

An Analysis of the Connections between Black Thought and the Culinary Ritual in the Context of Black Survival

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Abstract

In this article, we will draw an extended analogy between the centrality of 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun' in the solar system and the centrality of food—literally and figuratively—in Black culinary traditions. We will do so by means of Extended Analogy Layering (Kambon 2017a) interpretive analysis, in which we will look at the literal centrality of collectively-eaten food in Malidoma Somé's (1994) *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*; Camara Laye's (1954) *The African Child*; and Chinua Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart* as compared to the figurative centrality of 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun' in life as attested in the Song to the 𐀓𐀗𐀚 𐀓𐀗𐀚 'Aten' (Obenga, 2004). We find that these contemporary and classical texts, respectively, serve to mutually illuminate each other in that the meaning imbued in one text is further elucidated when compared with the other texts under study (Kambon 2017b).

Keywords: Black thought, culinary ritual, sun, food, Extended Analogy Layering

1.0 Introduction

The Song to the 𐀓𐀗𐀚 𐀓𐀗𐀚 'Aten' truly magnifies 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun' in a manner that leaves without a shadow of doubt that he, 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun', is truly 𐀓𐀗𐀚 *Hpr Ds.f* 'he who came to being on his own' (Obenga, 2004, p. 60). Later, in space and time, when the Sisala use the same word 'wia/wiisi' to refer to both the creator and 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun', and the Bakongo map out the cosmos using the 'Dikèngà', and refer to us, Black people, as living suns, it cannot be that such Ra-centric conceptions of reality can be taken for granted as mere references from the creative and intelligent minds of our 𐀓𐀗𐀚 𐀓𐀗𐀚 'Ancestors'. In this paper, we intend to relate the culinary ritual and/or protocols of Black people to the prominence of 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun' and his overlordship in the solar system. Using the Song to the Aten as a reference, we would show that the same prominence accorded to 𐀓𐀗𐀚 R' 'Ra, the Sun' as the giver of life may be perceived easily in food through the associated protocols that guide its consumption in the quintessential culinary reality of Black people. Three texts from the works of Black Afrikan creatives have been selected to illustrate the nature of the etiquette/protocols/procedures that attend consumption of food in the communal context of Black culture(s): Malidoma Somé's *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*; Camara Laye's *The African Child*; and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Each focus on themes that have nothing to do with how Black people on the continent organise themselves and perceive food as important matter that is crucial for survival. Yet, by dealing generally with life and living on the continent of Afrika, each of the texts provides a useful illustration for this work in terms of the sitting arrangement and

protocols/procedures/etiquette observed before, during and after meals which, as we will argue, are in alignment with natural phenomena.

Among many examples, architecture is one of the realms where Black people across space and time have demonstrated an acute understanding of our universe and have endeavoured to operate in tune with it, and there is a wealth of very rich literature that explores an interconnection between buildings and celestial phenomena (Griaule, 1965; Obenga, 2004; Belmonte et al., 2010; Belmonte et al., 2009; Kambon & Asare, 2019; Gumbe, 2020). This work discusses a new arena where Black people on the continent of Afrika have stayed true to living in alignment with nature by replicating their understanding of the workings of solar and celestial phenomena in the culinary domain.

In view of this, we will argue that the dining setup and protocols/procedures in the typical Black community is a microcosm of the solar system with $\sum_{i=1}^n R_i$ 'Ra, the Sun' at the centre bearing all the vital energy that is necessary for planetary functioning as is the case for food as far as human survival is concerned. In drawing these parallels, this study will use the Extended Analogy Layering (EAL) method pioneered by Kambon (2017a).

2.0 Putting Ingredients on Display: Creative Writing as Sources and Resources of Cultural Knowledge

The above four works mentioned in the introduction of the paper may be considered as the key ingredients that provide the vital nutrition necessary for advancing our proposal to see the similarities that arise from observing the solar system and the culinary etiquette/protocols/procedures observed among the culture(s) of Black people on the continent. If it is not redundant to explain, our reference to these selected works as ingredients with a potential nutritional value for our work is simply an extended analogy drawn from the culinary domain, owing from the fact that the paper partly discusses issues related to this domain. That is to say, the works of Achebe (1958), Laye (1954), Somé (1994) and the Song to the Aten (Obenga, 2004) are indispensable to the thrust of this argument as ingredients are indispensable to making an edible meal. A significant part of our preference for each of these works is because each one of them seeks to present reality in its own right as a result of a compulsion by the authors to be ambassadors of culture.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was born out of the writer's desire to challenge the othering of Afrikan culture for the purpose of ennobling the European's. He writes about this intellectual and ideological onslaught as

the desire – one might say the need – in western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will manifest...Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which better than any other work that I know displays that western desire and need which I have just referred to[,]...projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality (Irele, 2009, p. 170).

Thus, from this context, we get to learn from the singular perspective of Achebe about life and living in Igbo society in the late 1800s. While Achebe did not himself live in the period that he builds his story around, it is appropriate to state that he was born under cultural conditions

similar to what he depicts in the book. It is out of the medley of events from this account by the man, Chinua Achebe, that we will draw insights into what the nature of the context of eating looks like. Whatever the impact of the novel's attempt to present a positive image of Afrika may have been, it continues to provide us a medium to re-collect a past that may be of service to us, in many ways like this.

By drawing from Camara Laye's story, we get the opportunity to tap into Malinke life through the eyes of a man who participated in the events being narrated or witnessed them as they occurred. That is to say, even though a novel, *The African Child* is considered to be largely autobiographical, where the author narrates the story of his growing up years among his people (Laye, 1954, p. 3). From the book's introduction by William Plomer, we learn that,

It is not an earthly paradise to which Camara Laye introduces us, but a coherent society with a consistent manner of life which appears entirely free from vulgarity. It is a formal society permeated by a sense of mystery...[I]n work or in play (the line between which is not easily to be drawn and need not be drawn) nothing is cheapened, everything is given its due importance: the making of a trinket, etiquette at meal times, the harvesting of the rice, the rites of initiation into manhood, are communal acts in which the individual exerts his best scope or skill, because he has never a doubt that he belongs to what is going on and is a necessary part of it (Laye, 1954, pp. 7-8).

In presenting a story with the author being a partaker of the actual events, a certain measure of freshness is the result. As Laye engages his juvenile years via a prosaic stream of recollection, readers are afforded an introduction into a society with which the author has lost touch but remembers very dearly. It also indicates that as a result of the author's separation from his society, he was not equipped to be an authority on the culture from which he sprang; and this may be attributed to his discontinued engagement with it. This, nevertheless, does not interfere with the amount of cultural information that inheres in Laye's narrative concerning his growing up in a Malinke society. For readers as well as himself, the novel becomes a template that could be used to reconnect with culture for the sake of building an Afrikan identity.

Similar to *The African Child*, *Of Water and the Spirit* centres the human experience in a cultural milieu. It is considered, however, as a memoir; one of a kind in many ways, but particularly so in terms of the voice that carries the message. We observe that it is one thing to have a beautiful message and it is another thing to convey this message in the cleanest language possible – agreeable to the ear and profound to the being of the receiver. Baba Malidoma Somé, the quintessential Dagaon,¹ by virtue of the merit of this book, weaves the account of his life as a matter of cultural necessity and a will to fulfil his destiny. According to his own voice, “I deeply respect the story that I have told in this book. I respect it because it embodies everything that is truly me, my ancestors, my tribe, my life. It is a very complicated story whose telling caused me great pain; but I had to tell it” (Somé, 1994, p. 4). Rightly so, Somé's life swings like a pendulum between his home, surrounded by Dagaaba culture, and the seminary, inspired by Judaeo-Christian ideals, which he loathed terribly. In spite of his chequered experiences in the years of his upbringing, he was quite convinced of where he wanted to belong – in his culture.

Overall, it should not be taken for granted that texts that deal with human activity or more specifically, culture, usually take some time, even if unconsciously, to treat the subject of food

¹ Person of the Dagaare-speaking cultural-linguistic group.

and its consumption in some shape or form. Each of the three texts above discusses food, eating and the manner of doing so variously; however, only those aspects of it that deal with the manner are of importance to this work. All of the many references to food and eating in *Things Fall Apart*, *The African Child*, and *Of Water and the Spirit* are sound observations of reality pertaining to the contexts to which the texts refer. As we advance into the next text, the point we intend to reinforce is the idea that food is central to survival and thus should not be taken for granted. We eat because we need to survive, and as we would show, the associated etiquette/protocols that accompany the actual act of eating reinforce the notion that we eat to live, but better still that we must eat well to live well – the metaphor of the solar system with life-giving ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' at the centre intensifies this notion.

The Song to the 🌞 ☐tn 'Aten, Sun Disk' (Obenga, 2004) comes from the intellectual and creative heritage of ancient 🏛️ Kmt 'Land of Black People'. As such, it is useful to reiterate that this text is very pivotal to the core of our argument restated thusly: We will argue that the dining setup and protocols/procedures in the typical Black community is a microcosm of the solar system with ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' at the centre bearing all the vital energy that is necessary for planetary functioning as is the case for food as far as human survival is concerned. In drawing this extended analogy between the solar system and the dining setup and protocols/procedures, the Song to the 🌞 ☐tn 'Aten, Sun Disk' tells us why ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' is so prominent.

3.0 The Centrality of ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' in Life and Living as Evinced in the Song to the 🌞 ☐tn 'Aten, Sun Disk'

Some of the major themes in the Song to the 🌞 ☐tn 'Aten, Sun Disk' (Obenga, 2004) summarised as follows include rendering praise to the sun's beauty, inlaid with basic astronomical expressions of ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun's apparent movement in the celestial sphere; the effect on earth when ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' sets and the effect on earth when ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' rises; reference to origins of earth for the purpose of demonstrating the ancientness and prominence of ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' in this sense as the creator; and finally, actual references to ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun's influence on phenomena like the different seasons, rainfall patterns, and the greening of leaves for photosynthesis. Here are a few excerpts from the song for illustration:

3.1 Refocusing on the role of ☀️ R' 'Ra, the Sun' in creation:



šꜣ.wy s ☐ry.k

What a multitude of things you have made,



☐w šꜣ m hr pꜣ

even when they are invisible!

when you set, they die



ntk 'h'w r h'w.k

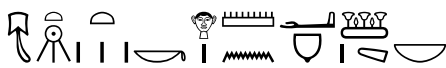
You are the very life to your body;



'nh.tw □m.k

one lives by you.” (following Obenga, 2004, p. 106)

3.2 The influence of R' 'Ra, the Sun' in terrestrial bloom and seasonal shifts:



stwt.k hr mn' }ht nb

Your rays nourish the countryside entire;



wbn.k 'nh.sn rd.sn n.k

as soon as you shine, they live and they grow towards you.






□r.k trw r shpr □ry.k nb



You made seasons for the transformation of all you have created:



prt r skbh sn hh dpt.f st tw

the season *peret* to cool them; the warm season for them to taste it.” (following Obenga, 2004, p. 104)


Save for the mythological material, the excerpt above provides us a glimpse of the value of  R' 'Ra, the Sun' in physical reality as he controls and sustains life and the cycles and seasons.  *hn □tn* Akhenaten's song (as it's authorship is ascribed to him) which has “been extolled as one of the jewels of universal literature” (Obenga, 2004, p. 108) provides us significant cultural information relating to the centrality of  R' 'Ra, the Sun' in the

universe of the ancient  *kmtyw* ‘Black people’ of  *Kmt* ‘Land of Black People’, and we may be gilding the lily by adding that:

It is well known that the pyramids, royal tombs built from the 3rd Dynasty (c. 2750 BC) to the 17th (c.1600 BC), were basically solar monuments. Invoking various modes of ascension such as stairways and shafts of sunlight, they putatively enabled the pharaohs to live, in the afterlife, either as companions of the Sun God, or as the Sun God in person. Similarly, obelisks, which proliferated in the New Kingdom, derived from the worship of the Sun God. We also know that beginning with Khefren, the fourth king of the 4th Dynasty (c. 2620 BC), who commissioned the sculpture of the Great Sphinx of Gizeh (representing, with his bearded visage, a solar god or king), Egyptian kings themselves came to be known formally as “sons of Ra.” This assertion of solar kinship was maintained in royal titles until the end of pharaonic civilization. (Obenga, 2004, p. 108)

Against the backdrop of all of this pervasive importance accorded to a single entity in the cosmos, we thought we had found an important parallel to draw in discussing the prominent place food must hold for Black people today, especially in conjunction with all of the etiquette/protocols/procedures that attend its consumption, which will be discussed later by drawing specific examples from the first three texts reviewed in this section. Now that we have displayed all the primary ingredients to be used for this paper, we will now shift our attention to preparing the vital output of the paper using the extractions from these primary ingredients mixed with other supplementary references.

4.0 Mixing Primary and Supplementary Ingredients to Produce a Meal: Connections Between the Solar System and the Culinary Etiquette/Protocols/Procedures

As we begin this section of the paper, we want to underscore that it is common practice that Black people across space and time have demonstrated our understanding of the cosmos in our worldview and how it is iterated. Consequently, we have proceeded to inhabit this earth bearing cognizance of the fact that all areas of people activity ought to fall in alignment, mimic and/or affirm the realities of the cosmos. Our attempt to draw the connection between  *R* ‘Ra, the Sun’, the solar system, food and culinary etiquette/protocols/procedures that guide its consumption is steeped in this phenomenon. Before we move forward to argue this case, we will take a few paragraphs to demonstrate how the phenomenon materialises in other areas of Black people activity.

In terms of constellations, “the Pleiades often play an important role in the agricultural lives of Black Afrikan communities. The Lobi of West Africa plant their crops as soon as this constellation appears at dawn” (Obenga, 2004, p. 344). This practice is born out of patient observation of movements of constellations to such a degree that it becomes verified knowledge on whose basis an extremely important activity such as agriculture is based. In order to buttress the significance of celestial phenomena to the practice of agriculture, Obenga further notes that “among the Bambara, diagrams of the movement of the sun are present in practically all agrarian rites...[T]he sun’s motion along the ecliptic is sometimes represented by choreographic images. At other times it is drawn on farm implements” (Obenga, 2004, p. 344). In relation to the Thonga, he adds,

Every new moon was welcomed with joyous shouts. The day the new moon appeared was called *Kengelekezee*, the Crescent, and celebrated as a day of rest. In other words,

social and religious life also revolved around this heavenly body. Days of rest were ritually set apart as taboo days, *shi must*, on which it was forbidden to do farm work, to weed, or to uproot plants. Babies were held up toward the moon in a presentation ceremony in which they were told the name of the month of their birth. In this way the moon was used as a reference point for dating births and keeping track of people's ages. (Obenga, 2004, p. 356)

Even after our time here on earth was physically over, there was still a structured practice of endeavouring to bury in alignment with cosmic orientations. Marcel Griaule in his reference to the positioning of the dead in their graves according to the Dogon states that “the man lies on his right side facing west, and the woman on her left side facing east, which are the positions they will occupy in the grave” (Griaule, 1970, p. 95). A similar interest for burying the dead

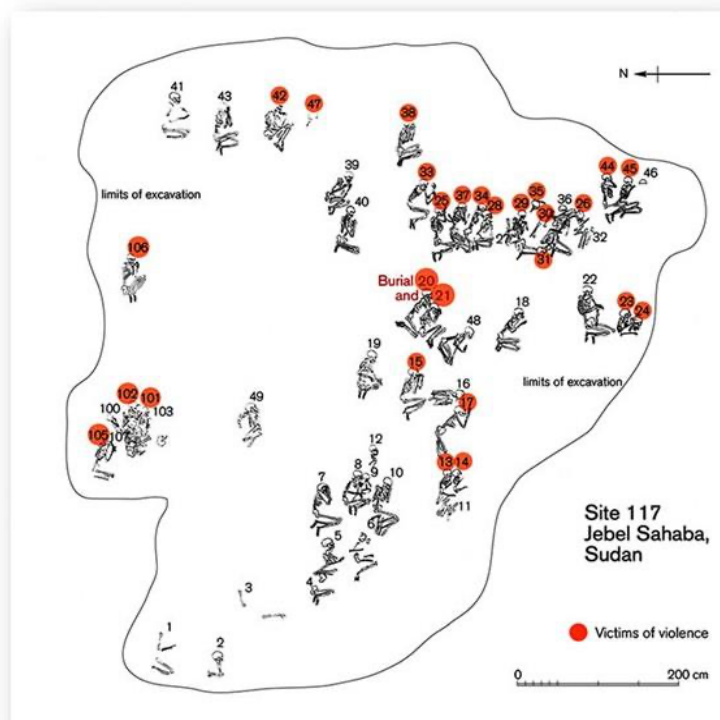


Figure 1.
Cemetery 117, Jebel Sahaba (Kambon & Asare, 2019)

with respect to cosmic orientations is found in the Jebel Sahaba cemetery located in Nubia, present day Northern Sudan, where “Afrikans [were] buried in the fetal position facing south and with their heads oriented toward the east” (Kambon & Asare, 2019, p. 221).

We will finish off our illustrations by descending from the sky (because our illustrations have mainly focused on solar and celestial phenomena) to present a final example on land, where Black people have, apart from celestial phenomena, also sought to align with terrestrial phenomena. Among the Musgum, the *teleuk* building style draws inspiration from the physical structure and the materials of termite hills. Apparently, termite mounds are built using a combination of soil, spittle and dung whereas the *teleuk* consists of clay, water, grass and dung (Gumbe, 2020, p. 108). For a visual impression of the *teleuk* building in relation to the termite hill, see Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.



Figure 2.

Picture of Teleuk Buildings (Gumbe, 2020)



Figure 3.

Picture of Termite Hills (Gumbe, 2020)

Against the background of these illustrations, to start with, we think that the direct relationship between food and ☰☱ R' 'Ra, the Sun' is more apparent in a sense that it allows for an easier connection to be drawn between this solar entity – ☰☱ R' 'Ra, the Sun' – and the product of the regular human being's activity in their quest to sustain life – food. According to the *Collins English Dictionary* (n.d.), food is any substance consumed to provide nutritional support for an organism. Apart from air and water, it is considered to be next in importance to life in the context of human survival. Moreover, the condition that allows food to occupy this primary place in human survival is directly and/or indirectly related to the functioning of the sun.

In classical ☰☱ Kmt 'Land of Black People', the birthplace of the Song to the Aten, three common virtues that are regularly associated with ☰☱ R' 'Ra, the Sun' include "life, energy and perennity" (Obenga, 2004, p. 117). All of these are embedded in the phenomenon of photosynthesis, which is considered as the primary source of energy and food for nearly all life on earth (Messinger et al., 2018); in other words, it is through the process of photosynthesis that the light energy emitted from the sun is converted into chemical energy which sustains the plants, which are in turn central to human and animal life in myriad ways. In essence, and more so moving beyond photosynthesis,

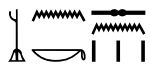
Solar radiation is an unflinching source of energy for the Earth. Without visible and infrared (IR) radiation from the Sun, Earth's surface temperature would be too cold to support life. Nor would there be energy to fuel photosynthesis or power the circulations of the lower atmosphere and oceans that profoundly influence living organisms. Lacking solar ultraviolet (UV) radiative inputs, Earth's middle atmosphere would be devoid of ozone and its upper atmosphere cold and unionized. Living things would be exposed to damaging high-energy solar photons. Society would lack the many benefits of Earth-orbiting space-craft and global communication. (Lean, 1997, pp. 33–34)

To return to the virtues Obenga (2004) describes as being associated with ☰☱ R' 'Ra, the Sun' by the ☰☱ Kmtyw 'Black People', life and energy, for example, are technically and fundamentally imbued in the power that resides in food; whether life is perceived as a consequence of having adequate amounts of energy from a sufficient supply of food or if both are mutually exclusive as benefits existing in food, the same principle/relevance unflinching applies. The following are few textual references to buttress the point:



rs h' hr rdwy.tsy

Awakened, humans rise to your feet



rs.n.k sn

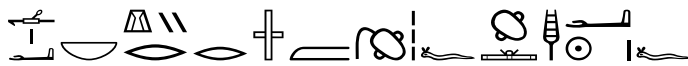
because you have roused them. (Obenga, 2004, p. 100)

(...)



rd.k s nb r st.f r.k hrt .sn

You have placed each man in his environment and supplied his need(s):



W' nb hry r wnmw.f hsb h'w.f

given each one his food, allotted to each his time of life. (following Obenga, 2004, p. 103)

As extracts from the Song to the Aten, these quotes re-centre the prominence of R' 'Ra, the Sun' in the context of the above listed virtues. The line translated in English as 'you have placed each human being in his environment and supplied his need: given each one his food, allotted to each his time of life', refers to R' 'Ra, the Sun' in his mythological role as the creator in ancient Kmt 'Land of Black People', but presently and in this time, as we have already discussed, R' 'Ra, the Sun' is metaphorically and literally ultimately responsible for our nourishment, which is our source of energy and life in perennity. Granted that we wished to stretch the point, R' 'Ra, the Sun'-like power that is associated with food, thus making it a perennial life and energy giver, is reflected in the zeal that is normally associated with eating in the context of traditional Afrika. According to Achebe,

The story was always told of a wealthy man who set before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other, and it was not until late in the evening that one of them saw for the first time his in-law who had arrived during the course of the meal and had fallen to on the opposite side. It was only then that they exchanged greetings and shook hands over what was left of the food. (Achebe, 1958, p. 11)

The context of this excerpt, above, in the book was couched as a historical allusion to the annual celebrations pertaining to the coming of new yam, which definitely signified abundance, as is reinforced by the quote. The same enthusiasm is evinced in *Of Water and the Spirit* when "seven hands assaulted the dishes, determined to empty them, and the meal was enjoyed in

silence. For the Dagara, there is no such thing as a plate for each person, because in the context of a real community, separate plates cultivate separateness” (Somé, 1994, p. 178). An arising observation from the two quotes that is worth highlighting is actually explicitly stated in the second quote in the following phrase: *‘separate plates cultivate separateness’*. For us, the essence of collective eating, at least, makes sure that no one is left out and that everyone is a witness to the recharge that every Black person needs perennially in order to get their quota of life and energy—ultimately derived from ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’. Thus, food becomes the vitality needed to begin tasks and to sustain them up until their completion, and this may include anything in between the spectrum of simple to complex tasks including farm work, locomotion, Black Liberation, conversation, building a house, thinking, and so on. This discussion addresses the centrality of ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’ on multiple levels as depicted in Figure 2. Just as food gives life and is at the centre of the gathering of Black people seeking sustenance, so too is ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’ at the centre of life metaphorically as attested in the Song to the ☱☰ Aten, Sun Disk’ and literally at the centre of the solar system.

Another passage worthy of consideration addresses the reverence with which food was

regarded as also parallel to the reverence accorded to the ☱☰ Aten, Sun Disk’ in the Song to the ☱☰ Aten, Sun Disk’. In the text is a description whereby “dinner began with the hand-washing ceremony. The male leader was first, followed by the next-oldest person and so on till the youngest had washed. The first bit of food was always offered to the spirit of the earth shrine. This is called a clearance bite. My father always performed this ceremony” (Somé, 1994, p. 178). Also, from *The African Child*, Camara tells us about what pertained among the Malinke thusly:

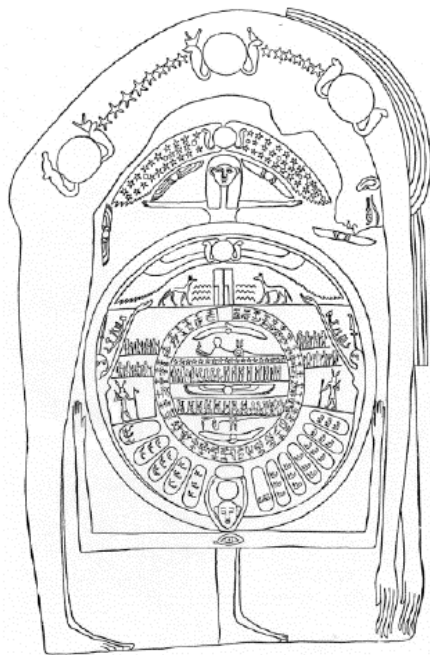


Figure 4.

Centrality of Ra on Multiple Levels including at the Centre of the World Depicted as Round on the Sarcophagus of Wereshnefer (Kambon 2017a)

[I]t was forbidden to cast my gaze upon guests older than myself, and I was also forbidden to talk: my whole attention had to be fixed on the food in front of me. In fact, it would have been considered most impolite to chatter at that moment. Even my younger brothers knew that this was no time to jabber: this was the moment to honour our food. Older people observed more or less the same silence. (Laye, 1954, p. 57)

Our comparison between food and ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’ has been for the express purpose of showing the importance, or centrality, that must be attached to food by drawing on the magnified place ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’ holds in Black thought. Part of the relevance that ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’ exudes is associated with ritual and/or the spiritual, where among other things, ☰☱ R’ ‘Ra, the Sun’, for example, is deified and thus plays a central role in the


spiritual and physical life of the ancient  Kmtyw ‘Black People’, where he was revered and honoured (Obenga, 2004; Allen, 2015). Along similar lines, the last two quotes above discuss food as holding some spiritual relevance and the moment of its consumption as ritual-like. This is the essence of the Extended Analogy Layering as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Extended Analogy Layering table

Central Giver of Life	Circumferential Receiver of Life
Sun	Planets
(Centrally-placed collectively-eaten) Food	Human Beings

Table 2.
Depictions of Life-Giving Rays of the Sun Holding the Ankh Symbol of Life featuring Akhenaten, Attributed Composer of the Song of the Aten
(Photo Credit: Obádélé Kambon, 2016)





Figure 5.
Collective Eating around Centrally Placed Food
 (Photo Credit: <https://bit.ly/3g350oe>)

In reference to Isidore Okpewho, the act of eating may be considered as a combination of the elements of mime and celebration (Okpewho, 1992, p. 264). The term mime is used because, as the texts suggest, food was generally eaten in silence. The silence, however, was not without some theatrical effects from the hierarchy that attends the sequence of the handwashing ceremony, the special morsel offered to the Ancestors, and the gendered division of the food for consumption. Thus, in myriad ways, the act of eating could be considered as a ritual dramatic performance of the sacred art of eating in order to stay alive and energised. Consequently, then, the act of filling one's belly with powerful life-giving energy and nutrition from 𐄂𐄃𐄄 R' 'Ra, the Sun' becomes a remarkable celebration. In a sense, when we eat, we are actually eating the transformations of the sun in the form of energy absorbed on earth.

Ultimately, it is truly right to reiterate that “the Sun is part of the life of the body of creatures on earth. When it dies or disappears every evening, creatures fall into the somnolence of death. They wake when the Sun awakens and reappears. If the Sun died definitively, all creatures would die forever” (Obenga, 2004, p. 116). By the same token, like 𐄂𐄃𐄄 R' 'Ra, the Sun', the absence of food renders the body hungry, weak and frail, but once food is introduced to it, it becomes energised and beams with life; consequently, a protracted denial of food to the body will only lead the body to its demise.

At this point, we would like to expand the discussion to include the solar system while, of course, still maintaining/recognising 𐄂𐄃𐄄 R' 'Ra, the Sun' at the centre in one instance and the dining setup with food at the centre on the other instance. For clarification, the dining setup basically includes food in the centre with its partakers surrounding it; from this understanding, and drawing on the significance of circles and cycles in Black cosmology, we will show that the dining setup with food at the centre is a microcosm of the solar system with 𐄂𐄃𐄄 R' 'Ra, the Sun' at the centre.

Everything exists within the belly of time, and nothing in this section can really be fully expressed without an explanation of time, particularly as it is experienced and expressed by Black people. That is to say, the significance of circles and cycles in the Black world is commensurate with the cyclical and circular understanding of time. According to the Kongo, for example, time is perceived as a cyclical entity which neither has a beginning or an end, and as an entity, it has two conditions of being – an abstract and a concrete (Fu-Kiau, 1994, p. 20). It is in its abstraction that a clear beginning and end is unknown, an idea which is evinced in the damballa – the snake with its tail in its mouth. Moreover, time’s being in a concrete sense is characterized by *dunga* (events) “that make time perceptible, providing the unending flow of time with specific ‘dams’, events, or periods of time” (Fu-Kiau, 1994, pp. 20–21). Hence, time is like a seat that can be occupied, such as on a Ferris wheel; time can rotate cyclically and unendingly with or without being occupied by *dunga* (events). Events here may characterise any activities that are engaged in or experienced by Black people, for example, menstrual cycles, agricultural cycles, water cycles, life cycles, and so on. Of course, we have intentionally used examples of events that have the word cycle in them to highlight the point on circles and cycles, but there are other phenomena across the Black cosmic space that happen in cycles/circles but do not necessarily constitute the word ‘cycle/circle’ nominally.

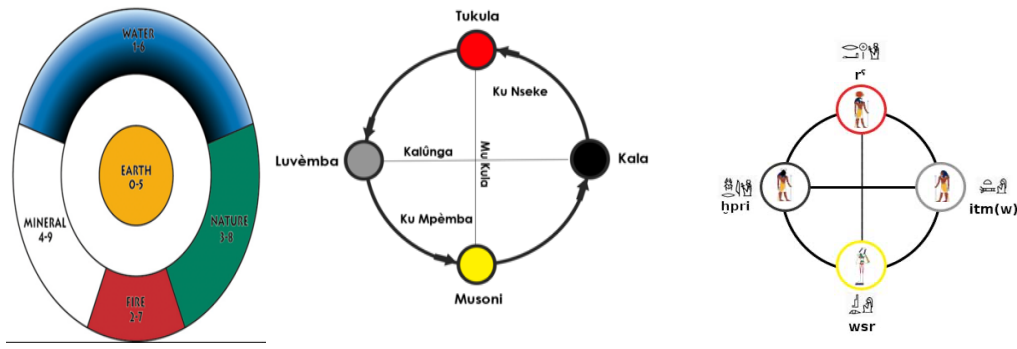







Figure 6.
Time Cycles in Black Thought
(Kambon 2017a)

By way of quickly illustrating, the depictions above are artistic renderings of cosmology as is perceived by the Dagaaba, Bakongo and ancient  *Kmt*yw ‘Black People’, respectively. Of specific interest are those from Kongo and  *Kmt* ‘Land of Black People’ because they are heliocentric in perspective, which magnifies the value of  *R* ‘Ra, the Sun’ and really further validates the symbolic value being drawn from  *R* ‘Ra’s, the Sun’s’ existence to explain the place food must hold for Black people of today. Beyond this, the core point is that the phenomena of cycles and circles are recurrent motives enshrined in the fabric of our worldview. Time is cyclical, and the world is round; indeed,  *phrt pw* ‘nh’ ‘Life is a cycle’ (Faulkner, 1956, p. 22; Kambon, 2019, p. 2). Even the solar system, including the sun and the planets moving about it, must move in a cycle/circle in their own orbits and around the sun to stay alive. That is to say, “the Sun is the center of the solar system. All other bodies in the solar system, such as planets, dwarf planets, asteroids, comets and dust, as well as all satellites associated with these bodies, rotate around the Sun” (Alcoforado, 2021, p. 8). By the same token, Black people in the quintessential dining setup congregate perennially around food to obtain the needed energy and life stored in food as is suggested from the illustrative excerpts below:

1. When my mother prepared meals, she always made two servings, one for the males and the other for the females. Father presided over male meals and she presided over female meals. *We always sat in a circle around the dish.* The grown-ups sat on stools, and the young sat with their left legs folded under their butts as a seat. (Somé, 1994, p. 178) (emphasis added)

2. *We would squat down round the platters,* and the hot couscous, made even hotter by the spices in it, would disappear, engulfed in great mouthfuls. (Laye, 1954, p. 53) emphasis added)

3. In the morning, when, after some persuasion, we rose, we would find the breakfast all ready. My mother used to get up at dawn to prepare it. *We would all squat round the great steaming platters:* my parents, sisters, brothers and the apprentices, those who shared my bed as well as those who had their own hut. There would be one dish for the men, and another for my mother and my sisters.” (Laye, 1954, p. 56) (emphasis added)



Figure 7.

Photo credit:

modernghana.com/news/649351/beyond-free-school-meals.html

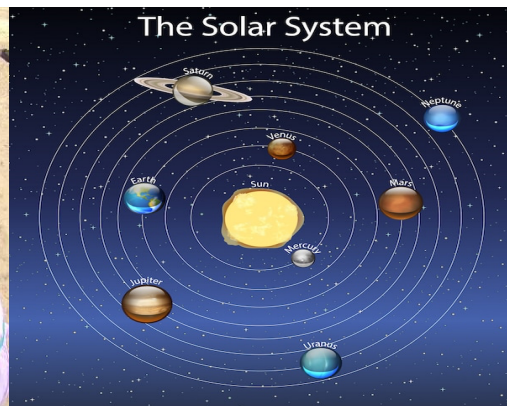


Figure 8.

Photo credit:

freepik.com/free-vector/diagram-showing-solar-system_6409371.htm

Finally, it might be necessary to point out that, it takes 3.2 minutes to 4.1 hours, respectively, for ☉ *R' 'Ra's*, the Sun's' light to travel from Mercury, the planet closest to it, to Neptune, the planet farthest away from it (Obenga, 2004). This means that there is a clearly defined variability in terms of its contact with the planets around it. Similarly, within the observed circular dining setup, there is a clearly defined sequence relating to the commencement of the meal. In a composite circle of consumers poised to eat, this sequence is hierarchical, according to age. Excluding the first morsel which is normally offered to the Ancestors, for those in the physical realm, the oldest in the circle of eating naturally proceeds and everyone else follows. In fact, for the Dagaaba, “dinner began with the hand-washing ceremony. The male leader was first, followed by the next-oldest person and so on till the youngest had washed” (Somé, 1994, p. 178). Clearly, this social construction is analogous to the natural path of light as ☉ *R' 'Ra*, the Sun' extends his rays across his sphere of influence in the solar system.

5.0 Conclusion

We would like to add two drops of proverbs drawn from Akan culture as a tincture to this meal which is ready to serve:

Onantefo) nya sika a, ɔde brɛ okuafo

If a traveller acquires money, he brings it back to the farmer.

(wealth is to everyone's benefit, but we need food in order to live.)

Onipa mu dua ne aduane

A person's staff of life (lit., "tree") is food. (Appiah et al., 2007, p. 202)

The purpose of this paper has truly been an attempt to show how food and the dining setup is an earthly microcosm of 𐏃𐏃𐏃 R' 'Ra, the Sun' and the solar system. This comparison has been for the express purpose of showing the importance that must be attached to food by relating it to the magnified place 𐏃𐏃𐏃 R' 'Ra, the Sun' holds in Black thought. That is to say, when we sit before a meal, we must be confident that it is filled with the relevant energy and life that is required for human survival. Common virtues that are regularly associated with 𐏃𐏃𐏃 R' 'Ra, the Sun' include "life, energy and perennity" (Obenga, 2004, p. 117); such must be the prerequisite in everything we consume. Finally, the social constructions built around the dining setup in traditional Afrika, like eating in a circle, is a useful reinforcement of Afrikan cosmological realities, which when applied revitalises the ritual significance of food and of eating collectively.

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