Survey of African Music
Edited by Karlton E. Hester, Ph.D

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Survey of African Music

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When the term globalization is used, most often people are referring to the interconnections between contemporary cultures; specifically, to the hegemony and influence of (Western) industrial powers on (non-Western) developing cultures. Similarly, many people assume that the globalization of African-derived musics began during the twentieth century with the interactions and rise in popularity of secular genres from the Americas and Africa. However, I argue that Africa’s interconnectedness with global music cultures began with the trans-Atlantic and trans-Indian trade and possibly earlier.

The dispersion and adoption of elements from the so-called culturally advanced societies (e.g., the Arab world and Europe) generally resulted from the authority these powers had in the lives of people with whom they came in contact. Such was not the case with Africa. Many non-Africans considered Africa to be inferior, the dark continent with no civilization or features of value to offer the world. Africa did not represent something that people wanted to emulate. In spite of these views, however, few would argue that African-derived musics are now global. Not only do people throughout the world pay enormous amounts of money to experience African-derived musics (going to concerts, purchasing recordings, viewing films, etc.), the appropriation of African musics is widespread. In this paper, I will address three issues. 1) Why are so many people in the global community attracted to Global African music? In other words, what gives African music its power? 2) How has the grandeur of Africa’s cultural mani-
festations affected the study of African performing arts? 3) How can research on Global African music be used to strengthen the world community?

1. WHAT GIVES AFRICAN MUSIC ITS POWER?

In my 1999 book, *Turn Up the Volume: The Celebration of African Music*, I comment on the globalization of African music and raise several questions about why African music has power. I state:

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, African music in all of its manifestations has become a global phenomenon. From Asia and the Pacific to Europe and the Americas, elements from Africa can be heard in blues, jazz, rap, gospel, rock, country, salsa, reggae, rumba, samba, calypso, rai, noise (a fusion of art and popular music), and many other world music genres. Not only do African features serve as the root for most commercially secular popular music styles world wide, many sacred music genres include African elements.

Although African culture has been enormously influential, the continent continues to be ridiculed and belittled, rarely recognized and acknowledged for its creations and contributions. Comments made by David Lamb in the 1980s still hold true today:

_No continent has been more mistreated, misunderstood and misrepresented over the years than Africa. Ask an American to mention four things he associates with Africa and the answer is likely to be “pygmies, jungle, heat and lions.” Yet pygmies have been all but extinct for decades, jungle is now as uncommon as snow in Southern California, the heat is no more intolerable than that in Washington, D.C., on a summer’s day, and lions are so few in number that most Africans have never seen one._ (Lamb 1984, xii)

Without realizing it, many world cultures embrace features that are African-derived, particularly when these elements have been recreated or refashioned into forms that suit their aesthetic preferences (for example, jazz and tango). Yet when these same characteristics are used within a context or sensibility that is clearly associated with Africa, much debate arises about the significance or worthiness of the forms (e.g., rap). What accounts for this schizophrenic attitude toward the continent that is birthplace of human life? In other words, why are people around the globe so attracted to African music
and culture, but at the same time are very critical of it? The central question is what gives African music its power?"

Instead of a single answer to this question, I believe several factors may account for the popularity of African music:

1. Global African music permits and encourages freedom of expression, experimentation, and individual interpretation. Instead of imitating, replicating, or duplicating what has been stated previously, musicians are allowed to be inventive and tell their own story in the manner in which they would like. In telling their individual stories, performers also establish a sense of community because those who identify with them may indicate their approval during the performance.

2. Global African music reflects the spirit and expressions of a people who have survived in spite of oppression and suffering. When we look around the world today, there is no question that people of African descent have been persecuted. Those who have achieved have done it against the odds. The strategies for survival can be found in the music.

3. Global African musics have become a mouthpiece for protest and resistance. This may explain why Europeans sang “We Shall Overcome” (derived from a hymn by Black minister Charles Tindley) when the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Rap has become a global phenomenon because it represents resistance. Andy Morgan, the author of “Algeria-Rai: Music Under Fire,” an article in Volume I of *World Music: The Rough Guide*, explains that both rap and rai are “musical styles most favoured by the dispossessed in their respective countries, by those who have little to loose and a lot to say. And for both, their paths to international fame have been littered with controversy and misunderstanding” (Morgan 1999:413).

4. The fusion of elements from both Africa and Europe to create new musical traditions has affected the popularity of Global African music. Symbolically, Europe represents economic and political power. When these elements are combined with African sensibilities, consumers are satisfied on several levels: the desire to be identified with the powerful and the need to be spiritually fulfilled.

5. The media have greatly influenced the popularity and power of Global African music. When music promoters recognized what could be gained economically from producing and marketing the music and culture, the commodification of Global African music went into full swing. The fact that African-derived
musics is mediated as “American” music and many people around the world desire to emulate America, this causes Global African music to become even more popular.

In an interview conducted with J. H. Kwabena Nketia in February 2000, I posed the question: Is there anything intrinsic about the performance of African music that gives it power? Nketia responded by saying that

It is a qualitative thing in the music that takes it along; the impact that music makes on the senses. When people open themselves up to this, they are able to see some kind of new experience that comes from their encounter with African music. The way of performing, the play concept in this music which makes it possible for young and old to relate, seems to be something that is beginning to catch the attention of those who have thus far only used music for contemplation or those who think that music should be contemplated for its forms and beauty. I believe that it is this direct thing that has given it [African music] that kind of power.

African and African world musicians have also emphasized, in their new forms, the vigor and power that we have in traditional music. Anything that tries to be different and emphasize beauty of forms doesn’t have mass appeal. It doesn’t mean to say that it is not good. But it is within the international framework of art music, and that always has a smaller kind of audience. It doesn’t mean that it [art music] should not be encouraged or pursued. For example, we cannot say that Michelangelo should not paint because it is not within the understanding and framework of everybody. So there is room in culture for promoting excellence which might take us away from the popular. But nothing displaces the other. Popular music should not displace the other kind of music. And [art] music should not look down on the popular because each one has its function. (Nketia 2002:137+)

The fact that Nketia points to the vigor and sensory aspects of African music is noteworthy, for these are factors that Westerners have often used to criticize Global African music. In his opinion, contemplative or so-called “classical” or “art” music has less appeal because too much emphasis is placed on form and aesthetic than the senses.

In the introduction to his book, Representing African Music, Kofi Agawu raises the question: what is the secret of African music? Interestingly, some of his comments are similar to the features identified by myself and Nketia (i.e. emphasis on community, drawing in the young and old as well as the skilled and unskilled, and allowance for the
expression of emotion). However, he also notes other characteristics. African music, according to Agawu, “is integrated with social life rather than set apart, natural rather than artificial, and deeply human in its material significance. Its themes are topical and of sharp contemporary relevance, sometimes humorous and satirical, sometimes sad and affecting, often profound. Thoughtful observers celebrate the close affinities between language and music, marvel at the extraordinary intellectual acumen displayed by lead drummers, song crafters, and instrumentalists, call attention to musicians’ clever use of iconic modes to signify, and, above all perhaps, proclaim the subtle and intricate domestication of a broad range of temporalities in African music. …” (Agawu 2003:xii).

2. HOW HAS GLOBAL AFRICAN MUSIC AFFECTED THE STUDY OF AFRICAN PERFORMING ARTS?

When studying or conducting research on African music, most scholars have focused on difference rather than commonality. In other words, greater attention has been given to how African music is distinct than on how it is similar to world culture. Because of the attitudes and values associated with Africa, this is not surprising. When a group of people are constantly ridiculed and denigrated, establishing a positive identity is critical. To lift a people up, one must point to features that are unique or distinctive and speak to them positively. One must emphasize that the elements that others have appropriated and believe to be fantastic are features which are African-derived. To establish ownership for traditions that others claim to be theirs, one needs to point out differences. Finally, when other cultures prop up their contributions to the world to demonstrate their superiority over others, Africans have felt it important to recapitulate so that the world is aware of their contributions as well. Thus, uniqueness must be pointed out.

Many people now believe that knowledge of African music is important because it is different. Nketia states that when Mantle Hood, the founder of the program in ethnomusicology at UCLA, promoted the importance of training in world musics, he used to quote the broad generalization about Africa being very highly sophisticated in rhythm, the Orient being very highly sophisticated in melody, and the West being sophisticated in classes of sound and harmony (Nketia 2002). Although these are very broad generalizations because all cultures share these elements, Nketia believes Hood emphasized difference to demonstrate that musical education is enhanced by knowledge of world music. If students studied African music, there is the likelihood that they will have a better understanding of rhythm and thinking in rhythmic terms than if they just confined themselves to a culture that has no African-derived features. Therefore, a good ethnomusicology program should include Africa because of what it has to offer (Nketia 2002).
Yet, placing emphasis on difference can be problematic for it suggests that a culture has nothing in common with others. This is significant when difference runs against the grain of what many feel is acceptable and highly valuable. When one society emphasizes rhythm and another places greater significance on melody, how is this often interpreted? Ideally, we should recognize and respect differences for they enrich the whole. In many disciplines, however, difference is used as a justification for sensationalism and, I believe, is at the root of ethnocentrism.

When studying African music, I believe that commonalities should be mentioned along with differences. Over the past several decades, I have been conducting research on fiddling in West Africa. While printed evidence documents West African fiddling to the early eighteenth century, my research reveals that a highly developed fiddle tradition began in West Africa in the twelfth or thirteenth century CE. Thus, fiddling is not due to contact with Western culture.

Although the fiddle is an instrument widely used in several parts of Africa, we do not understand the processes of transmission and adaptation, nor do we know what may have contributed to differences in performance practices. Furthermore, we have no explanation why the tradition has been maintained in spite of social and economic changes in West Africa. Most of the research on fiddling in world culture has been devoted to traditions in Asia, Europe and the Americas. I believe that one of the reasons researchers do not associate fiddling with Africa is because they are looking for differences instead of commonalities. In Western societies where the extraordinary generally receives the most attention, fiddling may seem commonplace. Therefore, I believe a study of West African fiddling is important for at least two reasons: (1) it will reveal the contributions of Africans to a tradition that is widespread globally and (2) it may address issues on the subject that have not been raised. Yet, I do not believe that a examination of fiddling in Africa should be used to find a “missing link” in Western or other non-African cultures. For this reason, when conducting projects that Africa may have in common with others, I believe the studies should be Africa-centered and concerned with developments in Global Africa.

3. HOW CAN RESEARCH ON GLOBAL AFRICAN MUSIC BE USED TO STRENGTHEN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY?

In order for music research to have meaning, it should relate to what is happening in the society; theories should draw on the ideas and expressions of the people who are the creators of the music. As Nketia explains, “No generation of scholars should prescribe the limits of the study because the limits of the study should be related to what is happening in music in society” (Nketia 2002). No culture, whether powerful or
INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION AND AFRICAN MUSIC

not powerful, should dictate the theories or approaches that should be used. For a long time, we have allowed a Western perspective to determine what is important in terms of theory and method. Commenting on the degree to which African scholars depend on Western interpretations, Igbo music scholar Meki Nzewi states: “we are cautiously worried by the haste with which Africa and African scholars embrace and adopt without discrimination or adaptation, the products of Western thought systems and social/cultural/histo-technological modernism (1997:76).

Relying only Western theories and concepts is dangerous for several reasons. Not only does this lead to mental bondage, but the views of Westerners may not be in the best interest of the global community. More importantly, dependence on the West impedes the emancipation and emergence of scholars. “They [Western theories] inhibit his/her enthusiasm to demonstrate independent thinking and, thereby, cultural-human integrity” (Nzewi 1997:79).

African performance culture tells us that not only should we recognize the diversity of global culture, but we should be tolerant of other expressions and approaches. Furthermore, scholars and performers should be free to be creative or express themselves without admonition. Although everyone should be allowed to have an opinion, the creative works of a society should be evaluated on the basis of aesthetics from within the culture and not by a judge or system totally unrelated to what is important within the culture concerned.

In conclusion, the adoption of the inherent values of Global African Music—recognition, tolerance, and respect for diversity—is crucial if we want to strengthen global culture. If we integrate these values into our scholarship and our learning, this would be a great benefit to the global community.

NOTE

1. I should mention that the negative reporting continues in present day. When Africa is mentioned in print, audio, and visual media, references are made almost entirely to the negative—e.g., genocide, corruption, ethnic warfare, AIDS, etc. I am not indicating that these problems do not exist, but to the fact the good or the positive is rarely reported or acknowledged. A balanced reporting of events on Africa rarely occurs. Less I digress too much, allow me to return to the topic of discussion here.
REFERENCES


The Continent now known as Africa is a very large landmass located to the south of western Europe and to the southwest of what we now call the ‘Middle East.’ It is bordered in the north by the Mediterranean Sea, in the east by the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and in the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The Continent has many environments, ranging from the most arid of desert wastes to tropical rain forest, savanna, vast swamps, and even snow-capped mountains. The diverse flora and fauna of these environments have supported a variety of human communities, which, in turn have developed a correspondingly wide range of economic, social, cultural and political strategies for survival.

Today the Continent is divided politically into fifty independent countries, ranging in population from Nigeria, with about 150 million, to Mauritania, Niger or Namibia whose citizens number fewer than 5 million. In size the differences are equally as great, with countries ranging in size from tiny, Connecticut-sized Gambia to giant Sudan, whose territory equals that of the entire United States east of the Mississippi River.

Over time the regions of the Continent have acquired commonly applied names, such as Sub-Saharan, North, West, Southern, East, Northeast (or Horn), Central, and Equatorial. Knowledge of these regional designations, along with the important physical features and modern country boundaries is necessary for understanding materials written about the history, societies, politics or cultures of the Continent.

The geography of the Africa has played an important role not only in the history of the peoples of the Continent, but history of all humans as well. All of us belong to
a species, Homo sapiens sapiens, the remote ancestors of whom lived in the African tropical savannas as early as 3 million years ago. Although, as is true in the rest of the world, African landform and climate have changed over the last 3 million years, we will first consider the modern geography and climate.

Africa is a very large continent. Large enough, in fact, to contain the United States, China, India, and Argentina combined. It is about 5,500 miles across the Continent, both east to west and north to south. Africa is the most tropical of continents, being practically bisected by the Equator. While virtually any kind of climate or topographical feature can be found somewhere on the African continent, the majority of land is either desert or savanna (open plains). Substantial rain forest (so-called ‘jungle’) covers the lowlands near the Equator. However, the majestic snow-capped peaks of Mt. Kenya and Mt. Kilimanjaro are also located near the Equator. The Continent has four major river systems: the Nile, the Niger, the Congo or Zaire, and the Zambezi.

As is the case in other world regions, human history in Africa is closely linked to the favorable distribution of natural resources—particularly good soils and an adequate water supply. The savanna regions of eastern Africa are literally home to the human species. Other well-watered savanna regions of the Continent, especially the Sudannic regions north of the great equatorial forest, have long supported diverse populations of farmers, herders, craftspeople and traders. And, of course, the fertile Nile valley was the cradle of one of the earliest civilizations known, that of the ancient Egyptians.

The Continent can be divided into broad climate zones according to patterns of rainfall and temperature. In the tropical forest or equatorial zone, which covers the lowlands of central Africa, the climate is similar year round, with warm, humid conditions and nearly daily rainfall. The dense forests and lush vegetation of this zone has historically made farming very difficult, and thus kept population densities low. The prevalence of the tse-tse fly prevented the raising of cattle. Thus, fishing, hunting and gathering, and trade have historically sustained regional economies. Equatorial mountain terrain provides an exception to the rule of tropical rain forest. Mountain slopes and valleys above 5,000 feet have environments that are more temperate; in the higher elevations, even alpine in character. The equatorial mountain zone is in the eastern part of the region, in modern day Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.
Both to the north and south of the equatorial forest zone the tree cover gradually thins out as annual rainfall declines. In the resulting tropical savannas rain occurs seasonally, alternating with increasingly lengthy dry seasons. In the open country days are hotter and nights cooler than in the forest year round. Even though soils are often poor and rainfall erratic, nonetheless this open country is more suitable for farming than either dense forest or desert; and can support livestock such as goats and cattle. Tropical savanna farming communities are historically the most typical of African settlement patterns. The indigenous savanna crops—millets, black-eyed peas, yams, palm oil and fruits are still important to the diets of many rural people.

The further one gets from the Equator the longer the dry season, until one reaches lands where there is no rainy season at all. In these deserts, which now cover about one-third of the Continent, water comes almost exclusively from underground sources (or from rain that fell elsewhere and comes down the river in the form of annual floods, as in Egypt. Thus agriculture can only be sustained in river valleys or in oases. Egyptian civilization was based on the exceptionally fertile alluvial soils of the Nile River, which, for the last 4500 years or so, has flowed through one of the most arid parts of the western Saharan desert. Deserts are hot during the day and cold during the clear starry nights. Most desert dwellers are nomadic herders, since animals must be regularly moved to take advantage of sparse grass and brush.

As one approaches either the northern or southern-most coasts of the Continent the climate becomes more temperate, with winter and summer seasons and periods of rainfall throughout the year, much the same as is the case in southern parts of the United States. Here the agriculture follows seasons familiar to us, and the climate supports crops and animals that are similar to other regions around the Mediterranean Sea, such as wheat, olives, grapes; sheep, goats and cattle.

Although there are people living in mountain valleys, along large lakes or seacoast, in swamps or on islands, the majority of African peoples live in the tropical savannas, the Nile Valley or Mediterranean climate zones in either the far north or the far south. It is the people of these three major environments who have, therefore, been the central characters in the long, interesting and very diverse history of the Continent, taken as a whole.

AFRICAN ROOTS OF HUMAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The African continent, and particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has an extremely lengthy period of human prehistory. Over one hundred years ago Charles Darwin hypothesized, on the basis of the limited evidence available at that time, that Africa would prove to be the homeland of the human species. In the last fifty years researchers in fields as
diverse as archaeology and genetics have convincingly demonstrated the correctness of Darwin's thesis.

Recent archaeological research indicates that early proto-humans, called hominids, were making and using stone tools in northern and eastern Africa three million or more years ago. Clear evidence for similar developments outside Africa does not appear until about one million years ago. Thus it seems likely that the first two million or so years of human development took place on the continent of Africa. Recent genetic research further suggests that all living members of our species, that is, Homo sapiens sapiens, may have had either a common grandmother (or grandfather, depending on the researcher), ten thousand times removed. This ancestress/ancestor of us all probably lived in Africa between 60,000 and 200,000 years ago.

All but the last 10,000 or so years of human history belong entirely to the era known broadly as the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age). The beginning of the Paleolithic is dated from when the hominid populations of Africa started to regularly make rudimentary tools from intentionally shaped stones for use in their daily lives. The “stone ages” (Old and New) ended when ancient humans began to use metals, such as copper or iron, as their principal tool making materials. Metal decorations, tools and weapons began to appear about 8,000 years ago in some places, but were not in general use, even in the ‘civilized world’ of the time, until about 3,000 years ago. Thus the stone ages, from the standpoint of time, constitute the bulk of human history.

**Scientific Evidence for Early Human Ancestors and Their Ways of Life**

Although stone tools give their names to eras of human prehistory and provide a major means for tracing its development, it is certain that materials other than stones were used as tools by hominids and early humans in their daily lives. However, since most of those made of organic materials have decayed beyond trace, they cannot be used as evidence by the archaeologists or other scientists interested in pre-history. It is very likely that the earliest hominid tools will forever remain unknown, as they were either natural objects (sticks, vines, rocks) or were so little changed from natural objects that they can't be distinguished in fossil remains.

Archaeologists and paleo-anthropologists, the principal researchers into our stone age past, use fossil remains of humans and other animals, tools, seeds, even pollen, as well other data from the environment, such as soils and rock strata, to reconstruct the ways of life of the peoples who used them. They also use indirect evidence in their research, including fossil remains from other related species, such as chimpanzees, and the data supplied by observing the ways of life of living populations of apes.
Some information is gathered as well from contemporary human societies that still follow what are presumed to be the ancient gathering and hunting way of life. Data derived from comparative anatomy, blood, protein and DNA research are also used in the search for understanding about our remote African ancestors. [2005 current research: Our Genetic Journey online at: https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/lan/en/index.html]

Dating of evidence plays a significant role in archaeological research, since it is impossible to trace changes without knowing the relative sequence of fossils and related evidence over time. Dating methods continue to improve. However, even the most sophisticated techniques for recovering and dating materials from antiquity do not give us the story of human development. All the evidence must be analyzed and interpreted using a unifying theoretical framework. The basic interpretive framework in use today is evolutionary theory. Charles Darwin and his contemporaries in England and other Western countries first developed it more than a hundred years ago. Evolutionists hypothesize that living species are the product of thousands, even millions of years of incremental genetic changes. That, in essence, if you take the ancestry of any living thing back far enough it will merge with all other living things.

Prehistory: Probable Sequences of Human Development in the Old Stone Age

The stone ages were not static. Popular expressions such as ‘living in the stone age’ or ‘stone age man’ are unhelpful when they are based on the false assumption that the ancestral human way of life remained the same throughout the millions of years known collectively as the stone ages. Changes in technology and lifestyle during all these stone ages from the Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) through the Neolithic (New Stone Age) are easily demonstrated. Stone Age ‘toolkits’[1] differed from period to period as the peoples who made and used them developed both physically and culturally over time. Specialists subdivide the stone ages into periods, such as ‘early,’ ‘late,’ and ‘new,’ to indicate the significant differences that developed over time.

The longest period in human pre-history encompasses the era known as the early Paleolithic (early Old Stone Age), which lasted from the time of the earliest recognizably proto-human beings to the advent of our species (i.e., from about 3 million BCE[2] until about 200,000 BCE). The first recognizable stone tools appeared in this period. Most of the fossil remains connected with the early Paleolithic are African. The first phase of this era (ca. 3 million to 1 million BCE) is named Olduwan—after Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania where the fossils remains associated with the earliest tools were first discovered.[3] Among the tool makers of Olduvai
was the human ancestral species called Homo Habilis, whose members were fairly small in stature, walked upright, had fairly small brains, and lived an average of only 20 years or so.

Oldowan hominids made pebble or chopper tools, which were probably used to fashion wooden digging sticks, to butcher already dead wild animals, and to scrape hides or soften leather. These early hominids began to develop the foraging (gathering and hunting) way of life that came to separate them from their primate cousins, the various species of apes. Cultural and physical changes occurred very slowly in the early Paleolithic because the total hominid populations were small, living in very small groups scattered across the then vast tropical African savannas.

The second phase of the early Paleolithic (c. 1 million to 200,000 BCE) is called the Acheulian, after its typical industry that is named for a typesite in southern France. Acheulian industries are distinguished by more sophisticated stone tools which gradually became sharper and more effective. Tasks which had been accomplished with the older technology could now be done better, plus the new ‘hand axes’ were good for digging. These industries were the work of Homo erectus (and perhaps other species). They had larger and differently organized brains than their Homo habilis ancestors. This enabled them to colonize favorable environments throughout the ‘Old World.’[4]

In the Acheulian period cultural changes began occurring with somewhat greater frequency. This may have been because developing brain and speech capacities gave homo erectus the ability to transmit information more effectively both to group members and to offspring thus making possible the accumulation of knowledge over time. Also, there was probably a significant overall population increase, since improved communication and tools also meant more reliable food supplies. Of course, not all populations changed at the same pace or in the same way. This depended upon environmental, cultural and communications factors specific to each.

After 200,000 BCE regional specialization of tools appears for the first time, again in Africa. Regional specialization describes the move from the production of generic, all-purpose tools to those designed for more specific tasks, such as trapping animals specific to a particular environment. These innovations were the work of Homo sapiens and/or Homo sapiens sapiens. Both groups were skilled and versatile enough to begin to move into environmentally more difficult territories, from temperate Europe and Asia to tropical rain forest Africa. To do this they adapted their existing tool kits—employing new materials and devising distinctive styles, some of which we even recognize as artistic qualities as well as functional ones. The status of Homo sapiens, the species known as ‘Rhodesiensis’ in Africa and ‘Neanderthal’ in Europe, whose members had physical characteristics very close to those of modern humans, is currently under debate. It is not known how populations of Homo sapiens and Homo sapiens sapiens related to
each other, or why Homo sapiens disappeared. What is known is that all living humans belong to one species, Homo sapiens sapiens.

As had been true from the beginning, change in the later Paleolithic can be linked to climatic factors, specifically to movement of glaciers in northern Europe and changes in rainfall levels in southern Europe and Africa. Climatic cycles alone, however, do not explain the accelerated pace of change. In the case of Africa experts have hypothesized that more dense populations, made possible by more abundant food supplies during wet phases, used their greater collective brain power to develop innovative means of coping with the harsher conditions prevalent in the drier times that followed.

Beginning around 200,000 new methods for making stone implements began to appear in some parts of Africa. The tools produced by Homo sapiens and/or early Homo sapiens sapiens were thinner, sharper, more accurately made. They display a greater variety of shapes enabling their owners to perform a wider variety of tasks. In the northern part of Africa large, stemmed projectile points, such as arrowheads, distinguish the regional industry called Mousterian. In the southern savannas more triangular-shaped points characterized the Fauresmith tool kit. Also, human groups began to tackle the difficult forest environment. These pioneer forest-dwellers departed from the traditions of their savanna cousins to develop the tools necessary for wood working and digging which weren’t needed on the more open plains. The earliest specialized African forest industry is called Sangoan.

By about 30,000 BCE Homo sapiens sapiens had become the only human creature on the planet. With the introduction of ‘hafting,’ that is attaching wooden shafts to stone implements, people could make such things as spears and axes. Techniques for finishing, sharpening and shaping stones continued to improve as well, with communities in each environmental region adapting both tools and styles more and more precisely to the needs of their own locale.

From about 20,000 BCE, there are further refinements in stone technology. Very specialized tools appeared, including arrowheads, fishhooks, grindstones, and awls. These most refined of stone implements have the generic name ‘microlithic.’ [5] This era of the late Paleolithic also saw the development of complex composite tools such as bows and arrows. As well, fishing equipment, including boats, and even pottery appeared in some environmental niches. As tools became more specialized and finely made, local variations, including stylistic ones, became more and more the rule.

By the Late Stone Age virtually the entire now-inhabited world had been occupied by human foraging communities. In various different regions of the world (including different parts of Africa), late Paleolithic people themselves probably were developing some of the distinctive (but superficial from a species perspective) physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair texture and eye-shape, which we associate with modern