enu*. [And then] you'll come back with it. (switched to Ewe) *Eku de alesi ke ne for ka nuti*. (English: The designs are programed using mathematical principles and formulae and step-by-step design procedure.) As such, any weaver who enters the loom follows the design procedure and the mathematical formulae strictly to realize the desired design as programed. (switched to Ewe) *Esi wonye be adanua de neworm eye medze be amesiame na kpor o ta la, adanua nutor nora avor gorme. Ke dziafoa nyea avor megbe.* (English: In

the making of the design, the outer surface of the kente doesn't show the actual design.

It's the underneath surface of the kente (in the loom) that shows the intended design by

the weaver).

Thus, kente weavers engage in technical communication in relation to design and pattern

programming. They communicate among themselves about designs and patterns through coded

language, which includes the use of mathematical principles and formulas.

Cultural Rhetoric Resonance

Culturally and socially situatedness of writing and rhetoric emphasizes the significance of having

the much-needed conversation about the question: *what is writing* in the general field of rhetoric

and writing studies and its related fields. The practice of kente weavers, especially Agbozume

kente weavers, weaving for users beyond their cultural communities highlights the intercultural

approach in doing rhetoric and writing work. These weavers understand the value of learning

how to effectively communicate across diverse cultures and prevent misunderstandings that can

arise from differences in rhetorical norms. A critical belief that drives cultural rhetoric is that

cultures are rhetorical and rhetoric is cultural. This highlights the importance of cultural

influences on writing and rhetoric and vice versa. As writing and rhetoric is culturally situated,

taking any writing or rhetorical practice out of context causes harm to the cultural community

that engages in that writing or rhetorical practice. Thus, to better understand the significance of

any writing and/or rhetorical practice, it is imperative to examine that practice through a

framework rooted within that specific culture. Unless a transcultural vehicle is created to

examine how writing and rhetorical practices from different cultures could be blended to achieve

the desired utmost goal.

Kente—like wampum and other rhetorical artifacts rooted in Indigenous cultures worldwide—is often misunderstood or underappreciated by those outside these communities, particularly in terms of its rhetorical complexity. As cultural rhetoric challenges the dominance of Euro-Western rhetorical traditions as the sole legitimate forms of writing and communication, kente and the practice of kente weaving exemplify the rhetorical dexterity embedded in Indigenous African knowledge-making practices. Cultural rhetoric affirms that rhetorical practices are culturally situated and diverse, offering a crucial lens for reimagining what counts as writing, rhetorical action, and communication. In this context, kente weavers in Ghana understand their craft not merely as artistic expression but as a communicative act—intentionally designed to persuade, convey meaning, and engage audiences through color, pattern, symbolism, and performance.

Digital and Multimodal Rhetoric Resonance

In her Chair's Address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (2004), Kathleen Yancey (2004) called for a critical rethinking and paradigm shift in how writing teacher-scholars understand writing. Yancey's address was crucial not just because it calls for a paradigm shift but also this call underscores the significance of recovering and reclaiming composition or writing practices that have been neglected, erased, and/or colonized, probably because many of these practices are peculiar to cultures outside the Euro-Western world. Kente and kente weaving illustrate how multimodality involves" ... affective, embodied, and material dimensions of writing …" (Shipka, 2011, p.130). Kente and kente weaving complicate how multimodal writing is mostly defined or understood among many people. This practice of knowledge making draws teacher-scholar's attention to the application of multimodality in writing by not only focusing on writing in the new media. Kente weaving involves the use of

different technologies—not only electronic technologies—and the application of different modes.

Drawing on Angela Haas's assertion that all writing is digital (Haas, 2007, p. 84), I contend that kente weaving is digital, as it involves the specialized form of coding and communication of knowledge. Similar to wampum (Haas, 2007), the patterns and designs in kente serve as hypertexts of messages and stories. As it is a characteristic of digital and multimodal writing to have a visual rhetoric component, so it is with kente weaving. Kente is a visual text that communicates knowledge through colors (as colors have their respective meanings), patterns (as they are representations of specific meanings/knowledges), and designs (as they hold specific stories and messages).

Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrates clearly the significance that kente and kente weaving hold in connection to rhetoric and writing studies and technical communication. Kente and kente weaving practice can be used for a variety of rhetorical work and purposes such as underscoring communality in knowledge making; shaping cultural, political and embodied identity and knowledge making practice; and serving as a repository of culture, history, knowledge, and communication. This chapter of analysis invites a deeper consideration of how cultural knowledge shapes design, usability, and meaning-making practices. Kente weaving practice underscores the imperative for technical communicators to engage in inclusive, context-specific, and relational approaches that create space for diverse ways of knowing and creating, for instance, in design thinking.

CHAPTER 5: FINISHING THE WEAVING

In this final chapter, I will discuss the broader implications of my research for disciplinary, pedagogical, and methodological practices. I begin by examining how African rhetoric urges a rethinking and expansion of disciplinary boundaries within rhetoric and communication studies. I then consider how this research contributes to ongoing conversations about centering decolonial research practices that are contextually grounded and ethically engaged. Next, I reflect on the pedagogical implications of the study, particularly in relation to culturally responsive teaching and learning. I also outline potential directions for future research inspired by this work. I conclude the chapter with a call to embrace *sankofa* as a critical orientation for research—one that emphasizes intentional reclamation or recovery from the past to inform more inclusive and relational futures. While this study focuses on (Indigenous) African rhetoric, its insights have relevance that can be adapted and engaged across a range of cultural and disciplinary contexts.

African Rhetoric: Toward a Transcultural Approach

Doing scholarly work on African rhetoric reveals how knowledge making in African contexts can be used to bring to light deep-seated knowledge making at the core of their everyday and cultural practices. It is used to construct better representations and positive identity for themselves, communities, and their ways of life, while pushing back at dominant narratives used to marginalize, colonize, and relegate their ways of life and thinking to the background over centuries. Just like every culture, African cultures have positive practices that can contribute to global education (Tedla, 1995). African scholars can build on these positive practices and knowledges as foundation for reimagining education and pedagogical practices that bring out the best out of African students, and beyond.

Another benefit of African rhetorical scholarship is that it can be used to challenge dominant practices and definitions of literacy, rhetoric, and communication. This study exemplifies how communication and rhetoric can emerge from material, spatial, and embodied knowledge. For instance, connecting kente weaving to design thinking—grounded in *sankofa*—affirms the sophistication of African Indigenous knowledge systems and their capacity to inform contemporary frameworks in education, rhetoric, design, and communication. It makes a case for the legitimacy and pedagogical value of Indigenous practices as sites of theory, critiques, inquiry, and innovations.

As African rhetoric emphasizes the profound rhetoricity of everyday practices, no matter how small they might be, it becomes clearer that everything is rhetoric and rhetoric is everything. For instance, our dressing, our songs, our drumming and dancing, our food, our craft and artwork among others are rhetorical. From personal experiences, many people in and out of academia always ask me this question—*what is rhetoric?*—after telling them about what you study or teach in school. Even after explaining it to them, they seemingly remain confused, probably more confused than ever. This confusion is not only limited to people who are not students or teachers of rhetoric, it permeates even the field of rhetoric and its related fields. African rhetoric as one of the broad traditions of rhetoric contributes to making it easier to explain what really rhetoric to a layman is. The diversity and cultural underpinnings of rhetorical practices demonstrate the need for space for all rhetorical traditions to work together, driven by communal spirit. African rhetoric recognizes and celebrates knowledge making practices that involve rhetorical technology, as revealed by the findings in this study. Kente weaving is a rhetorical technology—a material and symbolic system for encoding, circulating, and interpreting meaning.

In rhetorical and communication studies, technology is not just a tool but mediating systems that shape knowledge and its identity.

Research Implications: Centering Decolonial Practices

This study reiterates the call by decolonial scholars to centering non-Western knowledges and frameworks. A research approach emerging from kente and kente weaving will enable educators to introduce decolonial methodologies by using African epistemologies as *a* primary rather than supplementary. Implementing this scholarly stance will disrupt the assumption that knowledge flows *only* from the Global North or from written textual traditions. It will also encourage both educators and students to interrogate how coloniality has shaped academic discourse, and how reclaiming Indigenous methods and knowledge making practices—like kente weaving—can shift how we research, write, and teach. Another reimagination will be that this approach will open space for community-based and relational ways of knowing in research practice.

The sankofa principle embedded in kente weaving offers a guiding research logic that it is critically beneficial to look back to fetch valuable knowledges, practices across cultures in our reenvisioning of a better future. In terms of research, centering and creating space for historical and diverse cultural knowledges, even in formation of research questions and methods, is crucial. As part of research process, it is always important to continuously reflect critically on epistemic inheritance and positionality—how our cultural and intellectual lineages and heritage shape inquiry.

Directions for Further Studies

As a researcher, I have some big questions that are at the core of my research. These include the following:

- In what ways can research be done, used, and taught to effectively support a wide range of communities?

- What kinds of inquiries and approaches help us examine whether our practices are truly serving the needs of communities?

These questions heavily influenced my decision to conduct this study, as I was concerned about how some knowledge making practices and discussions about their rhetorical dexterity have been missing in disciplinary and scholarly conversations. I became interested in conducting this research with a goal of reclaiming the rhetorical dexterity of these practices—specifically kente weaving, which is rooted within African rhetorical contexts and African thought. As I explained earlier, the difference in conceptualizations of knowledge and rhetoric in African contexts from Western contexts emphasizes the need for the application of frameworks that are rooted within African thought to investigate any phenomena in African communities. This claim and the fact that I could not find a methodological framework that could allow me to do purposive reclamation or recovery work as well as build relationality as a foundation for my study led me to design sankofa methodology. In doing this, I continuously engaged with my research participants—kente weavers of Ewe background—while adopting a community approach from my cultural and kente weaving backgrounds. I used counter storytelling and talking circles as a blended method to gather relevant information on kente and kente weaving. This approach, in general, supports the contention that Indigenous communities become bonded when power is shared, as knowledge making is a communal practice among kente weavers in Ghana.

As I look forward to the future directions of this study, it is crucial to center Indigenous (African) research frameworks. One of doing this is decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2021). This needs to be a critical move to be made by researchers, especially those whose research

bothers on ways of life of Indigenous communities and peoples. Along this line, a future study will interrogate the strategies of applying sankofa methodology cross-culturally, the concerns it might generate (for example, possible displacement of the epistemologies, philosophies, and ontologies of non-African cultures), and how to address these concerns. Some of the questions that may guide my future engagements are:

- How might *sankofa's* principles grounding this methodology be adapted to non-African contexts in a way that complements rather than overrides Indigenous frameworks?

- What safeguards are needed to ensure its application beyond Indigenous contexts?

This future research will clearly articulate and demonstrate how, for example, many American students could benefit more from adopting this methodological framework in their research. Notwithstanding how grounding the design of sankofa methodology in Indigenous African thought could be limiting for many Americans, Black communities—especially African American communities—can adopt or adapt this methodology in their research.

Along similar lines of decolonial research, another future research will be directed at a more in-depth examination of what technical communicators could learn from kente and kente weaving, especially in design thinking. As visual rhetoric plays a critical role in communication, learning more about how kente weavers engage design thinking in communicating important messages through patterning, proverbs, designing among others will improve the work of technical communicators.

As a teacher, another research direction that is critical to teaching and learning is examining the pedagogical implications of this study. Some questions that can be used in guiding such future research include:

- How do we guide students and ourselves to understand the value of involving all communities in making and communicating knowledge?

- How can we employ *sankofa* and cultural humility in reclaiming marginalized and/or missing pedagogical practices that have significant implications for teaching and learning?

These questions are critically important particularly in attempts to address the enduring legacies of marginalization and colonialism in education. Without recovery and reclamation work, classrooms stand the risks of reinforcing problematic and exclusionary practices and epistemologies. Recovery becomes essential not only for historical justice but also for building more equitable and expansive futures in rhetoric, writing, and technical communication education.

Specific to kente weaving, this practice foregrounds the idea that literacy, rhetoric, and communication are not confined to alphabetic text, as kente weaving involves pattern, color, movement, memory, and community context. Understanding kente and kente weaving as both a rhetorical practice and a form of technical communication offers critical pedagogical possibilities, especially in writing, rhetoric, design, and communication classrooms.

Practicing *Sankofa*

In closing this dissertation, I want to encourage all of us to take time to reflect on our lives to ascertain how the concept of *sankofa* plays out in how we reimagine the future and thus plan for the future. As we navigate toward the futures we envision for ourselves, our families, our communities, and posterity, we must recognize that there are valuable aspects of our collective past—stories, practices, values—that await intentional reclamation. The principle of *sankofa* teaches us that the act of looking back is not mere nostalgia but a critical practice of recovering

what is meaningful and life-giving from the past. Yet this recovery must be done with care: the past holds both joy and pain, wisdom and wounds. Not all that is old is worth reclaiming, and uncritical recovery of painful legacies risks retraumatizing individuals and communities. *Sankofa*, therefore, offers not just permission but a framework—grounded in critical intentionality—for retrieving what nourishes us while leaving behind what hinders our growth. In this spirit, this study centers the rhetorical and cultural significance of kente weaving, not simply as a symbolic artifact but as a living, breathing practice that carries the wisdom, aesthetics, and philosophies of the Ewe people. It also opens new pathways for rhetorical inquiry—pathways attentive to materiality, embodiment, and Indigenous knowledge-making.

As a teacher-scholar, my commitment is to bring these insights—rooted in African thought and community-centered practices—into research, pedagogy, and broader scholarly conversations. This dissertation is both an act of recovery and a call to action: an invitation to explore the erased, missing, or marginalized ways of knowing within our own communities and to integrate them into how we teach, learn, and communicate. It underscores the importance of relationality—the human connections and communal support systems that sustain us—and of critical intentionality, a mindset that honors the temporal links between past, present, and future. Whether we were raised in Agbozume, Accra, Atlanta, Toronto, or Chicago, we all rely on the strength of community to overcome obstacles and build meaningful lives. As Indigenous concepts like co-creation and communality gain renewed traction in academia and beyond, we are reminded that community is not just a context but a method, a site for knowledge, care, and belonging. By embracing *sankofa* as a methodological and philosophical approach, we affirm the ongoing responsibility to remember, to relate, and to weave futures from the threads of our collective past.

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APPENDIX

Talking Circle Session

Guiding Questions:

1. You are Ewe and a native speaker of Ewe. How often do you engage in kente weaving?
2. How did you learn kente weaving?
3. What technical and technological knowledge is required to engage in kente weaving?
4. What would you say about the history of kente weaving among the Ewe people?
5. What are the functions of kente pieces (as artifacts) and kente weaving (as a practice)?
6. What roles do kente or kente weaving play in the following areas:
   a. Communication?
   b. History?
   c. Indigenous education?
   d. rhetoric?
7. Considering the influence of colonial legacies on Ghanaian cultures, how are kente and kente weaving used by the Ewes to assert and enact their identity and representation locally and globally?
8. Considering the significance of Indigenous knowledge systems, especially among the Ewe people, how could kente weaving influence the inclusion or situatedness of Indigenous knowledge systems in formal education?
9. What can kente weaving teach us about the importance of Indigenous and colonized knowledges, cultures, and meaning-making practices in building a better future globally?