

**AFRICA
DEVELOPMENT
AFRIQUE ET
DEVELOPPEMENT**

Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004

Special issue on "Philosophy and Development"



Guest Editor : Lansana Keita

AFRICA DEVELOPMENT AFRIQUE ET DÉVELOPPEMENT

Editor-in-Chief/Rédacteur en chef

Francis B. Nyamnjoh

Managing Editor

Sulaiman Adebawale

Assistant Editor

Khary Fall Cissé

Editorial Advisory Board/Comité éditorial consultative

Mustapha Al Sayyid	Cairo University, Egypt
Yusuf Bangura	UNRISD, Geneva, Switzerland
C.L.S. Chachage	University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania
Teresa Cruz Silva	Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique
Enwere Dike	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
James Ferguson	Stanford University, USA
Georges Kobou	University of Douala, Cameroon
Piet Konings	African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands
Marnia Lazreg	City University of New York, USA
Takyiwaa Manuh	IAS, University of Ghana
Michael Neocosmos	University of Pretoria, South Africa
Dessalegn Rahmato	Forum for Social Studies, Ethiopia
Nouria Ramaoun	CRASC, Oran, Algérie
Lloyd Sachikonye	Institute of Development Studies, Zimbabwe
Fatou Sow	Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Senegal
Kees van de Waal	University of Stellenbosch, South Africa
Samuel Wangwe	Economic and Social Research Foundation, Tanzania

Typeset by Sériane Ajavon

Cover designed by Aïssa Djonnie

© 2004

**AFRICA DEVELOPMENT
AFRIQUE ET DEVELOPPEMENT
Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004**

**A Quarterly Journal of the Council for the
Development of Social Science Research in Africa**

**Revue trimestrielle du Conseil pour le développement
de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique**

**Special Issue on
'Philosophy and Development'**

**Guest Editor
Lansana Keita**

CODESRIA would like to express its gratitude to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA/SAREC), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ford Foundation, Mac Arthur Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), the French Ministry of Cooperation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rockefeller Foundation, FINIDA, NORAD, CIDA, IIEP/ADEA, OECD, IFS, OXFAM America, UN/UNICEF and the Government of Senegal for supporting its research, training and publication programmes.

Le CODESRIA exprime sa gratitude à l'Agence suédoise de coopération pour le développement International (SIDA/SAREC), au Centre de recherche pour le développement international (CRDI), à la Fondation Ford, à la fondation Mac Arthur, Carnegie Corporation, au ministère norvégien des Affaires étrangères, à l'Agence danoise pour le développement international (DANIDA), au ministère français de la Coopération, au Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement (PNUD), au ministère des Affaires étrangères des Pays-bas, à la Fondation Rockefeller, FINIDA, NORAD, CIDA, IIEP/ADEA, OCDE, IFS, OXFAM America, UN/UNICEF, le gouvernement du Sénégal pour leur soutien généreux à ses programmes de recherche, de formation et de publication.

Africa Development is the quarterly bilingual journal of CODESRIA. It is a social science journal whose major focus is on issues which are central to the development of society. Its principal objective is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas among African scholars from a variety of intellectual persuasions and various disciplines. The journal also encourages other contributors working on Africa or those undertaking comparative analysis of Third World issues.

Africa Development welcomes contributions which cut across disciplinary boundaries. Articles with a narrow focus and incomprehensible to people outside their discipline are unlikely to be accepted. The journal is abstracted in the following indexes: *International African Bibliography*; *African Studies Abstracts Online*; *Abstracts on Rural Development in the Tropics*; *Documentationseliensst Africa*; *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, and the *African Journals Online*. Back issues are also available online at www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/Journals/africa_development.htm

Afrique et Développement est un périodique trimestriel bilingue du CODESRIA. C'est une revue de sciences sociales consacrée pour l'essentiel aux problèmes de développement et de société. Son objectif fondamental est de créer un forum pour des échanges d'idées entre intellectuels africains de convictions et de disciplines diverses. Il est également ouvert aux autres chercheurs travaillant sur l'Afrique et à ceux se consacrant à des études comparatives sur le tiers monde.

Afrique et Développement souhaite recevoir des articles mobilisant les acquis de différentes disciplines. Des articles trop spécialisés ou incompréhensibles aux personnes qui sont en dehors de la discipline ne seront probablement pas acceptés. Les articles publiés dans le périodique sont indexés dans les journaux spécialisés suivants: *International African Bibliography*; *African Studies Abstracts Online*; *Abstracts on Rural Development in the Tropics*; *Documentationseliensst Africa*; *A Current Bibliography on African Affairs*, et *African Journals Online*. Les numéros disponibles de *Afrique et Développement* peuvent être consultés à l'adresse suivante: www.codesria.org/Link/Publications/Journals/africa_development.htm

All editorial correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to:

Tous les manuscrits et autres correspondances à caractère éditorial doivent être adressés au:

Editor-in-chief/Rédacteur en Chef

Africa Development / *Afrique et Développement*

CODESRIA, Av. Cheikh Anta Diop x Canal IV B.P. 3304, Dakar, 18524 Sénégal.

Tel: +221 825 98 22 / 825 98 23 - Fax: +221 824 12 89

Email: publications@codesria.sn or codesria@codesria.sn

Web Site: www.codesria.org

Subscriptions/Abonnement

(a) African Institutes/Institutions africaines:	\$32 US
(b) Non African Institutes/Institutions non africaines	\$45 US
(c) Individual/Particuliers	\$30 US
- Current individual copy / Prix du numéro	\$ 7 US
- Back issues / Volumes antérieurs	\$10 US

Claims: Undelivered copies must be claimed no later than three months following date of publication. CODESRIA will supply missing copies when losses have been sustained in transit and where the reserve stock will permit.

Les réclamations: La non-réception d'un numéro doit être signalée dans un délai de trois mois après la parution. Nous vous ferons alors parvenir un numéro de remplacement dans la mesure du stock disponible.

ISSN 0850 3907

Contents / Sommaire
Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004

Special Issue on
'Philosophy and Development'

Introduction	
Lansana Keita	1
Modernité et interprétations religieuses	
Samir Amin	7
On Prospective: Development and a Political Culture of Time	
Souleymane Bachir Diagne	55
Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look	
Lewis Gordon	71
Philosophie et politique: pour une discussion avec Lansana Keita	
Paulin Hountondji	95
African Development and the Primacy of Mental Decolonization	
Messay Kebede	107
Philosophy and Development: On the Problematic of African Development—A Diachronic Analysis	
Lansana Keita	131
A Relevant Education for African Development—Some Epistemological Considerations	
Francis B. Nyamnjoh	161
Book Review	
Amartya K. Sen, 2000, <i>Development as Freedom</i> (New York: Anchor Books, 366 + xvi pages)	
Lansana Keita	185



Introduction

Philosophy and Development

Lansana Keita*

These days, Africa is seen as an underdeveloped or developing continent, but this qualification has been with us for many decades, dating immediately from post-colonial times. What is meant by this is that Africa as a whole lags behind other areas in terms of measurable economic output and general ‘quality of life’ indices for its inhabitants. An evident paradox in the attempts made to solve the problem of underdevelopment in Africa is that the vast majority of the research into the causes of Africa’s present condition emanates from research centres and universities located in the West. And what is evident about the majority of such theories is that they tend to focus narrowly on strictly economic issues geared towards ‘alleviating poverty’ and creating piecemeal conditions for ‘sustainable development’. The collection of essays in this issue approach the problem of development from a broader, more holistic perspective with analyses that explore Africa’s present status theoretically, from the standpoint of all the social sciences, not just economics.

The reason for this broader approach is that this collection of papers attempts to explain the issue of development from the standpoint of philosophical analysis, given its evident intractability. One reason for attacking the problem from the standpoint of philosophy is that philosophy, above all, is concerned with critical analysis of all forms of knowledge, and that given the intractability of the problem of development in Africa, attempts to examine this problem from all angles would undoubtedly be more illuminating than employing standard modes of analysis. It is also instructive to note that, merely for reasons of reference, the development of the West was accompanied by important

* Department of Philosophy, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, USA.

theoretical inputs from its philosophers and other thinkers. Adam Smith, author of *The Wealth of Nations*, the doctrinal text for modern liberal economics, was a professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow. Karl Marx of *Das Kapital* was also a philosopher, and so too J.S. Mill. Theories of social transformation cannot ignore the issues of democracy and governance, and in this regard, Westerners who discuss economics and development cannot avoid reference to the social contract theories of J.J. Rousseau, Hobbes, and others. For Africa, the synthetic theoretical-philosophical approaches of Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, and other theorists have also had much influence.

In this eclectic collection of essays by political economists, philosophers, and sociologists we have the essay of Samir Amin, 'Modernité et interprétations religieuses', arguing that development is essentially about attaining modernity characterized by a secular world view which includes the freedom of individuals to make their own histories, individually and collectively within the context of democracy. What this means is that development as modernity must accept the ability of individuals to challenge and even break with traditions. Amin argues that modern Islam, despite its Nahda renaissance of the nineteenth century, did not pursue the same path as that of the West, which founded its Renaissance on the civilization of ancient Greece. The West was thus able to establish a qualitative distinction between Christianity, which sought its justification in a rational theology, and secularism which was ushered in during the Age of Enlightenment. The Nahda Renaissance did not establish that same kind of distinction between religion and politics. There was no acceptable non-religious past as far as the Nahda Renaissance was concerned. So the question remains: Can development in this form take place without a revolution in the role of Islam in society? According to Amin, modern political Islam has not demonstrated capacities in this regard. This issue is important for Africa given the influence of religion on human affairs on the continent.

For Diagne, the central issue in development is the exploration of the future as a 'prospective' in time. Thus, the exploration of the concept of time as it relates to the problem of development constitutes the theme of Diagne's paper. First, Diagne critically evaluates and finds wanting the theories of time in the African sociological context as formulated by John Mbiti and French colonial theorist Levy-Bruhl. Diagne argues against Mbiti's notion that time in the Africa context is not intrinsically future oriented. With reference to the different plans and programmes for African development, such as the Lagos Plan of Action and the present NEPAD, Diagne attempts to show how the idea of time as it applies to 'prospective'

and a developmental political culture could produce for the youth of Africa a vision of a tomorrow with a future in Africa and not elsewhere.

Gordon approaches the issue of development from the perspective of Fanon, in that he argues that the question of development was already amply discussed by Fanon in his two classic works, *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*. In these two works, Gordon tells us, Fanon adumbrated two key aspects of the colonized and immediately ex-colonized: the psychological element which determines the political and economic mentality of the neo-colonized, post-colonial bourgeoisie. Gordon's interest in existentialist thought leads him to make a case for the idea that the logical result of Western normativity with regard to underdevelopment is the creation of 'problem people'. As he put it: 'The problem faced by problem people is how to be actional'. In the ensuing critique, Gordon invokes the ideas of three theorists, Sylvia Winter, Irene Gendzier and Amartya Sen, each of whom approach the problem of development from different angles. Sylvia Wynter's approach to the problem of development is to engage in epistemological analysis rather than a purely economic one in order to dissect the Western concept of the idea itself. The reason is that Western normativity necessarily implies African liminality. Only culture-systemic analysis offers a way out. Gordon's discussion of Gendzier informs us that this author has noted that development studies rarely produce alternative conceptions of the term or how to really tackle the problem itself. Gordon summarizes Wynter's critique with the observation that the latter is led to conclude that development theory is more a symptom of Western narcissism than otherwise.

Gordon then engages in an analysis of Amartya Sen's attempt to work the idea of freedom into the paradigm of development studies as an aspect of neoliberal economics. He engages in a critique of Sen's definition of freedom as being constructed within 'the philosophical language that fostered that unfreedom in the first place—namely, modern liberal political philosophy and political economy'. In response, Gordon articulates what he perceives as a 'postcolonial phenomenology'. His thesis has as its central argument the idea that development requires an existential and actional stance.

Hountondji's contribution adds some variety to this issue, in that it takes the form of a question-answer format. Hountondji tackles questions on the question of the relationship between philosophy and development as it applies to contemporary and historical African thinkers. He also discusses the contributions that thinkers such as Fanon and Nkrumah have made to the issue of African development. And he also expounds on his definition of contemporary African philosophy, its relationship to science,

and how it applies to the question of development. Of much interest too is how Hountondji deals with the pressing issue of the dependent but marginalised relationship between intellectual research in Africa and that of the European world.

Messay Kebede's thesis on development is that the problem of development exists because of the mental architecture of the post-colonial African. To prove his point, Kebede engages in a critique of what he describes as the three schools of contemporary African philosophy: ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy and African philosophical particularism. The key example afforded by ethnophilosophy is that of negritude, the intellectual product of the poet-philosopher Leopold Senghor and poet—*homme de lettres*, Aimé Césaire. Kebede rejects negritude because it 'leads to nothing else than the acceptance of marginality', despite its attempt to solve the African condition by appeal to cultural relativism. The modernist particularizers such as Hountondji and Towa are discussed by Kebede as following the Western model of philosophy as a historical tradition that requires writing and discursive analysis. Kebede's appraisal is that Hountondji's approach relegates African thought to a status of progressing only by assimilation of the intellectual traditions of the West. This, of course, runs counter to Kebede's thesis that the *a priori* condition for development is mental decolonisation by first positing the relativity of the historical path of the West. This leads Kebede to engage in a discussion of Mudimbe's deconstructive approach to the Western episteme and the attempt to establish a genuine African episteme instead of just another set of inventions. Kebede's solution is to modify Africa's programme to one of a 'divergent conception of evolution'. The result of this approach is that 'when the West is relativized through divergent conception, it becomes an object of utilitarian, pragmatic inquiries'. But freedom and development cannot eventuate according to Kebede unless there is the 'prior decolonization of the African mind'.

Keita attempts a holistic and diachronic approach to the question of development. His approach derives from the fact that the conventional wisdom seems to uphold the view that Africa constitutes a special case in terms of development because the continent has never been developed. Keita argues that in historical terms, Africa was, for most of human history, the centre of technological development for the whole world. This situation has changed only in the last five hundred years or so. Keita then proposes an evaluation of the idea of what the contours of a developed Africa might be from the standpoints of economic and political analysis. Current theories of development such as dependency theory and neoliberal economic theory

are also discussed within the context of their background theories of Marxism and neoclassical economics. Keita's ultimate statement is that development in Africa could only take place when the conversation itself is predominantly that of African theorists within the context of African universities and research centres. Thus maximal and concerted African agency is a necessary condition for progress in this regard.

Nyamnjoh's paper is an attempt to point out that the problem of development stems to a large extent from the alienating education bequeathed to Africa as a result of the colonial interlude. The European presence in Africa was accompanied by a Western epistemology that focused principally on a strictly empiricist and material approach to phenomena. For Nyamnjoh, this epistemology is too constraining in that on the basis of its modeling on modern science, it is preoccupied only with discovering *what* the universe is rather than *why* the universe is. Nyamnjoh argues that this limited ontology has 'serious weaknesses when compared with the popular epistemologies of the African continent'. On the contrary, 'popular epistemologies in Africa are different. They create room for *why* questions...' The problem with all this is that this Western approach to knowledge has been exported to Africa, and when 'translated into educational systems and curricula, takes the form of science as ideology and hegemony'. Nyamnjoh demonstrates how the imbibing of the Western epistemological export to Africa has had a deleterious effect on the minds of Africa. This is worth a set of critiques of the Eurocentric educational institutions that dot the continent. Nyamnjoh's solution is a vigorous effort to make more indigenous Africa's educational programmes, especially in the social sciences. He argues finally that paradigm change in educational criteria and orientation are obviously necessary for African development.

Critical analysis of the idea of development reveals that development entails not just economic ministrations about 'alleviating poverty' but also psycho-sociological analysis in the form of the examination of mental structures, beliefs, and attitudes conditioned by the colonial experience, sociological analysis in the form of examining the role that religion plays in facilitating or retarding development, and historical analysis in the form of evaluating the historical contingency of economic, political, and sociological ideas of Western provenance that are now viewed as universal and necessary for development. An examination of role of the concept of time in Africa's precolonial sociology also demonstrates that the essentialist and qualitatively different notions of time attributed to Africa cannot be supported, and hence play no role in formulating dynamically prospective theories of development.



Modernité et interprétations religieuses

Samir Amin*

Résumé

La naissance de la modernité en Occident est caractérisée par trois critères principaux: le capitalisme, la démocratie, et la laïcité. Mais pour comprendre ce phénomène, il faut se rendre compte des rôles joués par les trois religions dites du Livre—le christianisme, le judaïsme, et l'islam. L'Europe a pu avancer vers la modernité en s'appropriant le passé classique de la Grèce antique. Ce fut l'invention de la Renaissance. Cette stratégie a permis à l'Europe de la Renaissance de fonder la modernité sur la laïcisation de la vie sociale et de déclarer que les êtres humains font leur propre histoire et que pour ce faire ils ont le droit d'innover et de dépasser les traditions. La modernité annoncée par la Renaissance instaure une rupture définitive avec le principe fondamental des sociétés pré-modernes y compris celle de l'Europe chrétienne et féodale. La Renaissance arabe du XIXe siècle par contre n'est jamais allé au delà des paramètres définis par la religion musulmane, ce qui aurait été nécessaire pour lui permettre de rompre avec les traditions et de s'ouvrir aux concepts modernes de liberté et de démocratie. L'islam politique contemporain n'a pas été une création authentique des peuples musulmans, mais a été inventé par les orientalistes au service du pouvoir britannique aux Indes. Récusant le concept de la modernité émancipatoire, l'Islam politique refuse le principe même de la démocratie et des droits individuels et collectifs. Cela constitue un défi pour le développement en Afrique et au Moyen-Orient.

Abstract

The advent of modernity in the West is characterized by three main elements: capitalism, democracy and secularism. However, in order to understand this phenomenon, one must consider the role played by the so-called three religions of the Book: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Europe achieved modernity by capturing the classic past of the Ancient Greece, which has led to Renaissance. This strategy allowed Renaissance Europe to make the secularisation of social life a basis for modernity, and to decide that individuals could make their own history, and therefore should have the right to innovate and go beyond traditions. The kind of modernity brought about by the Renaissance breaks definitively

* Directeur, Forum du Tiers Monde, Dakar, Sénégal.

with the fundamental principle of pre-modern societies, including those of Christian and feudal Europe. However, the 19th century Arab Islamic Renaissance never went beyond the parameters set by Islam, which would have otherwise enabled Muslims to break with traditions, and open up to modern concepts of freedom and democracy. Contemporary political Islam was not an authentic creation of the Muslim people, but was rather invented by the Orientalists in the service of British Imperialism in India. Political Islam, which denies the concept of emancipatory modernity, rejects the very principle of democracy as well as individual and collective rights. This poses a challenge to the development of Africa and the Middle East.

Introduction

Dans le monde actuel, le discours dominant associe spontanément modernité et Occident. Les débats concernant le développement évacuent de ce fait la question préalable relative à l'essence propre de la modernité, réduite à l'occidentalisation du monde. La modernité peut-elle emprunter d'autres voies, à partir de la transformation interne des cultures non européennes? Cette question est centrale en Afrique, marquée entre autre par une présence significative de l'islam. Dans cet article j'identifierai d'abord la modernité, synonyme de raison émancipatrice, à la proclamation du droit des peuples à transgresser leurs «traditions», ce qui impose la laïcisation de la vie sociale et conditionne le déploiement de la démocratie. J'analyserai dans ce cadres la trajectoire de l' Europe, engagée dans cette voie, mais qui se heurte aux limites d'une modernité tronquée par son association au déploiement capitaliste. Je montrerai également que le monde de culture islamique n'a pas encore pris la mesure du défi et que l'Islam politique est davantage le produit de cet avortement de la modernité qu'une réponse efficace au défi qu'elle représente, comme il le prétend.

La modernité

Raison et émancipation

Il y a deux moments dans l'histoire dont la portée a été décisive dans la formation du monde moderne.

1. Le premier de ces moments concerne la naissance de la modernité. C'est le moment des Lumières (les XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles européens) qui est aussi, pas par hasard, celui de la naissance du capitalisme. J'en résumerai la portée dans les deux propositions suivantes.

La première concerne la définition de la modernité, qui est l'affirmation que l'être humain, individuellement et collectivement, peut et doit faire son histoire. Une affirmation qui marque une rupture avec la pensée

dominante dans toutes les sociétés antérieures—en Europe et ailleurs—fondée sur le principe que Dieu, ayant créé l'univers et l'être humain, est le «législateur» en dernier ressort. Les principes éthiques que cette législation divine fonde sont, bien entendu, formulés par et à travers des religions ou des philosophies transcendantales historiques, ouvrant par là même la porte à des interprétations diverses à travers lesquelles les réalités sociales en transformation permanente se sont exprimées. La raison est alors invoquée souvent—mais pas toujours—pour servir ces interprétations, mais alors celle-ci reste soumise au devoir de «concilier foi et raison». L'affirmation nouvelle qui définit la modernité se libère de cette obligation, sans nécessairement se désintéresser de la question de la foi. L'affirmation nouvelle clôt un chapitre, mais en ouvre un autre avec ses problèmes propres: la liberté que les êtres humains se donnent doit être définie à son tour. L'histoire, si elle n'opère plus comme une force extérieure à l'humanité, doit être expliquée par d'autres «lois» dont la découverte est l'objet d'un nouvel ensemble de sciences dont la constitution devient à la fois possible et nécessaire: celles de l'homme et de la société. La raison est mobilisée à nouveau dans la recherche de ces déterminations objectives du mouvement des sociétés. La liberté nouvelle que se donne l'humanité moderne reste donc soumise aux contraintes de ce qu'on pense constituer les logiques de la reproduction sociale et des dynamiques de transformation des sociétés.

La seconde concerne le caractère bourgeois de la modernité telle que l'exprime la pensée des Lumières. Émergence du capitalisme et émergence de la modernité constituent les deux facettes d'une seule et même réalité.

La pensée des Lumières nous propose alors un concept de raison indissolublement associé à celui de l'émancipation sans lequel la phrase «l'être humain fait son histoire» n'aurait pas de sens. Il demeure que l'émancipation en question est définie et limitée par ce qu'exige et permet le capitalisme. Le discours des Lumières propose néanmoins un concept de raison émancipatrice qu'il prétend être transhistorique, alors que l'examen de ce qu'il est en fait va en montrer la nature terriblement historique.

L'expression fondamentale la plus systématique de ce discours est celle qu'Adam Smith a formulée, en la qualifiant malheureusement «d'utilitarisme», un vocable douteux mais spontané dans la tradition de l'empirisme anglais. Dans cette vision du monde humain la société est conçue comme une assemblée d'individus; et c'est là une vision qui rompt avec la tradition des ordres de l'Ancien Régime. Il s'agit donc d'une idéologie incontestablement émancipatrice de l'individu; encore une fois

l'une des dimensions de la modernité. Cet individu est d'ailleurs doté de raison, naturellement. L'ordre social qui doit assurer le triomphe de cette raison émancipatrice—et donc le bonheur des êtres humains—est alors imaginé comme un système de «bonnes institutions», pour utiliser le terme en usage jusqu'aujourd'hui dans la pensée sociale états-unienne. Ce système est fondé à son tour sur la séparation, dans la vie sociale, du domaine de la politique et de celui de l'économie. Les «bonnes institutions» qui doivent assurer la gestion de la vie politique par la raison sont celles de la démocratie garantissant la liberté et l'égalité juridique des individus. Dans la gestion de la vie économique, la raison impose de choisir la liberté contractuelle (autrement dit le «marché») comme fondement des rapports d'échange et d'organisation de la division du travail entre les «individus» dont la société est constituée. Et le fonctionnement sain de l'économie exige à son tour la protection de la propriété, considérée désormais comme une valeur sacro sainte dans la «bonne société».

La raison émancipatrice s'exprime alors dans le triptyque classique: liberté, égalité, propriété. Une formule qui est celle des révolutions successives précoces des Provinces Unies, de la «glorieuse révolution» anglaise de 1688, avant d'être reprise plus systématiquement par la révolution américaine, puis par la révolution française dans son premier moment.

Les éléments constitutifs du triptyque sont considérés comme «naturellement» harmonieusement complémentaires les uns des autres. Et jusqu'à ce jour l'affirmation qu'il y a signe d'égalité entre «marché» et «démocratie» est demeurée la pierre angulaire de l'idéologie bourgeoise. Le conflit qui, dans la réalité, a au contraire opposé sans cesse l'extension des droits démocratiques à tous les citoyens, hommes et femmes, bourgeois et prolétaires, possédants et non-possédants aux défenseurs inconditionnels du «marché» est d'emblée évacué du débat.

Adam Smith et la pensée des Lumières ont certes l'intuition que le système de la «bonne société»—rationnelle et émancipatrice pour l'éternité à venir—qu'ils proposent se heurte à quelques difficultés. Mais ils glissent rapidement sur celles-ci. La «main invisible» qui garantit le triomphe de la raison dans la gestion de la vie économique apparaît trop souvent comme une main «imprévisible», remettant en question par-là même la capacité des êtres humains de faire réellement leur histoire comme le veut la modernité. Et la garantie de la liberté, de l'égalité, de la sûreté de la propriété implique que le «poing visible» de l'État complète l'œuvre de la main invisible du marché.

La raison émancipatrice des Lumières n'exclut pas, mais au contraire implique, que place soit faite à un principe éthique. La raison n'est pas ici instrumentale, mais inséparable des objectifs et moyens émancipateurs dont le triptyque résume les éléments éthiques fondamentaux.

L'éthique associée à la pensée des Lumières peut être ou ne pas être d'inspiration religieuse. Dieu est présent pour ceux qui lui attribuent d'être à l'origine du besoin d'émancipation auquel aspirent les êtres humains. Il disparaît lorsque cette aspiration est seulement constatée comme «naturelle». La différence est mince.

La version contemporaine de la raison émancipatrice bourgeoise mise à la mode avec toute l'insistance que la vulgarisation médiatique permet—celle du libéralisme égalitaire de John Rawls—n'apporte rigoureusement rien de nouveau, étant restée prisonnière du triptyque liberté, égalité, propriété. Interpellé par le conflit liberté/égalité que la répartition inégale de la propriété implique forcément, le libéralisme dit égalitaire ne l'est que fort modérément. L'inégalité est acceptée et légitimée par une acrobatie peu «raisonnable», qui emprunte à l'économie vulgaire son pseudo concept de «dotations». Il s'agit là d'un constat d'une grande platitude: les «individus» (la société étant la somme de ceux-ci) qui se rencontrent sur le «marché» sont dotés de fortunes diverses (les uns sont—par hasard? —chefs d'entreprises puissantes, les autres n'ont rien). Ces «dotations» inégales demeurent néanmoins légitimes tant qu'elles sont le produit (hérité évidemment) du travail et de l'épargne (des ancêtres). On est donc invité à remonter la chaîne de l'histoire jusqu'au jour—mythique—du contrat social d'origine passé entre égaux, devenus inégaux par la suite parce qu'ils l'ont bien voulu, par l'inégalité des sacrifices qu'ils ont consentis. Je ne crois pas que cette manière d'évacuer les questions relatives à la spécificité du capitalisme mérite même d'être considérée comme élégante.

Mais si le libéralisme faussement égalitaire est proposé avec insistance comme une alternative idéologique au désarroi de la société de notre moment, c'est parce que le devant de la scène n'est plus occupé par l'utilitarisme (dont le libéralisme dit égalitaire se distingue à peine), mais par la dérive que représente l'idéologie libertaire de droite (d'extrême droite, en fait). Cette idéologie substitue le diptyque «liberté-propriété» au triptyque des Lumières renonçant carrément à donner à l'égalité le statut de valeur fondamentale. La version Von Hayek de cette nouvelle formule idéologique de droite extrême renoue avec celle de ses inventeurs, les «libéraux» du XIXe siècle (Bastiat et compagnie) qui sont à l'origine de la dérive, partis comme ils l'étaient d'une aversion affichée pour les Lumières, responsables de la révolution française. Mais le diptyque en

question constitue depuis longtemps l'essentiel de «l'idéologie états-unienne», faisant contraste avec les idéologies européennes restées en partie encore fidèles aux Lumières.

Dans la version libertaire de droite, l'éthique disparaît car les êtres humains, s'ils font bien leur histoire, sont autorisés à la faire en se comportant comme dans la jungle: ils ne sont pas responsables des conséquences de leurs actes, en particulier des inégalités qu'ils approfondissent, lesquelles sont même bienvenues. Or sans responsabilité, il n'y a plus d'éthique. Peu importe alors que certains beaucoup même—de ces libertaires de droite s'affichent «croyants»—chrétiens en l'occurrence. Leur religion est en réalité amorale, tend par-là même à devenir simple convenance sociale, expression de singularité «communautaire» et guère plus. C'est peut être une interprétation possible de la religion; elle reste discutable pour le moins qu'on puisse dire.

2. Le second moment décisif s'ouvre avec la critique que Marx adresse à la raison émancipatrice bourgeoise des Lumières. Cette critique ouvre un nouveau chapitre de la modernité, que je qualifie de modernité critique de la modernité.

La raison émancipatrice ne peut ignorer ce second moment de son déploiement, plus précisément de l'amorce de son redéploiement. La pensée sociale ne peut plus être, après Marx, ce qu'elle avait été avant lui. Ce que j'ai écrit plus haut concernant la critique de la raison émancipatrice des Lumières—ma seconde observation—n'aurait certainement pas pu l'être sans Marx. Marx est incontournable.

La raison émancipatrice ne peut plus inscrire ses analyses et ses propositions sous le triptyque «liberté, égalité, propriété». Ayant pris la mesure du conflit sans solution qui oppose le maintien de la propriété capitaliste au déploiement de l'égalité entre les êtres humains, la raison émancipatrice ne peut plus que supprimer le troisième terme du triptyque. Et lui substituer celui de fraternité, plus fort que celui de «solidarité» proposé ici et là aujourd'hui par les uns ou les autres. Fraternité signifiant alors, d'évidence, abolition de la propriété capitaliste qui est forcément celle de quelques-uns—une minorité, la vraie classe bourgeoise dominante et exploiteuse—privant les autres—la majorité—de l'accès aux conditions d'une égalité digne de ce nom. Fraternité signifiant alors substitution à cette forme de propriété exclusive et excluante une forme nouvelle, celle de la propriété sociale, exercée par l'ensemble du corps social et à son profit. L'intégration sociale opérerait alors par la démocratie, exigence incontournable non plus de la seule gestion de la vie politique au sens

étroit du terme, mais de celle de cette propriété sociale. L'intégration par la démocratie se substituerait à l'intégration partielle et inégale par nature opérée dans les limites du respect de la propriété capitaliste, c'est-à-dire par le «marché» exclusif pour employer le langage de la vulgate dominante.

«Liberté, égalité, fraternité»—la devise n'a pas été inventée par Marx, comme tout un chacun le sait bien. La révolution française, comme toutes les grandes révolutions, est en avance sur son temps et se projette loin en avant de ses exigences. Elle est donc à la fois révolution bourgeoise (et elle se stabilisera tardivement sur cette base) et percée plus avant, qu'elle avait vécu comme une révolution populaire et qu'on peut lire aujourd'hui comme amorçant la critique socialiste du système bourgeois. Tout comme les deux autres grandes révolutions des temps modernes—la russe et la chinoise—se projettent dans un projet de société communiste loin en avant des exigences et des possibilités immédiates de leurs sociétés.

La «propriété populaire» que la révolution française croit pouvoir et devoir donc garantir est celle de millions de paysans et d'artisans; et le «marché» qu'elle protège est déclaré devoir être authentiquement ouvert et concurrentiel, excluant les monopoles et les rentes qu'ils produisent. Mais cette propriété populaire est déjà, à l'époque, menacée sur sa droite et sur sa gauche. Sur sa droite par la bourgeoisie des grands entrepreneurs et capitalistes qui se cristalliseront dans le symbole que représentent ces fameuses «deux cent familles» propriétaires de la Banque de France. Sur sa gauche par tous les exclus de la ville (prolétaires et paupérisés précaires) et de la campagne (paysans pauvres et sans terre). Les soubresauts de la révolution française occuperont tout le XIXe siècle jusqu'à sa fin, à partir de laquelle la «République» se stabilise, adoptant la devise de la révolution, mais après avoir écrasé la Commune et vidé le terme de fraternité de son contenu social radical d'origine, pour lui substituer principalement celui qui peut s'exprimer dans et par l'appartenance à la communauté «nationale» et dans l'humanisme universaliste.

Toutes les ambiguïtés, les contradictions et les interprétations divergentes de «l'idéologie française» constituent la trame de cette histoire, jusqu'à nos jours. Et ce sont ces ambiguïtés dont on cherche aujourd'hui à se débarrasser par un retour brutal à la formule garantissant la suprématie de la sûreté de la propriété bourgeoise.

La raison bourgeoise remise en place droite sur ses pieds, n'est plus, ne peut plus être émancipatrice. Elle ne se dresse d'ailleurs plus que sur deux pieds: la liberté et la propriété. Désormais Bastiat et Von Hayek, qui affichent leur antipathie ouverte pour toute velléité de donner une importance quelconque à l'égalité, sont les représentants véritables d'une

raison dégénérée, qui n'est même plus celle que les Lumières avaient conçue. Et pour autant que cette raison bourgeoise réduite à la liberté et à la propriété est celle de «l'idéologie états-unienne», le recul—l'abolition en pensée de la révolution française, comme bien entendu de la russe et de la chinoise—n'est rien d'autre que l'expression de l'essentiel de ce qu'on peut entendre par l'américanisation du monde.

Cette raison bourgeoise, privée désormais de toute ambition émancipatrice, devient alors par la force des choses raison instrumentale, courte, creuse, irresponsable (et donc sans fondement éthique).

L'expression achevée de cette raison non émancipatrice se déploie dans le champ de «l'économique», définie d'ailleurs par ses inventeurs et défenseurs comme une «science pure» («l'économie pure»). Je rappellerai ici fort brièvement les critiques qu'on peut faire ailleurs à cette rationalité tronquée. D'abord le fait qu'elle ne parvient jamais à établir par des arguments logiques conséquents (au sens le plus plat du terme) la justesse de sa proposition fondamentale: que la liberté des marchés produit un «équilibre général optimal». Ensuite qu'elle s'entête à refuser de réfléchir sur les raisons de son échec, qui tiennent à sa conception irréaliste de la société, réduite à la somme des individus qui la composent. Au contraire, elle tente de sortir de la confusion dans laquelle elle s'est installée en renforçant son axiome de départ (l'individu constitue la cellule exclusive dont est constituée la société) par l'invention de ces fameuses «anticipations». Mais l'intégration de celles-ci dans les «raisonnements économiques» aggrave le chaos et ne conduit qu'à une seule conclusion possible: que le marché se déplace de déséquilibre en déséquilibre sans jamais tendre à l'équilibre (conclusion à laquelle Marx et même Keynes étaient parvenus depuis longtemps). La cerise sur le gâteau que la qualification «d'optimum social» voulait être disparaît à son tour. Qu'à cela ne tienne: l'économie pure renonce alors à cette ambition sans laquelle pourtant l'émancipation de l'être humain—le bonheur des Lumières et d'Adam Smith—perd son sens. L'être humain est déclaré irresponsable comme le marché à travers lequel il s'exprime. Les cyniques de l'économie pure oseront le penser et le dire, et il faut les en remercier pour ce courage. Le marché peut produire trois milliards d'êtres humains «inutiles», une proportion grandissante de «pauvres» dans les pays les plus riches, peu importe. C'est, paraît-il, «rationnel». La raison, devenue destructrice de l'être humain aliéné et /ou exclu de la nature (que le calcul économique dit rationnel, toujours à court terme, implique) et de sociétés entières (donc de cultures humaines), non seulement renonce à être émancipatrice,

mais accepte de remplir les fonctions d'une entreprise de démolition de l'humanité.

D'autres défenseurs de la raison bourgeoise hésitent à rallier le camp du cynisme et/ou de l'américanisation dans laquelle le système du monde réel est engagé. Le libéralisme dit égalitaire auquel j'ai fait référence plus haut s'emploie donc à tenter de sauver les meubles. Ce courant de la pensée bourgeoise contemporaine, que Rawls symbolise (que certains croient même pouvoir être qualifiée «de gauche»!) ignore Marx, se situe avant lui. Son échec est cuisant, comme en témoigne son enfermement dans le chaos de la théorie de l'inégalité des «dotations» (des individus) contraignant à remonter jusqu'au jour zéro mythique du contrat social d'origine.

Je ne sais pas si les adversaires «culturalistes» du monde réel et des tendances de son évolution entendues comme «américanisation» par les uns, «occidentalisation» (générale) par les autres, peuvent être qualifiés de «rationnels». Confrontés aux menaces «d'américanisation» les uns défendent donc les seules «valeurs culturelles», sans remettre en cause les tendances générales du système, comme si la réalité pouvait être découpée en tranches, comme le saucisson, afin d'en conserver «un morceau pour demain». D'autres, ayant préalablement confondu capitalisme et «Occident», oubliant la réalité déterminante de celui-là au profit de l'affirmation gratuite et fautive d'un «Occident» éternel, croient pouvoir transférer le lieu de la confrontation du terrain de la réalité sociale en mouvement permanent au ciel d'un imaginaire culturel transhistorique pour tous.

L'ensemble hétéroclite de ces fourre-tout—l'économie pure des marchés imaginaires, plus le libéralisme faussement égalitaire, plus les élucubrations culturalistes transhistoriques—s'érige pompeusement en pensée «nouvelle», celle dite «post-moderniste». La critique du modernisme bourgeois ayant été gommée et la raison ayant renoncé à être émancipatrice la pensée bourgeoise contemporaine est-elle alors devenue autre chose que celle d'un système qui a fait son temps?

Sénilité dangereuse, et danger renforcé par le ralliement au principe d'irresponsabilité. Sénilité dangereuse parce que le système est parvenu à un stade caractérisé par la puissance monstrueuse de ses capacités destructrices. Destruction de l'être humain, de la nature, de sociétés tout entières ai-je dit plus haut. La raison émancipatrice doit répondre à ce défi.

3. La raison est émancipatrice ou n'est pas

Le concept de raison implique donc davantage que la mise au point d'un ensemble de procédures mentales qui permettent l'avancée de l'intelligence des rapports entre les objets et les phénomènes. Étant entendu que cette intelligence des rapports est aussi celle de la mesure de leur degré de nécessité, qui n'est absolue—ou presque—que dans les situations de banalité extrême sans grand intérêt. Le déploiement de la science—connaître davantage mais aussi et surtout connaître les limites de la connaissance—permet alors de situer le degré de liberté dont peut bénéficier l'action humaine, de définir les alternatives possibles et efficaces. Mais aussi de reconnaître qu'il y a incertitude (peu de certitudes absolues) et d'en apprécier autant que possible la marge.

Cet ensemble de procédures ne constitue pas à lui seul la raison, même si nombre de chercheurs dans les sciences dites de la nature ou dites de l'homme peuvent, en première approximation, non seulement s'y tenir (il le faut), mais s'en satisfaire, s'en contenter. Tous les êtres vivants—et singulièrement les animaux supérieurs—mettent en œuvre, au cours de leur vie, des méthodes d'action et des choix qui témoignent d'un certain degré de ce type d'intelligence, au moins dans son palier premier—l'intelligence des rapports.

La raison exige davantage. Car l'émancipation suppose la responsabilité sans laquelle les options entre différents possibles n'a plus ni portée, ni sens. Qui dit responsabilité dit alors éthique, dont les principes ne peuvent être évacués d'une réflexion qui souhaite être scientifique.

Les principes de l'éthique en question peuvent être ceux que l'humanisme universaliste a-théiste (et *a fortiori* a-religieux) inspire, des Lumières (et même avant) au marxisme et à nos jours. Mais ils peuvent tout aussi bien être ceux d'un humanisme universaliste déiste, voire religieux au sens qu'il s'inscrit dans une tradition religieuse particulière, chrétienne ou autre. Il y a de fortes probabilités que ces rivières convergent vers le même grand fleuve. L'exemple qui nous vient immédiatement à l'esprit est celui des théologiens de la libération que je lis comme étant des croyants pour lesquels être chrétien ce n'est pas s'arrêter au Christ, mais partir de lui. Il pourrait y avoir d'autres interprétations religieuses (islamiques, bouddhistes et autres) ou philosophiques non occidentales (au sens que leur ancêtre n'est pas l'«hellénisme» commun aux peuples des mondes chrétiens et musulmans) qui voient le jour dans cet avenir commun à toute l'humanité à construire. C'est dans ce sens et dans celui-là seul que la diversité dite culturelle (faute de meilleure qualification)

est, plus qu'à «respecter» («tolérer» est un terme péjoratif—on «tolère» ce qu'on n'aime pas), à souhaiter voir se déployer dans toute sa richesse potentielle. Cette diversité—tournée vers la construction de l'avenir dans la tradition de la raison émancipatrice—je la distingue de la fausse diversité des spécificités héritées du passé dont les culturalistes font des invariants transhistoriques (ce qu'elles ne sont pas) pour s'y cramponner névrotiquement.

Retourner au défi auquel la raison émancipatrice est confrontée aujourd'hui, c'est inventer les moyens efficaces qui peuvent faire avancer vers des fins bien définies, progresser en direction de l'émancipation de l'aliénation marchande, s'éloigner des pratiques destructives du potentiel de la nature et de la vie, converger vers l'abolition des disparités gigantesques dites de «développement» (matériel) que l'expansion polarisante du capitalisme mondial produit nécessairement.

Le marxisme est pour moi l'instrument efficace qui permet à la fois d'analyser les défis et de définir des stratégies capables de changer le monde dans les directions précisées ici. À condition aussi qu'on considère que Marx n'a fait qu'amorcer la réflexion et l'action dans ce sens. Autrement dit qu'on se définisse comme partant de Marx et non s'arrêtant à lui.

Les questions à régler, en théorie et en pratique, sont complexes et dans leur enchevêtrement ne permettent aucune solution unilatérale qui ignorerait les conflits entre les différents éléments constitutifs du défi. J'en choisirai un seul exemple, parce qu'il me paraît constituer la dimension majeure du défi à l'échelle mondiale. Le gigantesque contraste centres/périphéries que le capitalisme a construit doit être déconstruit. Cela exigera certainement un certain développement des forces productives dans les périphéries du système, dont on doit reconnaître qu'il risque de reléguer au second plan les autres dimensions de l'émancipation. La contradiction est dans la réalité. Certains pensent la surmonter en abolissant l'un de ses termes. En persistant dans l'ignorance de 80% de l'humanité, en se contentant de déclarer qu'il leur faut d'abord «passer par l'étape capitaliste», sans tenir compte du fait que la polarisation immanente à ce système ne leur permettra jamais de «rattraper». En ignorant l'ensemble des dimensions de l'émancipation au profit exclusif du développement préalable des forces productives. La raison émancipatrice, entre autres dans sa formulation marxiste vivante, doit pouvoir combiner les deux termes contradictoires du défi.

Modernité et interprétations des religions

La flexibilité des interprétations religieuses

- La modernité est fondée sur la revendication de l'émancipation des êtres humains à partir de leur libération des carcans de la détermination sociale dans ses formes traditionnelles antérieures. Cette libération appelait à renoncer aux formes dominantes de légitimation du pouvoir—dans la famille, dans les communautés au sein desquelles sont organisés les modes de vie et de production, dans l'État—fondées jusqu'alors sur une métaphysique, généralement d'expression religieuse. Elle implique donc la séparation entre l'État et la religion, une laïcisation radicale, condition de déploiement des formes modernes de la politique.

La laïcisation abolira-t-elle la croyance religieuse? Certains philosophes des Lumières le pensaient et le souhaitaient, qui rangeaient la religion dans le lot des superstitions absurdes. Cette perception du fait religieux a trouvé un terrain d'expansion favorable aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles dans les classes populaires accédant à la conscience politique. Ne serait-ce que parce que les gauches ouvrières (et les intellectuels organiques qui en exprimaient les idéologies) se heurtaient, dans la pratique, aux options conservatrices de toutes les hiérarchies religieuses chrétiennes organisées, catholiques, protestantes ou orthodoxes. L'anticléricalisme devenait carrément synonyme d'anti-religieux et, de ce fait, a gagné du terrain pratiquement partout en Europe, bien qu'évidemment à des degrés divers selon les circonstances de l'évolution des luttes idéologiques, politiques et sociales. La société française en particulier a compté parmi les plus réceptives au nouvel anticléricalisme—athéisme, pour des raisons qui tiennent au legs du caractère radical de sa Révolution. L'idéologie soviétique a repris cet athéisme fondamental et l'a intégré dans sa conception du matérialisme dialectique.

On peut néanmoins faire une autre lecture de Marx. La phrase souvent citée («la religion est l'opium du peuple») est tronquée, la suite laissant entendre que l'être humain a besoin d'opium. Car l'être humain est un animal métaphysique, qui ne peut éviter de se poser des questions relatives au sens de la vie. Il leur donne les réponses qu'il peut, soit il reprend à son compte celles que les religions lui offrent, soit il en invente lui-même ou encore il évite de s'en embarrasser.

- Les religions en tout état de cause sont là, font partie du tableau de la réalité, constituent même une dimension importante de celle-ci. Il importe donc d'en analyser le fonctionnement social, c'est-à-dire dans notre monde moderne leur articulation à ce qui constitue la modernité en place—le

capitalisme, la démocratie, la laïcité. J'essayerai de le faire, dans ce qui suit, pour le domaine des trois religions dites du Livre. On verra alors que les religions en question ont fait l'objet d'interprétations successives qui leur a permis de survivre, de s'adapter à des transformations sociales gigantesques et de les accompagner.

Le succès du christianisme dans ce domaine, qui a accompagné la modernité, laquelle s'est constituée en Europe (faut-il le rappeler?), a suscité une floraison de «théories» qui n'emportent pas ma conviction. La plus courante—qui est devenue une sorte de lieu-commun généralement admis sans que cela ne suscite le moindre questionnement critique—est que le christianisme portait en lui cette évolution exceptionnelle. Le «génie du christianisme» est ainsi reconstruit comme l'un des mythes—à côté d'autres (l'ancêtre grec entre autres, le racisme «indo-européen», etc.)—à partir desquels on explique le «miracle européen» (le fait que la modernité ait été inventée là et pas ailleurs). Les plus extrémistes des idéologies de cet eurocentrisme adoptent une théorie idéaliste de l'histoire selon laquelle le capitalisme serait le produit de cette évolution de l'interprétation religieuse. J'en propose une critique systématique dans *l'Eurocentrisme* (en cours de réédition).

Et les plus extrémistes des extrémistes réservent ce génie créateur de la modernité capitaliste à la Réforme protestante. On a reconnu ici la thèse fameuse de Max Weber, encore moins convaincante à mon avis que ce que j'ai appelé la «christianophilie» de l'eurocentrisme.

Les arguments que Weber développe à cet endroit sont confus, en dépit de leur précision d'apparence. Ils sont d'ailleurs parfaitement retournables; analogues à ceux qui ont été avancés hier pour expliquer le retard de la Chine par le confucianisme, puis cinquante ans plus tard pour expliquer le décollage de ce pays par le même confucianisme! Des historiens superficiels avaient expliqué les succès de la civilisation arabe du Moyen Âge par l'islam, tandis que des journalistes contemporains, encore plus superficiels, expliquent la stagnation du monde arabe par le même islam. Le «culturalisme» n'a pas de réponse univoque possible à aucun des grands défis de l'histoire; il en a trop, parce qu'il peut prouver une formulation quelconque et aussi bien son contraire.

• En contrepoint à ces idées-force, fausses, mais dont se nourrit l'idéologie du monde dominant—je propose les thèses suivantes:

- (i) La modernisation, la laïcité et la démocratie ne sont pas les produits d'une évolution (ou révolution) des interprétations religieuses, mais à l'inverse celles-ci se sont ajustées, avec plus ou moins de bonheur, à leurs exigences.

Cet ajustement n'a pas été le privilège du protestantisme. Il a opéré dans le monde catholique d'une autre manière certes, mais non moins efficace. Dans tous les cas il a créé un nouvel esprit religieux, libéré des dogmes.

- (ii) Dans ce sens, la Réforme n'était pas la «condition» de l'épanouissement du capitalisme, même si cette thèse (de Weber) est largement admise dans les sociétés qu'elle flatte (l'Europe protestante). La Réforme n'a pas même été la forme la plus radicale de la rupture idéologique avec le passé européen et ses idéologies «féodales»—entres autre son interprétation antérieure du christianisme. Elle en a été au contraire la forme primitive et confuse.
- (iii) Il y a eu une «réforme des classes dominantes», qui s'est soldée par la création d'églises nationales (anglicane, luthériennes) contrôlées par ces classes et mettant en œuvre le compromis entre la bourgeoisie émergente, la monarchie et la grande propriété rurale, écartant la menace des classes populaires et de la paysannerie mise en coupe réglée. Ce compromis réactionnaire—que Luther exprime et que Marx et Engels ont analysé comme tel—a permis aux bourgeoisies des pays en question d'éviter ce qui s'est produit en France: une révolution radicale. Aussi la laïcité produite dans ce modèle est-elle demeurée timide jusqu'à nos jours. Le recul de l'idée catholique d'universalité que manifeste l'institution d'églises nationales a rempli une seule fonction: asseoir davantage la monarchie, renforcer son rôle d'arbitre entre les forces de l'ancien Régime et celles représentées par la bourgeoisie montante, renforcer leur nationalisme et retarder la progression des formes nouvelles de l'universalisme que l'internationalisme socialiste proposerait plus tard.
- (iv) Mais il y a eu également des mouvements réformateurs qui se sont emparés des couches populaires victimes des transformations sociales occasionnées par l'émergence du capitalisme. Ces mouvements qui ont reproduit des formes anciennes de lutte—celles des millénarismes du Moyen Âge—n'étaient pas en avance sur leur temps, mais en retard par rapport à ses exigences. Il a donc fallu attendre la Révolution française—avec ses mobilisations populaires laïques et démocratiques radicales—puis le socialisme pour que les classes dominées apprennent à s'exprimer avec efficacité dans les conditions nouvelles. Les sectes protestantes en question se sont nourries d'illusions de type fondamentaliste. Elles ont créé un terrain favorable à la reproduction sans fin de «sectes» à vision apocalyptique, comme

on les voit fleurir aux États-Unis.

- (v) Il n'y a pas eu que des ajustements «positifs», l'interprétation religieuse renouvelée offrant aux transformations sociales des perspectives ouvertes. Il y a également des involutions, l'interprétation religieuse devenant à son tour un obstacle à la progression sociale. J'en donnerai l'exemple de certaines formes du protestantisme nord-américain.
- (vi) Ajustements positifs et/ou négatifs ne sont pas le monopole du christianisme. L'islam a connu des ajustements positifs dans le passé et vit actuellement une involution par beaucoup d'aspects analogues à celle des sectes protestantes américaines en question. Le judaïsme également. Et j'ajouterai (ce que le lecteur trouvera explicité dans *l'Eurocentrisme*) que cela concerne aussi bien les grandes idéologies et religions de l'Asie.
- (vii) Que ces ajustements puissent être positifs ou négatifs plaide en faveur d'une interprétation du matérialisme historique fondée sur la «sous-détermination». J'entends par-là que chacune des instances (l'économique, le politique, l'idéologique) recèle une logique interne qui lui est propre et que, de ce fait, la complémentarité dans leur évolution, nécessaire pour assurer la cohérence globale d'un système, ne définit pas à l'avance une direction donnée d'une évolution garantie.

Les trois religions dites du Livre: une ou trois métaphysiques religieuses?

- Les trois religions s'autoproclament «monothéistes», et s'en honorent. Elles prétendent même qu'elles sont seules à l'être, chacune d'entre elles de la manière la plus «juste», naturellement, et, de ce fait, manifestent un mépris qui frise l'arrogance à l'égard des autres croyances religieuses qui, n'étant pas parvenues à concevoir le Dieu unique, abstrait, le même pour tous les être humains—qu'elles le reconnaissent ou pas—seraient de ce fait «primitives» et «inférieures».

De surcroît les trois religions se proclament «révélées» (par ce Dieu unique) et nient cette qualité chez les autres. Celles-ci seraient donc des religions «inventées» (donc fausses). Bien entendu, les tenants des autres religions croient tout autant à la révélation. Révélation et sacré sont synonymes. La distinction entre les religions du Livre et les autres est arrogance idéologique.

- La parenté entre les trois religions dites du Livre est un fait historique d'évidence. Les trois religions ont un livre sacré en commun, la Bible des juifs (l'ancien testament chez les chrétiens), même si cette Bible se présente dans des variantes fortement différentes chez les juifs et les musulmans,

chacun prétendant évidemment que sa version est la «bonne», celle qui a été véritablement «révélée». Les catholiques et les protestants par contre acceptent les versions juives de la Bible, les premiers le corpus des Juifs de la Diaspora, les seconds celui des Juifs de Jérusalem. Cette parenté pourrait s'expliquer d'une manière fort terre à terre par le lieu géographique de naissance des trois religions. Le Christ a vécu en Palestine, aux côtés des communautés juives du pays et peut être en leur sein. L'islam est né dans un pays proche, pénétré par les croyances des juifs et des chrétiens, mis au défi par celles-ci, notamment par le christianisme des sociétés civilisées qui l'encerclaient presque de Byzance à l'Éthiopie.

Par elle-même la parenté n'exclut, ni n'implique *a priori* l'unicité fondamentale de la métaphysique des trois religions. Pour répondre à cette question il faudra mesurer l'importance, fondamentale, mineure ou insignifiante, du tronc commun qu'elles partagent. Comment celui-ci a-t-il marqué les options métaphysiques et les vécus sociaux des groupes de peuples que se répartissent les trois religions?

- Tous les peuples de la Planète ont une mythologie qui rend compte de la création et de leur place dans celle-ci. Tous, au départ, se donnent dans cet univers la place du «peuple élu», celui dont la mythologie est le récit vrai de la création. Leurs dieux sont donc, aussi, les «vrais»; tous les autres peuples se sont trompés, ou ont été trompés. Au départ les dieux sont donc conçus comme particuliers et différents d'un peuple à l'autre. Cependant il n'a jamais manqué d'esprits assez lucides, même très tôt dans l'histoire, pour relativiser la portée des récits mythologiques et la particularité des dieux. Une première réaction salutaire a consisté à accepter la pluralité des vérités révélées aux uns et aux autres («chaque peuple a sa vérité»; c'est la même exprimée dans des langues diverses), et donc d'une certaine manière l'équivalence des dieux de chacun. Cette réaction favorisait le syncrétisme, qu'on retrouve par exemple dans l'Empire romain, qui associe des peuples divers, comme ailleurs, jusque dans l'Afrique contemporaine. D'ailleurs les emprunts mutuels que les mythologies ont pu se faire sont de mieux en mieux connus. Les progrès de l'archéologie, de l'histoire et de l'exégèse ont permis de découvrir des «mythologies-ancêtres», comme celles qui relatent l'affaire du Déluge au Moyen-Orient, le mythe de Gilgamesh, etc.

Les Juifs ne sont donc pas le seul peuple à se proclamer «élu». Tous en ont fait de même. Les Juifs continuent-ils à le penser sérieusement? J'en doute. Dans la réalité sociale de notre époque, la majorité des Juifs, même ceux d'entre eux qui sont des croyants convaincus, comme chez les autres,

savent sans doute qu'ils ne sont que des être humains ordinaires. La nuance qu'on peut apporter sur ce plan est peut être que, du fait de la Diaspora, les Juifs ont été amenés, pour subsister en tant que tels, à souligner leur «spécificité» (donc leur attachement religieux). Mais ils ne sont pas absolument seuls à être dans ce cas.

Notre société moderne a quand même fait quelques progrès, depuis deux mille ans ou plus (même si le concept de «progrès» doit être jeté à la poubelle, dit-on!). Beaucoup d'êtres humains de notre monde moderne, même parmi ceux qui restent fortement attachés à leurs croyances propres, ont quelque peu relativisé leurs références religieuses. Ils sont peut-être plus facilement «tolérants», pas seulement dans leurs comportements quotidiens extérieurs, mais aussi—et cela est plus important—dans le respect intime des croyances des autres.

- Du fait de ce progrès, les mythologies de la création ont été érodées à leur tour. Elles ne sont plus lues comme elles l'étaient à l'origine: à la lettre. Beaucoup de nos contemporains—encore une fois y compris chez les croyants—acceptent que ces mythologies sont des mythologies, c'est-à-dire qu'elles ont le statut des fables éducatrices même—et justement si—on les pense inspirées par la divinité. La Bible des trois religions du Livre, la mythologie des Bororo ou des Dogons ont un statut identique: celui de constituer le texte sacré d'origine des croyances d'un ou de plusieurs peuples.

L'affirmation monothéiste est, par elle-même, un concept strictement théologique. Quand on a dit qu'il n'y a qu'un seul Dieu, on n'a pas dit grand chose. Ce n'est ni une évidence, ni une contre évidence. Le monothéisme est d'ailleurs probablement plus répandu que ne le croient les partisans de la distinction formelle religions monothéistes/religions qu'ils disent polythéistes. Beaucoup de ceux qui sont «accusés» de polythéisme classent hiérarchiquement leurs divinités et les ramènent souvent à des expressions diverses d'une seule et même force surnaturelle. En y regardant de plus près, on s'est rendu compte que ceux qu'on appelait des «idolâtres» étaient en réalité des «animistes» et que cette qualification les revalorisait, puisque, derrière la pluralité de ses expressions, la force surnaturelle était une.

Au demeurant, les monothéistes le sont-ils aussi fortement qu'ils le proclament? Toutes les religions, judaïsme, christianisme et islam inclus, affirment l'existence d'êtres surnaturels autres que Dieu—anges, démons, djins, etc. Comme elles affirment que, parmi les êtres humains, certains sont «inspirés» par la divinité: Saints ou prophètes, ils ont véhiculé la

parole de Dieu. Les trois religions du Livre connaissent Satan aux côtés de Dieu, même si elles hiérarchisent les pouvoirs de ces deux êtres au bénéfice du second. Avant et après les religions du Livre la même conception dualiste du surnaturel a existé, chez Zoroastre, les Manichéens et d'autres. Et dans le christianisme le Dieu unique en trois personnes (le Père, le Fils et le Saint-Esprit), objet d'un mystère—et de débats théologiques qui ont animé la dispute entre les Chrétiens monophysites et les autres—nuance le concept de monothéisme. Comment alors distinguer réellement la parole de Dieu de celle que celui-ci inspire à travers ses Prophètes ou son Fils? Du point de vue de l'analyse du texte métaphysique, il s'agit de la même chose.

Sans doute les trois religions du Livre ont-elles été plus que d'autres affirmatives de ce caractère monothéiste, comme elles ont introduit une certaine forme de rationalité dans d'autres aspects de leurs éléments constitutifs, éthiques et organisationnels. On est alors tenté d'établir une correspondance entre cette évolution religieuse et celle des sociétés du Moyen-Orient ancien, au dépassement de l'organisation lignagère par la construction de l'État. Mais si cet ajustement mutuel de la base sociale et de l'instance religieuse est plausible, il n'en constitue pas la seule forme historique possible. D'autres sociétés, non moins avancées, en Inde et en Chine par exemple, ont répondu à ces exigences par d'autres moyens: en Chine par l'adoption d'une métaphysique non religieuse (le confucianisme), en Inde par la liberté de l'invention religieuse (l'hindouisme).

Au risque de voir certains protester avec violence, j'ajouterai que les trois religions en question, comme les autres, se sont cristallisées dans des moments où les tentations de syncrétisme étaient puissantes. Des savants ont pu faire apparaître des «emprunts», par exemple du christianisme à la religion de l'Égypte ancienne, du judaïsme aux religions de l'Orient ancien (Baal et autres), de l'islam aux croyances de la péninsule arabique, etc. Si l'on descend d'un cran en direction des rites, interdits alimentaires et autres choses du même genre, les emprunts sont encore plus visibles. Aucun croyant ne sera gêné par cette reconnaissance: pour lui elle prouverait seulement que Dieu a inspiré les êtres humains dans tout le cours de leur histoire, avant même que ne soit révélée la religion à laquelle il se rattache.

- Entre les trois religions du Livre, la proximité du Judaïsme-Islam est la plus forte. Des savants des religions ont avancé—non sans arguments—que l'islam est largement une arabisation du judaïsme. Non seulement

parce que ses préceptes, sa législation et ses rites sont largement communs avec ceux des juifs, mais aussi—et cela est plus fondamental—parce que l'islam partage avec le judaïsme la même conception du rapport Religion/Société. L'arabisation du judaïsme est d'ailleurs antérieure au message du prophète de l'Islam. L'histoire et le Coran reconnaissent l'existence des hanifs, qui se réclament du Dieu de leur ancêtre Abraham, sans pour autant se déclarer Juifs. Dans cet esprit, l'islam s'est affirmé être la religion révélée par Dieu à l'Humanité dès l'origine, ayant été révélée à Adam lui-même. L'islam aurait donc existé depuis toujours, avant même que Dieu ne parle par la voix de son Prophète Mahomet. Mais il aurait été oublié ou incompris par les uns (les polythéistes), compris en partie seulement par les autres (les juifs et les chrétiens).

On saisit alors l'importance que les musulmans—ou certains d'entre eux—donnent à un curieux débat. Il existe en effet une littérature abondante, non considérée comme hérétique par les autorités qui s'autoproclament «les» porteurs de l'islam, qui s'attache à «prouver» qu'Abraham n'était pas Juif, mais Arabe, etc. Cette démonstration présente les apparences de la scientificité: on invoque ici les fouilles en Mésopotamie, la linguistique, l'étymologie des noms, etc. Pour qui lit la Bible comme une mythologie parmi d'autres, la question n'a ni sens, ni portée. On ne «corrige» pas une mythologie, on ne cherche pas qui était la personne réelle qui se profile derrière le personnage mythologique.

On comprend alors—dans la perspective de la thèse de l'arabisation du judaïsme (ou de l'islamisation du judaïsme)—que l'islam ne reprenne pas la Bible des juifs telle quelle. Celle-ci est revue et corrigée.

La concomitance entre l'apparition de l'islam et l'unification politique de la péninsule arabe est d'une évidence telle qu'elle a fait dire à beaucoup d'historiens arabes que le monothéisme—se substituant à la pluralité des divinités tribales—avait été le véhicule de la formation nationale arabe; car obéir au même Dieu devenait synonyme d'obéir au même pouvoir politique. Or les Arabes connaissaient bien le monothéisme chrétien et judaïque. Mais s'ils avaient opté pour le christianisme, ils auraient couru le risque de tomber dans la dépendance de Byzance, qui dominait la région, ce qu'ils craignaient par-dessus tout. Par contre en reprenant pour leur compte une forme de judaïsme, ils ne couraient pas de risque, la religion juive n'étant pas associée à un système étatique en place. L'attraction était donc forte pour eux de faire leur lecture singulière du judaïsme et de se l'approprier en refusant de le voir comme la religion

propre d'un peuple sémite particulier, les Hébreux, mais en le proclamant religion révélée à leurs propres ancêtres, sémites également mais arabes.

Par ailleurs les caractéristiques du milieu dans lequel l'islam et le christianisme se sont constitués étaient bien différentes. L'islam s'est constitué dans l'intégralité de ses dogmes au sein d'un petit milieu homogène, celui des tribus arabes de la Mecque et de Médine. Il devait alors fatalement porter les marques de cette origine. À tel point que la vocation universelle de cette religion n'était pas établie au départ. Dans un premier temps de la conquête arabe au-delà de la péninsule la tendance dominante chez les Arabes était de se réserver l'islam et de laisser aux peuples conquis leurs religions. S'il en avait été ainsi l'islam serait resté une religion strictement arabe. Mais un double mouvement a ouvert l'islam à sa vocation universelle: la conversion spontanée de segments importants des populations conquises, l'accueil finalement favorable de ces conversions par les Arabes eux-mêmes. Le christianisme par contre s'est constitué dans le milieu cosmopolite de l'Empire romain de culture hellénistique. De surcroît sa formation a été plus lente. Il était donc marqué dès l'origine par ce milieu multiethnique et multiculturel qui favorisait sa vocation à l'universalisme.

Une dernière observation: le monothéisme constitue-t-il véritablement une prodigieuse avancée de la pensée, un «progrès» qualitatif? Il ne manque pas d'esprits malins (mais qui dit malin dit mal intentionné, inspiré par le Malin—le Diable) qui font le rapprochement entre ce Dieu unique (dans l'imagerie populaire—sinon dans la vision épurée des docteurs—un vieil homme d'âge à la barbe blanche, symbole de sagesse et d'autorité) et le patriarche du patriarcat, l'autocrate des systèmes de pouvoir. Dans cet imaginaire qui traduit bien le vécu, il est évident que le vieux mâle sage est plus proche de Dieu qu'une femme ou un jeune. Projection dans le ciel qui légitime le patriarcat et l'autocratie qui règnent ici bas. Entre autres la suppression des divinités féminines, toujours importantes dans les religions non monothéistes, ne pouvait qu'accentuer la domination patriarcale. Ces esprits malins diront que ce Dieu seul tout puissant les dépouille eux, pauvres hères, de tout pouvoir. Car avec des Dieux nombreux, en concurrence et en conflit, on peut appeler à son secours celui qui est le mieux placé pour rendre service, et—à la grecque—faire un pied de nez à celui qui vous ennuie! Est-ce un hasard si la démocratie grecque est polythéiste? Est-ce un hasard si dans les aires qui seront dominées par les grandes religions—ici christianisme et islam—cette démocratie disparaît? Mais on fera remarquer que le pouvoir qui adopte

en Chine une métaphysique non religieuse et en Inde le pluralisme religieux hindouiste n'a guère été également autre chose qu'autocratique.

Religion et Société: le risque de théocratie

• Les religions ne sont pas seulement des métaphysiques. Elles s'expriment également comme des réalités sociales majeures. Métaphysique et fonction sociale se mêlent et se déterminent mutuellement dans une dialectique historique en mouvement. Les spécificités éventuelles de leur expression métaphysique sont de ce fait difficilement séparables de celles qui concernent les systèmes sociaux dans lesquels elles se situent et sur lesquels elles opèrent.

Un point de départ utile pour répondre à la question posée plus haut—les trois religions du Livre sont-elles pour l'essentiel une ou plusieurs?—consiste à partir de la vision du temps historique qu'elles proposent.

Le judaïsme croit à la fin des temps. L'heure de celui-ci sonnera avec la venue du Messie qui organisera sur Terre, ici bas, son Royaume, c'est-à-dire la société enfin juste et heureuse pour l'éternité des temps. Le croyant convaincu ne croit pas que ce règne de la justice puisse être conquis par l'action humaine avant cette fin des temps. C'est la raison pour laquelle certains Juifs refusent l'État d'Israël. Cependant ce Messie n'est pas encore venu, jusqu'ici tout au moins. La fin des temps est alors devant nous.

L'islam a adopté sur cette question majeure une position différente. Le prophète a bien organisé de son vivant, ici bas, à Médine, une société juste. En ce sens, bien qu'il ait été lui-même qualifié de Prophète—encore qu'il soit le dernier des Prophètes, qu'il n'y en aura plus après lui—ce Prophète peut être considéré comme celui que les Juifs appellent le Messie: il est l'organisateur du Royaume de Dieu sur terre. Je sais bien que cette interprétation de l'islam et du temps du prophète n'est pas la seule chez les croyants musulmans eux-mêmes. Beaucoup de musulmans—et pas nécessairement seulement une minorité d'entre eux qui se voudraient éclairés—n'ont jamais dit, ni ne disent, qu'il faudrait établir—ou rétablir—le système de la société de Médine. Ceux-là disent que de cette époque, révolue à jamais, on ne peut tirer que des leçons générales, des valeurs morales, des exemples, des principes d'inspiration. Rien de plus. Ne serait-ce que parce que le Prophète n'est plus là pour diriger la société et que nul ne saurait le remplacer. Le problème est alors d'adapter ces principes aux réalités changeantes du temps. Dès lors une marge imposante ouvre la voie à la discussion, à des opinions diverses. Or ce concept relativiste a dominé en fait l'histoire réelle des musulmans. Mais il n'est qu'un concept, qui peut être rejeté. On peut lui substituer l'idée que l'organisation sociale du temps du prophète constitue bel et bien le modèle final de l'histoire,

celui auquel il faut se raccrocher, qu'il faut reproduire ou auquel il faut revenir si on s'en est écarté. Une interprétation qu'on peut qualifier de fondamentaliste si l'on veut, puisqu'elle appelle à revenir aux «sources», aux fondements. Elle existe, elle a toujours existé. Elle a aujourd'hui le vent en poupe. Mais elle ne revient au devant de la scène, ne s'impose ou ne paraît s'imposer que dans des conjonctures particulières dont il faudrait bien alors analyser les raisons. Ce qui est important ici, c'est de savoir donc que ce concept place l'avenir dans le passé. La fin des temps a commencé il y a quinze siècles, l'histoire s'y est arrêtée pour l'essentiel. Ce qui a pu arriver depuis dans l'histoire réelle n'a guère d'importance, puisque cette histoire ne fournit à ceux des musulmans qui adhèrent à cette interprétation de l'islam aucune leçon digne d'être retenue.

Le christianisme a adopté un troisième point de vue sur cette question de la fin des temps, un point de vue qui le sépare du judaïsme et de l'islam et lui donne sa spécificité à la fois comme métaphysique et comme force qui participe au façonnement de la réalité sociale. Mais pour voir cette différence il faut en venir directement à l'analyse de la réalité sociale en question.

- Le judaïsme n'est pas seulement l'abstraction d'un monothéisme, il a également été l'organisateur d'une société historique, celle des juifs en Palestine, puis, en partie, l'inspirateur et l'organisateur des communautés juives de la Diaspora.

On connaît mal l'histoire réelle des Juifs en Palestine ancienne. Infiniment moins bien que celle des autres peuples de la région, peut-être parce que ceux-ci, plus forts ou plus avancés, ont laissé davantage de traces écrites et autres. Mais ce qu'on sait sûrement c'est que le judaïsme a produit une loi précise, détaillée à l'extrême. Non pas seulement quelques grands principes moraux généraux—les Tables de Moïse, d'ailleurs semble-t-il inspirées d'autres—mais bien plus: un ensemble de règles qui encadrent solidement la vie individuelle, familiale et sociale des Juifs. Des lois qui règlent tout dans le domaine des droits personnels, le mariage, le divorce, la filiation, l'héritage etc. Toutes ces lois sont partie intégrante du religieux, du sacré et donc du difficile (sinon du tout à fait impossible) à modifier. Ces lois et règlement sont accompagnés de lois pénales non moins précises, et de surcroît fort rudes, voire sauvages aux yeux contemporains (la lapidation des femmes adultères ...), elles-mêmes partie intégrante du sacré. Enfin elles opèrent dans un cadre fortement ritualisé: de la circoncision à l'interdiction absolue de toute activité le jour du Sabbat et aux interdits alimentaires, la liste est longue.

C'est peut-être le formalisme précis de l'ensemble de ces lois, règles et rituels qui a permis aux juifs dans la Diaspora de se préserver de l'inévitable contagion, assimilation et conversion. C'est aussi peut être là l'un des motifs de l'hostilité manifestée à leur égard (un motif n'est pas une excuse!).

Ce qui paraît certain c'est qu'une telle conception fortement sociale de la religion ne laisse aucune place au concept de société laïque. Elle ne produit qu'un concept théocratique du pouvoir, ce dont les Juifs n'avaient été préservés que par la Diaspora. Car le pouvoir n'a pas à inventer des lois, il est là pour appliquer celles que Dieu a établies une fois pour toute. On a tendance aujourd'hui à n'appeler théocratie que les formes de pouvoir opérant par le canal d'une caste religieuse qui revendique son monopole parce qu'elle seule connaît bien les lois qu'il faut appliquer, que cette caste s'appelle synode, église ou autre chose, ou même n'ait pas de nom. Cette réduction est malheureuse; théocratie veut dire pouvoir de Dieu, en pratique donc de ceux qui parlent en son nom. Théocratie s'oppose à modernité si par celle-ci on fait référence au concept fondamental de la démocratie moderne, à savoir que les êtres humains établissent librement leurs lois et par-là même sont responsables de leur histoire.

La loi juive est, semble-t-il, pauvre en ce qui concerne l'organisation des pouvoirs, le droit public pour parler le langage moderne. Contrairement aux États avancés de la région—l'Égypte pharaonique, l'Iran achéménide depuis sassanide, les pays de la Mésopotamie, la Grèce et Rome—qui ont produit des modèles détaillés de l'organisation administrative et politique (peu importe que ces modèles n'aient pas été démocratiques), les juifs sont restés enfermés dans les formes politiques plus frustes dans lesquelles les pouvoirs des Rois ou des Juges sont mal précisés. Mais cette faiblesse n'est qu'un argument supplémentaire en faveur de la théocratie. Le pouvoir de Dieu ne s'embarrasse pas de formes précises ...

Longtemps oublié chez les juifs grâce à la Diaspora, cette propension naturelle à la théocratie devait émerger à nouveau dans l'État juif—Israël contemporain. N'en seront étonnés que ceux qui ne veulent pas voir le judaïsme réel comme forme d'organisation sociale à fondement religieux.

• l'islam offre, sur tous ces plans, un parallèle rigoureux avec le judaïsme. L'Islam a réglé de la même manière, en détail et dans son texte sacré, tous les aspects du droit personnel. Il en a fait de même pour ce qui est du droit pénal, aussi sévère et formel que celui des juifs (encore une fois même dans le détail l'analogie est parfaite: lapidation des femmes adultères ...). Il pratique des rituels semblables puissants, de la circoncision aux interdits

alimentaires, en passant par les prières à heure fixe (pas n'importe quand) et dans une formule répétitive unique (sans personnalisation possible). Il s'agit bien d'un ensemble de règles et de pratiques qui encadrent fortement la société, et laissent peu de marge à l'innovation ou à l'imaginaire.

Peu importe ici que tout cela ait pu paraître, puisse encore paraître, insuffisant à des croyants plus exigeants. Dans l'islam historique, le soufisme leur ouvre ses portes et permet l'épanouissement de mystiques non ritualisées.

Juifs et musulmans sont néanmoins—comme tout le monde—des gens pratiques. Ils ont besoin d'un droit des affaires, complétant les droits personnels. Ils l'empruntent donc aux milieux ambiants adaptés aux exigences du temps. Les musulmans «islamisent» les pratiques et les lois qu'ils découvrent dans l'aire civilisée qu'ils conquièrent: le droit musulman traduit sur ce plan, parfois mot à mot, le droit byzantin. Ils donnent à cette opération un habillage islamique, sacré; mais il ne s'agit là que d'un habillage.

Les musulmans, comme les juifs n'ont pas de droit public élaboré. Cela n'est pas ressenti comme gênant, pour la même raison que chez les juifs. Mais on sait bien qu'il a fallu pallier cette absence en inventant le khalifat (postérieur à l'islam du prophète), et en reprenant les institutions administratives byzantines et sassanides. L'absence de précision concernant le pouvoir suprême, qu'on ne peut définir puisque celui-ci relève de Dieu, ne permettra jamais de dépasser dans les faits l'autocratie pure et simple.

Autocratie et théocratie vont de pair. Car qui va parler au nom de Dieu, sinon pour légiférer (personne n'en a le droit) tout au moins pour appliquer la loi, qu'elle existe ou pas? Le Khalife—ou son substitut, le Sultan—le fera sans grande hésitation. Et le peuple le verra un peu comme «l'ombre de Dieu sur terre» même lorsque les docteurs de la loi se gardent parfois de le dire.

Dans ce sens, le pouvoir dans les pays musulmans a été et est toujours théocratique, même si dans la pratique son expression est fortement atténuée par le fait que la théocratie en question n'est pas mise en œuvre par une caste spéciale d'hommes de religion. Les États des musulmans ne peuvent se concevoir autrement, qu'en tant qu'États islamiques. Pour le faire il a fallu, dans les deux seuls pays à population musulmane entrés dans la laïcité (la Turquie et l'ex-Asie centrale soviétique) rompre bruyamment et officiellement avec l'islam. Ces pays retourneront peut être à la norme islamique, mais cela constitue une autre histoire.

Sur ce plan, l'islam politique contemporain n'est pas novateur. Il va seulement plus loin, et veut transformer ces États théocratiques «mous»,

contaminés par la modernité ambiante, en États théocratiques au sens fort du terme, c'est-à-dire donner le pouvoir, entier et absolu, à une caste religieuse—quasi-église comme en Iran, l'Azhar en Égypte—qui aurait le monopole du droit de parler au nom de «la» religion, de «la» loi (de Dieu), expurger la pratique sociale de tout ce qui, à ses yeux, n'est pas authentiquement islamique, dans la loi et les rites. À défaut, c'est-à-dire si cette caste ne parvient pas à s'imposer comme seule détentrice de la légitimité islamique, «n'importe qui»—c'est-à-dire en fait des chefs de clans ou de bandes quelconques—peut y prétendre. C'est la guerre civile permanente, comme en Afghanistan.

J'avais déjà écrit ce texte lorsque j'ai pris connaissance de la critique de la religion juive par Israël Shahak. La lecture de cet ouvrage convaincra le lecteur de l'extraordinaire similitude entre le judaïsme et l'islam qui partagent une conception commune de la théocratie comme seule forme légitime du pouvoir politique. Les raisons par lesquelles Shahak explique ainsi la renaissance du fondamentalisme juif en Israël sont transposables mot à mot au fondamentalisme islamique. Mais évidemment les deux religions, juive et musulmane, peuvent aussi—si on le veut—être interprétée différemment, non toutefois sans difficulté.

- Le christianisme s'est écarté à l'origine de la voie théocratique, puis y est venu par la suite; avant que les peuples de la chrétienté ne s'en écartent à nouveau.

Dans le moment de sa constitution, le christianisme paraît bien ne pas rompre avec l'héritage judaïque concernant la fin des temps. L'annonce du jugement et de la deuxième venue du Messie a certainement des dimensions eschatologiques, qui ont été fortement accentués dans un texte tel que celui de l'Apocalypse. C'est d'ailleurs la raison pour laquelle tout au cours de l'histoire du christianisme il y a eu constamment des mouvements messianiques et millénaristes.

Cependant par la nature de son message le christianisme rompait en fait radicalement avec le judaïsme. Cette rupture est fondamentale puisque le message qui s'exprime dans l'histoire dramatique du Christ est clair: le Royaume de Dieu n'est pas sur Terre, il n'y sera jamais. Si le Fils de Dieu lui-même a été vaincu sur Terre, crucifié, c'est évidemment qu'il n'était pas dans l'intention de Dieu (le Père) d'établir son royaume ici bas, d'y faire régner définitivement la justice et le bonheur. Mais alors, si Dieu refuse de se substituer aux êtres humains pour régler leurs problèmes, il appartient à ceux-ci de prendre la responsabilité de le faire. Il n'y a plus de fin des temps, et le Christ ne la proclame ni venue, ni à venir. En cela

le Christ n'est pas le Messie attendu du judaïsme, et les juifs n'ont pas été dans l'erreur en refusant de le reconnaître pour tel. Le message du Christ peut être alors interprété comme simplement une invitation aux êtres humains à faire leur histoire et, s'ils la font bien (c'est à dire en s'inspirant des valeurs morales dont lui—Messie—donne l'exemple par sa vie et sa mort) se rapprocheront de Dieu à l'image duquel ils ont été créés. Cette interprétation est celle qui a fini par s'imposer et donner au christianisme moderne son style particulier fondé sur une lecture des Évangiles qui permet d'imaginer le futur comme la rencontre entre l'histoire construite par les êtres humains et l'intervention divine. La fin des temps, imaginée comme produite par une intervention extérieure à l'histoire, a disparu.

La rupture s'étend alors d'elle-même à tout le champ réglé jusqu'alors par la loi sacrée. Sans doute le Christ précise-t-il qu'il n'est pas venu pour bouleverser la loi (des juifs). Attitude logique conforme à son message essentiel: il n'est pas venu pour substituer de meilleures lois aux anciennes. Soumises au jugement des hommes ces lois vont donc pouvoir être remises en question. Le Christ lui-même va en donner l'exemple, en s'attaquant à l'une de ces lois pénales parmi les plus formelles et dures (précisément la lapidation des femmes adultères). En disant «que celui qui n'a jamais péché jette la première pierre», il ouvre les portes du débat: et si cette loi n'était pas juste? et si elle cachait seulement l'hypocrisie des véritables pécheurs? Les Chrétiens vont alors en fait abandonner la loi et les rituels juifs: la circoncision disparaît, les règles du droit personnel se diversifient d'autant que l'expansion du Christianisme hors du milieu juif s'adapte à des lois et statuts différents, auxquels il ne substitue pas un droit chrétien qui n'existe pas, les interdits alimentaires perdent leur force, etc.

Sur un plan plus dogmatique, le christianisme se comporte de la même manière: il ne rompt pas ouvertement avec le judaïsme, puisqu'il admet son texte sacré (la Bible). Mais il se l'approprie «sans discussion», il ne le soumet ni à relecture ni à correction. Du coup il en annule presque la portée. Il lui juxtapose d'autres textes sacrés, ceux qu'il produit, les Évangiles. Or la morale proposée dans ceux-ci (l'amour du prochain, la pitié, le pardon, la justice ...) est passablement différente de celle qu'inspirait l'Ancien testament. De surcroît les Évangiles ne proposent rien de suffisamment précis pour inspirer une législation positive quelconque en matière de statut personnel ou de droit pénal. De ce point de vue ces textes tranchent avec ceux de la Torah et du Coran.

Il n'y a plus de confusion possible entre le Pouvoir légitime et Dieu («Rendez à César ce qui est à César»). Précepte intenable dès lors que le pouvoir, après avoir combattu le Christianisme pendant trois siècles,

change de camp et se fait chrétien. Dès avant, dans la clandestinité des églises autour desquelles s'organisent les chrétiens, encore davantage après que l'Empereur soit devenu lui-même le protecteur armé du christianisme, un nouveau droit s'élabore, un droit qui se dira «chrétien». D'abord dans le domaine du droit des personnes. Qu'est-ce qu'une famille chrétienne? Il faut en préciser les contours, légiférer sur ce terrain. Ce sera long, fluctuant, et on ne parviendra jamais à s'entendre. Car on accepte des lois et coutumes antérieures, différentes ici et là ... Progressivement quand même ces lois seront revêtues du prestige du sacré: les droits canons catholiques (il y en a un pour les Églises orientales et un autre pour les occidentales), comme les formes juridiques des différentes Églises orthodoxes et protestantes sont les résultats de cette évolution lente.

Concernant l'organisation des pouvoirs, le rapport politique/religieux, mêmes fluctuations, même évolution vers la sacralisation. Les églises, qui s'étaient constituées comme des partis clandestins dirait-on dans le langage de notre époque, subsistent en tant que telles après «la prise du pouvoir». Dans la mesure où elles avaient été démocratiques, au sens banal de proches de leurs fidèles, fut-ce par nécessité, elles perdent ce caractère. Elles se rapprochent du pouvoir, s'éloignent s'il le faut des fidèles que désormais elle «encadrent» pour le compte du premier. Le pouvoir, lui, de son côté, ne se laisse pas domestiquer par les églises. Il tient à ses règles propres de dévolution dynastique; il institutionnalise les exigences du nouveau système—féodal en Occident romano-barbare, impérial en Orient byzantin—et soumet autant que possible les églises à sa propre logique. La fusion progresse néanmoins et, tout comme le Khalife, le Seigneur ou le Roi deviennent des personnages plus ou moins sacralisés.

La chrétienté se rapproche alors d'un modèle de théocratie «molle» gérée conjointement par des hommes de religion et par des laïcs du pouvoir qui ne manquent pas de se proclamer aussi chrétiens que les gens d'Église. Comme en terre d'Islam. Lorsque, en terre chrétienne, la révolution bourgeoise viendra mettre en question le concept de l'éternité de l'ordre social qui se prétend assis sur les principes chrétiens immuables (ou prétendus tels), lorsque cette révolution aura ouvert les portes de la modernité, inventé la démocratie nouvelle (quelque limitée qu'en ait été la mise en œuvre), lorsque les Lumières auront déclaré que les Hommes (pas les Femmes à l'époque!) font leur histoire, doivent choisir leurs lois (et les défaire), les défenseurs de l'ordre ancien vont, au nom du christianisme, dénoncer cette ambition démesurée de libération humaine, d'émancipation. On comprend alors comment Joseph de Maistre, dans la

France réactionnaire de la Restauration, peut proclamer que la démocratie est une absurdité, un rêve dangereux et criminel, car Dieu seul est législateur, que Dieu a produit les lois qu'il n'y a qu'à appliquer, sans exercer son imagination à vouloir en inventer de meilleures. Un texte que l'Ayattollah Khomeini ou Cheikh El Azhar auraient pu écrire mot pour mot!

Peu importe alors, qu'à l'époque où Joseph de Maistre écrit, au début du XIXe siècle, on ne sache plus ce que sont ces «lois» que Dieu aurait décrété pour la Chrétienté. Les Tables de Moïse? Ou plus platement toutes ces traditions romaines, germaniques et slaves—fort peu chrétiennes—qui ont fourni la trame du tissu des sociétés européennes dites chrétiennes.

Lorsque Joseph de Maistre écrit, il est de toute façon trop tard. Les sociétés européennes ont pris goût à faire leurs lois elles-mêmes, sans référence nécessaire aux principes chrétiens, qu'on invoque parfois ici ou là, mais sans rigidité ni même grande conviction; ces sociétés sont d'ailleurs confrontées à des exigences nouvelles—à un besoin objectif établi d'agir ainsi. Le risque théocratique est passé, définitivement.

Du débat ancien—concilier Foi et Raison—au débat moderne—laïciser le pouvoir social

- Proclamer que Dieu seul est législateur est bien beau en théorie, mais fort peu pratique. Musulmans et chrétiens vont en faire l'expérience dans leurs aires respectives.

Hautement civilisées, les sociétés du Moyen Âge musulman et européen se heurtent à un problème majeur, le même: comment concilier la Foi—plus précisément leur religion qui est le fondement de la légitimité du pouvoir—et la Raison—dont on a besoin chaque jour non pas seulement pour régler les petits problèmes de la vie technique et quotidienne, mais également pour inspirer des lois et règlements en réponse à des besoins nouveaux.

Musulmans, chrétiens et juifs de la Diaspora vont résoudre ce problème de la même manière, par les mêmes méthodes (la scolastique aristotélicienne)—qui ne sont ni juives, ni chrétiennes, ni islamiques, mais grecques!—et avec les mêmes résultats brillants. Les avant-gardes, Ibn Rochd chez les musulmans, saint Thomas d'Aquin chez les chrétiens ou Maimonide chez les juifs en terre d'islam, iront fort loin. Ils sauront relativiser les dogmes, interpréter les textes sacrés autant que nécessaire, pallier leurs insuffisances, substituer à la lecture textuelle les images de l'exemple éducateur. Les plus audacieux seront souvent condamnés comme hérétiques (ce fut le cas d'Ibn Rochd) par les interprètes conservateurs au service des pouvoirs. Mais qu'importe. La société européenne en

mouvement vit selon les préceptes que ces avant-gardes recommandent; tandis que le monde musulman qui refuse de le faire est entré de ce fait dans le déclin dont il n'est pas encore sorti. Ghazali, le porte-parole du conservatisme islamique, l'ennemi d'Ibn Rochd, est resté jusqu'à ce jour, chez les Ayatollahs «révolutionnaires» d'Iran comme à El Azhar ou en Arabie Saoudite, la «référence» définitive en toute matière.

- À partir de la Renaissance, puis surtout des Lumières, l'Occident européen chrétien sort du débat ancien pour en amorcer un nouveau. Il ne s'agit plus de concilier Foi et Raison, mais Raison et Émancipation. La Raison a pris son indépendance, elle ne nie pas qu'un champ puisse exister où se déploie la foi, mais elle ne s'y intéresse plus. Il s'agit désormais de légitimer de nouveaux besoins: la liberté de l'individu, l'émancipation de la société qui prend le risque d'inventer ses lois, de façonner son propre futur. La modernité réside précisément dans cette rupture qualitative avec le passé.

Cette nouvelle vision implique bel et bien la laïcité, c'est-à-dire l'abandon de la référence à la religion comme à toute autre force méta-sociale dans le débat sur les lois. Bien entendu, les différentes sociétés bourgeoises iront plus ou moins loin, dans ce domaine comme dans les autres, selon les circonstances. Plus la révolution bourgeoise aura été radicale, plus forte sera l'affirmation de la laïcité. Plus la bourgeoisie aura fait des compromis avec l'Ancien régime, moins franche sera la laïcité.

Le christianisme moderne s'est adapté à cette transformation sociale profonde. Il lui a fallu pour cela se réinterpréter de fond en comble, renoncer à son ambition de faire régner sa loi, accepter d'inspirer les âmes des croyants dans la liberté et la concurrence de ses adversaires. Exercice bénéfique car ce faisant les Chrétiens modernes découvraient la minceur des lois attribuées à Dieu par leurs ancêtres.

Le christianisme moderne est devenu une religion sans dogmes.

- Quelqu'aient été les avancées produites par les tentatives de concilier Foi et Raison, il n'en demeure donc pas moins nécessaire d'en reconnaître les limites. En effet les avancées se bloquent chez les musulmans et les juifs dans la problématique ancienne, et sont finalement défaits au profit d'un retour à l'orthodoxie des origines. Par contre dans le monde chrétien occidental, ces mêmes avancées ont peut-être préparé—sans l'avoir nécessairement conçu—leur propre dépassement.

Comment peut-on tenter d'expliquer cet avortement des uns et ce succès des autres, qui deviendront les inventeurs de la modernité? La tradition matérialiste dans l'histoire donne la priorité au développement social et

suppose de ce fait que les religions—en leur qualité d'instance idéologique—finissent par se réinterpréter elles-mêmes pour satisfaire aux exigences du mouvement de la réalité. Cette hypothèse de recherche est certainement plus féconde que son opposé, selon laquelle les religions constitueraient des ensembles dogmatiques donnés une fois pour toutes, des invariants transhistoriques. Cette seconde hypothèse—qui a le vent en poupe dans le moment actuel—interdit toute réflexion sur le mouvement général de l'histoire de l'humanité prise dans son ensemble et enferme dans l'affirmation de la «différence irréductible entre les cultures».

Mais l'hypothèse matérialiste n'exclut pas la réflexion sur les raisons pour lesquelles certaines évolutions de la pensée religieuse se sont frayées la voie ici et pas là. Car l'instance religieuse—comme chacune des instances constitutives de la réalité sociale (l'idéologie, le politique, l'économique)—se meut dans sa logique propre. Les logiques de chacune des instances peuvent donc, soit faciliter leur évolution parallèle, assurant l'accélération du changement social, soit entrer en conflit et bloquer celui-ci. Dans ce cas qui l'emportera? Il est impossible de le prévoir; et c'est dans cette sous-détermination que réside la liberté des sociétés dont les choix (soumettre telle instance particulière à la logique imposée par l'évolution d'une autre) façonnent l'histoire réelle.

Cette dernière réflexion—et hypothèse de sous-détermination—nous permettra peut-être alors d'avancer dans la réponse à la question posée ici.

Le judaïsme et l'islam se sont constitués historiquement par l'affirmation que la société (juive ou musulmane) est une société dont le Roi véritable est Dieu. Le principe de la «hakimiya», réintroduit par les fondamentalistes musulmans de notre époque, ne fait que réaffirmer ce principe, avec la force la plus extrême, pour en tirer toutes les conclusions possibles. De surcroît le judaïsme et l'Islam donnent à leur texte sacré d'origine (la Torah et le Coran) l'interprétation la plus forte possible: aucun mot n'y est superflu. Au point que les hommes de religion dans les deux cas ont toujours exprimé des réserves très fortes à l'égard de toute traduction du texte, hébreu et arabe en l'occurrence. Les peuples juifs et musulmans sont des peuples de l'exégèse. Le Talmud chez les juifs, le Fiqh chez les musulmans n'ont pas leur équivalent dans la lecture des Évangiles.

Ce double principe judéo-islamique explique sans doute beaucoup des aspects visibles de ce qu'ont été les sociétés juives et musulmanes. Car les textes sacrés peuvent alors être lus comme des Recueils de lois—et même des Constitutions (l'Arabie Saoudite proclame que le Coran est la constitution politique de l'État) qui règlent tous les détails de la vie

quotidienne (le droit des personnes, le droit pénal, le droit civil, les liturgies), invitent le croyant à «renoncer à sa volonté propre pour se soumettre intégralement à celle de Dieu» comme on l'a écrit à maintes reprises, imaginent cette vie comme devant être réglée dans tous ses détails comme dans un couvent.

La conciliation Foi-Raison se déploie dans les limites imposées par ce double principe, tant chez le musulman Ibn Rochd que chez son contemporain juif Maimonide. Et dans les deux cas la réaction traditionaliste l'a emporté, avec le retour au Kalam chez Ashari et Ghazali, à l'exégèse talmudique préconisée par Judah Halevy. Dans les deux cas on proclamera donc que la certitude réside dans la Révélation et non dans la Raison. La page de la philosophie était tournée chez les Musulmans et chez les Juifs. Accompagnant la stagnation, puis le déclin des sociétés musulmanes, cet avortement de la réforme religieuse devait par la force des choses, et dans les deux cas, se solder par l'accentuation du caractère formaliste, légaliste et ritualiste de l'interprétation de la religion. La compensation à cette forme d'appauvrissement a été trouvée, dans les deux cas, par le développement de sectes mystiques: soufis musulmans et cabbalistes juifs, qui d'ailleurs ont largement emprunté leurs méthodes aux traditions venues de l'Inde.

Si le christianisme s'est finalement avéré plus flexible, et si, de ce fait, l'enfermement dans les horizons de la conciliation Foi-Raison a pu être brisé, c'est peut-être, en partie tout au moins, pour les raisons invoquées plus haut: parce que le christianisme ne se proposait pas d'établir le royaume de Dieu sur Terre, parce que les Évangiles ne s'érigeaient pas en système positif de lois. On peut alors comprendre le paradoxe suivant: bien que l'Église catholique soit fortement organisée et qu'il y a une autorité officielle qui peut imposer son interprétation de la religion, celle-ci n'a pas résisté aux assauts de la nouvelle problématique séparant la Raison de la Foi, et c'est le christianisme qui a dû s'adapter à la nouvelle conception émancipatrice de la raison, tandis que l'absence d'une telle autorité dans l'islam postérieur au prophète et dans le judaïsme depuis la destruction du Temple et la dispersion du Sanhédrin, n'a pas gêné le maintien de l'orthodoxie des origines.

- Les Juifs de la Diaspora en terre d'Europe ne pouvaient pas ne pas être affectés par la transformation radicale de la société et des conceptions du rapport entre celle-ci et la religion.

Moïse Mendelsohn tente donc, au XVIIIe siècle d'emboîter le pas et de faire, dans le judaïsme, une révolution analogue à celle dans laquelle la

société chrétienne était engagée. En interprétant librement la Torah dans laquelle il ne voit plus une législation obligatoire, mais seulement une source d'inspiration où chacun peut puiser selon son gré, Mendelsohn s'engageait dans la voie de la laïcisation de la société. L'évolution de la société européenne elle-même contribuait à faciliter cette assimilation des juifs, dont la «nation» est déclarée défunte par la révolution française qui ne connaît que des citoyens, éventuellement de confession israélite. Dès lors le risque était grand que la judaïté disparaisse progressivement dans l'indifférence que la bourgeoisie israélite d'Europe occidentale et centrale partageait avec toute sa classe y compris dans ses fractions de croyants chrétiens.

L'anti-sémitisme persistant—pour toutes sortes de raisons religieuses ou simplement économiques et politiques—surtout en Europe orientale, ne devait pas permettre à la Réforme de triompher dans le judaïsme comme dans les populations d'origine chrétienne. Se dessine alors une contre réforme, qui se développe dans les ghettos, et prend la forme du hassidisme permettant aux Juifs de trouver une compensation à leur statut infériorisé en assumant leur humiliation pour l'amour de Dieu.

- La culture du monde moderne n'est plus «chrétienne», ni «judéo-chrétienne» comme on l'écrit désormais dans les médias contemporains. Cette dernière expression n'a d'ailleurs strictement aucun sens. Comment alors en expliquer l'usage répandu? Très simplement à mon avis: l'Europe chrétienne avait été fortement anti-juive (on a dit anti-sémite lorsque la référence à la pseudo «race» a été substituée à la religion, au XIXe siècle) pour des raisons dont la discussion entraînerait hors du cadre de ces réflexions. Tardivement, après que l'anti-sémitisme ait conduit aux horreurs du nazisme, l'Europe, saisissant alors la dimension de son crime, adoptait cette expression de judéo-chrétien dans une intention sympathique et louable de déraciner son anti-sémitisme. Il aurait été bien plus convaincant de reconnaître directement les contributions décisives de tant de penseurs «juifs» aux progrès de l'Europe. Les guillemets sont utilisés ici parce que tout simplement la culture moderne n'est ni chrétienne, ni judéo-chrétienne: elle est bourgeoise.

Le critère s'est déplacé du champ régi par le vieux débat (concilier la Foi—une religion—et la Raison), pour se situer sur un terrain qui ignore la religion. Les penseurs modernes ne sont donc fondamentalement ni chrétiens, ni juifs. La civilisation bourgeoise n'est pas la création du christianisme—ou du judéo-christianisme. À l'inverse ce sont le christianisme et le judaïsme des Juifs d'Europe occidentale qui se sont

adaptés à la civilisation bourgeoise. On attend de l'Islam qu'il le fasse à son tour. C'est la condition pour que les peuples musulmans participent au façonnement du monde et ne s'en excluent pas d'eux-mêmes.

La Réforme, expression ambiguë de l'adaptation du christianisme à la modernité

• La Réforme est un mouvement complexe à l'extrême tant dans ses dimensions doctrinales religieuses que dans la portée des transformations sociales qui l'ont accompagnées. Elle se déploie d'ailleurs sur des terrains européens fort différents, dans certains des noyaux les plus avancés dans l'invention du capitalisme (les Provinces Unies, l'Angleterre) et dans des régions attardées (l'Allemagne, la Scandinavie). Il est dangereux, dans ces conditions, de parler de «protestantisme» au singulier.

Au plan dogmatique tous les grands réformateurs ont appelé à un «retour aux sources» et, entre autre, ont, dans cet esprit, réhabilité l'Ancien Testament que le catholicisme et l'orthodoxie avaient marginalisé. J'ai développé plus haut l'idée que le christianisme s'était en effet constitué non pas en continuité avec le judaïsme, mais en rupture avec celui-ci. L'usage, aujourd'hui courant, du qualificatif de «judéo-chrétien», popularisé par l'expansion d'un certain discours protestant (particulier aux États-Unis pour l'essentiel), implique un renversement dans la vision des rapports entre ces deux religions monothéistes, auquel les catholiques (mais toujours pas les orthodoxes) se sont ralliés tardivement et sans grande conviction, mais plutôt par opportunisme politique.

L'appel au «retour aux sources» est une méthode qu'on retrouve presque toujours dans les mouvements qui se revendiquent de la religion. Mais il ne signifie à peu près rien par lui-même, l'interprétation des sources en question étant toujours décisive. Dans la Réforme, les fragments d'idéologies et les systèmes de valeurs qui s'expriment sur ce terrain du religieux gardent toutes les marques de formes primitives de réactions au défi capitaliste naissant. La Renaissance avait été plus loin par certains de ses aspects (Machiavel en est l'un des témoins les plus éloquents). Or la Renaissance se déploie en terrain catholique (l'Italie). Et la gestion de certaines villes italiennes comme de véritables sociétés commerciales dirigées par le syndicat des actionnaires les plus riches (Venise en est le prototype) établit un rapport avec les formes premières du capitalisme plus franc encore que ne le sera le rapport protestantisme/capitalisme. Plus tard les Lumières qui se déploient dans des pays catholiques (la France) comme dans d'autres protestants (l'Angleterre, les Pays Bas et l'Allemagne) se situent plus dans la tradition laïque de la Renaissance

que dans celle de la réforme religieuse. Enfin la Révolution française, par son caractère radical, donne à la laïcité sa pleine vigueur, quittant délibérément le terrain des réinterprétations religieuses pour se situer sur celui de la politique moderne, qui est largement le produit de son invention.

On comprend alors que, selon les circonstances historiques, la Réforme ait pu se solder par soit l'institution d'églises nationales au service du compromis Monarchie/Ancien Régime/grande bourgeoisie émergente, soit le repliement de classes dominées dans des sectes développant des visions apocalyptiques.

Le catholicisme de par sa structure hiérarchisée, longtemps plus rigide face au défi des temps modernes, a fini lui aussi par s'ouvrir à la réinterprétation des dogmes, avec finalement des résultats qui ne sont pas moins remarquables. Je ne suis pas surpris, dans ces conditions, que les nouvelles avancées dans l'interprétation du religieux—je veux dire celles que la théologie de la libération représente aujourd'hui—aient trouvé un terrain de réflexion fertile chez les catholiques plutôt que chez les protestants. Décidément la thèse de Weber ne vaut pas grand chose!

• Il y a eu aussi un bel exemple d'involution dans l'interprétation religieuse associée à la Réforme.

Les sectes protestantes qui se sont trouvées dans l'obligation d'émigrer de l'Angleterre du XVII^e siècle avaient développé une interprétation fort particulière du christianisme, que ne partagent ni les catholiques et les orthodoxes, ni même—du moins au même degré d'extrémisme—la majorité des Protestants européens, y compris bien entendu les anglicans, dominants dans les classes dirigeantes de l'Angleterre.

Cette forme particulière du protestantisme implantée en Nouvelle Angleterre va être appelée à marquer l'idéologie américaine d'une empreinte forte jusqu'à nos jours. Car elle sera le moyen par lequel la nouvelle société américaine partira à la conquête du continent, légitimant celle-ci dans des termes puisés dans la Bible (la conquête violente par Israël de la terre promise, thème répété à satiété dans le discours nord-américain). Par la suite les États-Unis étendront à la planète entière leur projet de réaliser l'œuvre que «Dieu» leur a ordonné d'accomplir. Car le peuple des États-Unis se vit comme le «peuple élu»—synonyme dans les faits de *Herrenvolk*, pour reprendre la terminologie nazie parallèle. Nous en sommes bien là aujourd'hui. Et c'est pourquoi l'impérialisme américain (et non «l'Empire») est appelé à être encore plus sauvage que ses prédécesseurs (qui ne se déclaraient pas investis d'une mission divine) le furent.

• Dans tous les cas, qu'il s'agisse de sociétés catholiques ou protestantes, d'une école ou d'une autre, je ne donne pas à l'interprétation religieuse un rôle indépendant déterminant dans l'organisation et le fonctionnement du pouvoir réel dominant.

Le passé ne devient pas par la force des choses «transmission atavique». L'histoire transforme les peuples et les interprétations religieuses, même lorsqu'elles persistent dans des formes apparemment «anciennes» et figées, sont elles mêmes l'objet de révision de leur articulation aux autres dimensions de la réalité sociale.

C'est parce que les parcours historiques ultérieurs de l'Europe d'une part, et des États-Unis d'autre part, ont été différents que, catholiques ou protestantes, les sociétés européennes et la société des États Unis ont aujourd'hui des cultures politiques divergentes.

La culture politique est le produit de l'histoire envisagée dans sa longue durée, laquelle est toujours, bien entendu, propre à chaque pays. Celle des États-Unis est, sur ce plan, marquée par des spécificités qui tranchent avec celles qui caractérisent l'histoire sur le continent européen: la fondation de la Nouvelle Angleterre par des sectes protestantes extrémistes, le génocide des Indiens, l'esclavage des Noirs, le déploiement de «communautarismes» associés à la succession des vagues de migrations du XIXe siècle.

La «révolution américaine» tant appréciée par beaucoup des révolutionnaires de 1789 et aujourd'hui vantée plus que jamais, n'a été qu'une guerre d'indépendance limitée sans portée sociale. Dans leur révolte contre la monarchie anglaise, les colons américains ne voulaient rien transformer des rapports économiques et sociaux, mais seulement n'avoir plus à en partager les profits avec la classe dirigeante de la mère patrie. Ils voulaient le pouvoir pour eux-mêmes non pas pour faire autre chose que ce qu'ils faisaient à l'époque coloniale, mais pour continuer à le faire avec plus de détermination et de profit. Leurs objectifs étaient avant tout la poursuite de l'expansion vers l'ouest, qui impliquait entre autres le génocide des Indiens. Le maintien de l'esclavage n'était également, dans ce cadre, l'objet d'aucun questionnement. Les grands chefs de la révolution américaine étaient presque tous des propriétaires esclavagistes et leurs préjugés dans ce domaine inébranlables.

Les vagues successives d'immigration ont également joué leur rôle dans le renforcement de l'idéologie américaine. Les immigrants ne sont certainement pas responsables de la misère et de l'oppression qui sont à l'origine de leur départ. Ils en sont au contraire les victimes. Mais les circonstances—c'est-à-dire leur émigration—les conduisent à renoncer à

la lutte collective pour changer les conditions communes à leurs classes ou groupes dans leur propre pays, au profit d'une adhésion à l'idéologie de la réussite individuelle dans le pays d'accueil. Cette adhésion est encouragée par le système américain dont elle fait l'affaire à la perfection. Elle retarde la prise de conscience de classe, qui, à peine a-t-elle commencé à mûrir, doit faire face à une nouvelle vague d'immigrants qui en fait avorter la cristallisation politique. Mais simultanément la migration encourage la «communautarisation» de la société américaine. Car le «succès individuel» n'exclut pas l'insertion forte dans une communauté d'origine (les Irlandais, les Italiens, etc.), sans laquelle l'isolement individuel risquerait d'être insupportable. Or ici encore le renforcement de cette dimension de l'identité—que le système américain récupère et flatte—se fait au détriment de la conscience de classe et de la formation du citoyen. Alors qu'à Paris le peuple s'apprêtait à partir «à l'assaut du ciel» (je fais ici référence à la Commune de 1871), aux États-Unis les gangs constitués par les générations successives d'immigrants pauvres (irlandais, italiens, etc.) s'entretuaient, manipulés avec un cynisme parfait par les classes dominantes.

L'Europe protestante—Angleterre, Allemagne, Pays Bas, Scandinavie—partageait au départ quelques fragments d'une idéologie semblable à celle des États-Unis, véhiculée par le «retour à la Bible», bien qu'assurément dans des formes atténuées, sans comparaison avec les formes extrêmes des sectes qui immigrèrent en Nouvelle Angleterre. Mais dans les pays en question, la classe ouvrière est parvenue à se hisser à une conscience de classe affirmée, que les vagues successives de migrants ont stérilisé aux États-Unis. L'émergence de partis ouvriers a fait la différence; en Europe elle a imposé des combinaisons de l'idéologie libérale et de systèmes de valeurs (l'égalité entre autres) qui non seulement lui sont étrangers, mais même conflictuels. Ces combinaisons ont eu bien entendu leur histoire propre, différente d'un pays et d'un moment aux autres. Mais elles ont préservé l'autonomie du politique face à l'économique dominant.

Aux États-Unis il n'y a pas de parti ouvrier, il n'y en a jamais eu. Les idéologies communautaires ne pouvaient pas constituer un substitut à l'absence d'une idéologie socialiste de la classe ouvrière; même la plus radicale parmi celles-ci, celle de la communauté noire. Car par définition le communautarisme s'inscrit dans le cadre du racisme généralisé qu'il combat sur son propre terrain, sans plus.

La combinaison propre à la formation historique de la société des États-Unis—idéologie religieuse «biblique» dominante et absence de parti

ouvrier—a produit finalement une situation encore sans pareille, celle d'un parti *de facto* unique, le parti du capital.

La démocratie américaine constitue aujourd'hui le modèle avancé de ce que j'appelle «la démocratie de basse intensité». Son fonctionnement est fondé sur une séparation totale entre la gestion de la vie politique, assise sur la pratique de la démocratie électorale, et celle de la vie économique, commandée par les lois de l'accumulation du capital. Qui plus est cette séparation n'est pas l'objet d'un questionnement radical, mais fait plutôt partie de ce qu'on appelle le consensus général. Or cette séparation annihile tout le potentiel créateur de la démocratie politique. Elle castré les institutions représentatives (parlements et autres), rendues impuissantes face au «marché» dont elles acceptent les diktats.

L'État américain est, de ce fait, au service exclusif de l'économie (c'est-à-dire du capital dont il est le fidèle serviteur exclusif, sans avoir à se soucier d'autres intérêts sociaux). Il peut l'être parce que la formation historique de la société américaine a bloqué—dans les classes populaires—la maturation d'une conscience politique de classe, d'une conscience citoyenne véritable.

En contrepoint l'État a été en Europe (et peut redevenir) le point de passage obligé de la confrontation des intérêts sociaux, et, à partir de là favoriser les compromis historiques qui donnent un sens et une portée réelle à la pratique démocratique. Si l'État n'est pas contraint de remplir cette fonction par les luttes de classes et les luttes politiques qui gardent leur autonomie vis-à-vis des logiques exclusives de l'accumulation du capital, alors la démocratie devient une pratique dérisoire, ce qu'elle est aux États-Unis.

L'idéologie américaine, comme toutes les idéologies subit «l'usure du temps». Dans les périodes «calmes» de l'histoire—marquées par une belle croissance économique accompagnée de retombées sociales jugées satisfaisantes—la pression que la classe dirigeante doit exercer sur son peuple s'affaiblit. De temps à autre donc, selon les besoins du moment, cette classe dirigeante «regonfle» l'idéologie américaine par des moyens qui sont toujours les mêmes: un ennemi (toujours extérieur, la société américaine étant décrétée bonne par définition) est désigné (l'Empire du Mal, l'axe du Mal) permettant la «mobilisation totale» de tous les moyens destinés à l'annihiler. Ce fut hier le communisme, permettant, à travers le mac carthysme (oublié par les «pro-américains»), d'engager la guerre froide et de subalterniser l'Europe. C'est aujourd'hui le «terrorisme», prétexte évident (le 11 septembre ressemble tellement à l'incendie du

Reichstag), qui fait passer le véritable projet de la classe dirigeante: s'assurer le contrôle militaire de la planète.

Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas. Ce n'est pas l'idéologie fondamentaliste à prétentions religieuses qui est aux postes de commande et imposerait sa logique aux vrais détenteurs du pouvoir—le capital et ses serviteurs dans l'État. C'est le capital qui prend seul toutes les décisions qui lui conviennent, puis mobilise l'idéologie américaine en question pour la mettre à son service. Les moyens utilisés—désinformation systématique sans pareille—sont alors efficaces, isolant les esprits critiques, les soumettant à un chantage odieux permanent. Le pouvoir parvient alors à manipuler sans difficulté une «opinion» entretenue dans sa niaiserie.

L'Islam politique

- La modernité est fondée sur le principe que les êtres humains, individuellement et collectivement font leur histoire et que pour ce faire ils ont le droit d'innover, de ne pas respecter la tradition. Proclamer ce principe c'était opérer une rupture avec le principe fondamental qui régissait toutes les sociétés pré-modernes, y compris bien entendu celle de l'Europe féodale et chrétienne. La modernité est née avec cette proclamation. Il ne s'agissait pas d'une re-naissance, mais d'une naissance tout court. La qualification de Renaissance que les Européens eux-mêmes ont donné à ce moment de l'histoire est donc trompeuse. Elle est le produit d'une construction idéologique selon laquelle l'Antiquité gréco-romaine aurait connu le principe de modernité, enseveli pendant le «Moyen Âge» (entre la modernité antique et la nouvelle modernité) par l'obscurantisme religieux. Perception mythique de l'Antiquité qui fonde à son tour l'eurocentrisme, par lequel l'Europe prétend hériter de son passé, «retourner à ses sources» (d'où Renaissance), alors qu'en fait elle opère une rupture avec sa propre histoire.

La Renaissance européenne était le produit d'une dynamique sociale interne, la solution apportée aux contradictions propres à l'Europe de l'époque par l'invention du capitalisme. Par contre ce que les Arabes ont appelé, par imitation, leur Renaissance—la Nahda du XIXe siècle—ne l'était pas. Elle était la réaction à un choc externe. L'Europe que la modernité avait rendue puissante et conquérante exerçait sur le monde arabe un effet ambigu, à la fois d'attraction (admiration) et de répulsion (par l'arrogance de sa conquête). La Re-naissance arabe prend son qualificatif au pied de la lettre. Elle pense que si, comme les Européens l'auraient fait (c'est ce qu'ils disent eux-mêmes), les Arabes «retournaient» à leurs sources, un

moment avilies, ils retrouveraient leur grandeur. La Nahda ne sait pas en quoi consiste la modernité qui fait la puissance de l'Europe.

Ce n'est pas ici le lieu de revenir sur les différents aspects et moments du déploiement de la Nahda. Je me contenterai de dire brièvement que la Nahda n'opère pas les ruptures nécessaires avec la tradition qui définissent la modernité.

Dans la construction de leur «renaissance» les Européens ont situé leur origine, fut-elle mythologique, avant le christianisme, dans la Grèce antique. Cette invention les aidera à relativiser la dimension religieuse de leur «spécificité». Par contre les Arabes, dans leur construction par analogie, situeront leur origine dans l'islam. Il leur faut alors gommer de leur héritage l'apport des civilisations de l'Orient ancien, traité de «jahiliya», c'est-à-dire de temps impie.

On comprend alors pourquoi la Nahda ne saisit pas ce que signifie la laïcité, c'est à dire la séparation entre la religion et la politique, condition pour que la politique devienne le domaine de l'innovation libre, donc de la démocratie au sens moderne. La Nahda croit pouvoir lui substituer une relecture de la religion purgée de ses dérives obscurantistes. Et jusqu'à ce jour, les sociétés arabes sont mal équipées pour comprendre que la laïcité n'est pas une «spécificité» occidentale, mais une exigence de la modernité. La Nahda ne comprend pas ce que signifie la démocratie, entendue justement comme le droit de rompre avec la tradition. Elle reste donc prisonnière des concepts de l'État autocratique; elle appelle de ses vœux un despote «juste» (al moustabid al adel)—pas même «éclairé». Et la nuance est significative. La Nahda ne comprend pas que la modernité produit également l'aspiration des femmes à leur libération, exerçant par là même leur droit d'innover, de rompre avec la tradition. La Nahda réduit en définitive la modernité à l'apparence immédiate de ce qu'elle produit: le progrès technique. Cette présentation volontairement sur-simplifiée ne signifie pas que son auteur ignore les contradictions qui se sont exprimées dans la Nahda, ni que certains penseurs d'avant garde aient eu conscience des défis réels de la modernité, comme Kassem Amin en ce qui concerne l'importance de la libération des femmes, Ali Abdel Razek de celle de la laïcité, Kawakibi du défi démocratique. Mais aucune de ces percées n'a été suivie d'effets; au contraire la société arabe a réagi en renonçant à poursuivre dans les voies indiquées. La Nahda n'est donc pas le moment de la naissance de la modernité en terre arabe, elle est celui de son avortement.

Parce que les sociétés arabes ne sont pas encore entrées dans la modernité, bien qu'elles en subissent de plein fouet le défi quotidien, les

peuples arabes acceptent encore largement ces principes du pouvoir autocratique. Celui-ci tient sa légitimité ou la perd sur d'autres terrains que sa non-reconnaissance du principe de la démocratie. S'il est capable de résister à l'agression impérialiste—ou d'en donner l'impression—s'il est capable d'offrir une amélioration visible des conditions matérielles de vie de beaucoup sinon de tous, le pouvoir autocratique—devenu despotique éclairé—bénéficie d'une popularité qui lui est garantie. C'est aussi parce que les sociétés arabes ne sont pas entrées dans la modernité que le refus rhétorique brutal de celle-ci, affiché comme thème idéologique exclusif placé au centre du projet islamiste peut trouver un écho favorable aussi puissant qu'on le sait.

Au-delà de ce principe de non-modernité, le pouvoir autocratique tient donc sa légitimité de la tradition. Il peut s'agir dans certains cas d'une tradition de monarchie nationale et religieuse comme au Maroc, ou d'une monarchie tribale comme dans la péninsule arabique. Mais il existe une autre forme de tradition, qui est celle héritée de l'Empire ottoman, dominant de l'Algérie à l'Irak, donc sur l'espace majeur du monde arabe, que je qualifie de tradition de «pouvoir des mamelouks».

De quoi s'agit-il? D'un système complexe associant le pouvoir personnalisé d'hommes de guerre (plus ou moins hiérarchisé et centralisé ou au contraire éparpillé), d'hommes du commerce et d'hommes de religion. Je dis bien hommes, les femmes étant exclues d'évidence de tout exercice de responsabilités quelconques. Les trois dimensions de cette organisation ne sont pas simplement juxtaposées; elles sont véritablement fusionnées dans une seule réalité du pouvoir.

Les mamelouks sont des hommes de guerre qui tirent leur légitimité d'une certaine conception de l'Islam qui place l'accent sur le contraste Dar El Salam (monde musulman, monde soumis aux règles d'une gestion pacifique) / Dar El Harb (monde extra musulman, lieu de poursuite de la Jihad, «guerre sainte»). Ce n'est pas un hasard si ce concept militaire de la gestion politique ait été forgé par les conquérants turcs seldjoukides puis ottomans, s'auto qualifiant de «Ghazi», c'est-à-dire de conquérants et de colonisateurs qu'ils furent de l'Anatolie byzantine. Ce n'est pas un hasard si le système des mamelouks a été construit à partir de l'époque de Salah El Dine, libérateur des terres occupées jusqu'alors par les Croisés. Salah El Dine est toujours évoqué avec une admiration respectueuse par les pouvoirs populistes et nationalistes contemporains, sans que les ravages du système à l'origine duquel il se situe ne soient jamais considérés, ni même effleurés. À la sortie des Croisades le monde arabe (devenu turco-arabe) entre dans un processus de féodalisation militaire et de repli sur

lui-même, qui a été une régression mettant un terme à la civilisation brillante des premiers siècles du Khalifat, alors même que l'Europe amorce sa sortie du féodalisme, s'appêtant à faire le saut dans l'invention de la modernité et à partir à la conquête du monde.

En contrepartie de cette fonction de protecteurs de l'Islam, les mamelouks laissent aux hommes de religion le monopole de l'interprétation des dogmes, de la justice exercée en son nom, de la police morale de la société. Réduite à sa dimension sociale purement conventionnelle—le respect des rites important seul—la religion est parfaitement instrumentalisée par le pouvoir autocratique des hommes de guerre.

La vie économique est alors soumise aux humeurs du pouvoir militaro-politique. La paysannerie est, chaque fois que cela est possible, soumise directement aux ponctions de cette classe dirigeante et la propriété privée (dont le principe est incontestablement sacralisé par les textes fondateurs de l'islam) précarisée. Les profits du commerce ne le sont pas moins.

La classe dirigeante mamelouk aspire naturellement à l'émiettement de son pouvoir autocratique. Formellement soumis au Sultan-Khalife, les mamelouks bénéficient de la distance—alors lointaine—qui les sépare de la capitale (Istanbul) pour exercer à titre personnel tout le pouvoir réel dans le rayon du terroir qui leur échoit. Là où la tradition de centralisation étatique est millénaire, comme en Égypte, les tentatives se succèdent de discipliner l'ensemble du corps militaire. Ce n'est pas un hasard si Mohamed Ali établit son pouvoir centralisé en massacrant les mamelouks, mais pour reconstituer une aristocratie militaro-foncière désormais entièrement soumise à son pouvoir personnel. Les beys de Tunis tenteront d'en faire autant à plus modeste échelle. Les deys d'Alger n'y parviendront jamais. Le Sultanat ottoman le fera à son tour, intégrant de cette manière ses provinces turques, kurdes et arméniennes d'Anatolie et ses provinces arabes de la Syrie historique et de l'Irak dans un pouvoir «modernisé» de la sorte.

Modernisation tout court? ou modernisation de l'autocratie seulement? Despotisme éclairé? ou despotisme tout court? Les fluctuations et les variantes se situent dans cet éventail, n'inaugurant rien permettant d'aller au-delà.

Sans doute le modèle type autocratique mamelouk a-t-il dû faire avec les réalités nombreuses et diverses qui en ont toujours défini les limites réelles. Communautés paysannes réfugiées dans leurs montagnes fortifiées (Kabyles, Maronites, Druses, Alaouites ...), confréries soufis un peu partout, tribus, contraignaient les pouvoirs dominants aux compromis et

à la tolérance des insoumis. Le contraste au Maroc entre le Maghzen et le Bled Siba est d'une nature analogue.

Les formes de l'exercice du pouvoir dans le monde arabe ont-elles innové au point qu'on puisse dire que celles décrites ici appartiennent désormais à un passé révolu? L'État autocratique et les formes de la gestion politique qui lui sont associées sont certainement encore en place. Mais elles sont entrées dans une crise profonde qui en a déjà largement érodé la légitimité, étant de moins en moins capables de faire face aux défis de la modernité. Émergence de l'Islam politique, confusion des conflits politiques, mais aussi renaissance des luttes sociales en sont les témoignages.

- L'erreur fatale est de croire que l'émergence de mouvements politiques mobilisateurs de larges masses se revendiquant de l'islam est le produit inévitable de l'irruption sur la scène de peuples culturellement et politiquement arriérés incapables de comprendre un autre langage que celui de leur obscurantisme quasi atavique. Erreur d'un discours fondé sur le préjugé que seul l'Occident pouvait inventer la modernité, tandis que les peuples musulmans seraient enfermés dans une «tradition» immuable qui les rend incapables de comprendre la portée du changement nécessaire.

Les peuples musulmans et l'islam ont une histoire, tout comme ceux des autres régions du monde, qui est l'histoire d'interprétations diverses des rapports entre la raison et la foi, celle des transformations et des adaptations mutuelles de la société et de sa religion. Mais la réalité de cette histoire est niée non seulement par les discours eurocentriques, mais tout également par les mouvements contemporains qui se réclament de l'islam. Les uns et les autres partagent en effet le même préjugé culturaliste en vertu duquel les «spécificités» propres aux différentes trajectoires des peuples et aux religions qui sont les leurs seraient de nature intangible, incommensurable et transhistorique. À l'eurocentrisme des occidentaux, l'islam politique contemporain n'oppose qu'un eurocentrisme inversé.

L'émergence des mouvements qui se réclament de l'Islam est en fait l'expression d'une révolte violente contre les effets destructeurs du capitalisme réellement existant, contre la modernité inachevée, tronquée et trompeuse qui l'accompagne. C'est l'expression d'une révolte parfaitement légitime contre un système qui n'a rien à offrir aux peuples en question.

Le discours de l'islam proposé en alternative à la modernité capitaliste (à laquelle sont assimilées sans nuance les expériences de modernité des socialismes historiques) est de nature politique et nullement théologique.

Les qualificatifs d'intégriste et de fondamentaliste dont on l'affuble souvent ne correspondent en rien à ce discours qui d'ailleurs n'y fait guère allusion sauf chez certains intellectuels musulmans contemporains qui s'adressent dans ces termes plus à l'opinion occidentale qu'à la leur.

L'islam proposé est en l'occurrence l'adversaire de toute théologie de la libération. L'islam politique appelle à la soumission, pas à l'émancipation. La seule tentative de lecture de l'islam qui allait dans le sens de l'émancipation fut celle du Soudanais Mahmoud Taha. Condamné à mort et exécuté par le pouvoir de Khartoum, Taha n'a été revendiqué par aucun parti de la mouvance islamique, ni «radical», ni «modéré» et n'a été défendu par aucun des intellectuels qui se revendiquent de la «renaissance islamique» ou même seulement expriment le souhait de dialoguer avec ces mouvements.

Les hérauts de la «renaissance islamique» en question ne s'intéressent pas à la théologie et ne font jamais référence aux grands textes qui la concernent. Sur ce plan ce qu'ils entendent par Islam paraît n'être qu'une version conventionnelle et sociale de la religion, réduite au respect formel et intégral de la pratique rituelle. L'islam en question définirait une «communauté» à laquelle on appartient par héritage, comme l'ethnicité, et non une conviction personnelle intime et forte. Il s'agit seulement d'affirmer une «identité collective», rien de plus. C'est la raison pour laquelle l'expression d'islam politique, par laquelle l'ensemble de ces mouvements sont qualifiés dans les pays arabes est certainement plus exacte.

L'Islam politique moderne avait été inventé par les orientalistes au service du pouvoir britannique en Inde, avant d'être repris tel quel par le Pakistanais Mawdudi. Il s'agissait de «prouver» que les Musulmans croyants ne sont pas autorisés à vivre dans un État qui ne serait pas lui-même islamique—anticipant sur la partition de l'Inde—parce que l'islam ignorerait la possibilité d'une séparation entre l'État et la religion. Les orientalistes en question ont omis d'observer que les Anglais du XIII^e siècle n'auraient pas davantage conçu leur survivance hors de la chrétienté!

Abul Ala Al Mawdudi reprend donc le thème selon lequel le pouvoir émane de Dieu et de lui seul (*wilaya al faqih*), refusant le concept de citoyens ayant le droit de légiférer, l'État n'ayant que la charge d'appliquer la loi définie une fois pour toutes (la «charia»). Joseph de Maistre avait déjà écrit des choses analogues accusant la Révolution du crime d'avoir inventé la démocratie moderne et l'émancipation de l'individu.

Récusant le concept de la modernité émancipatoire, l'Islam politique refuse le principe même de la démocratie—le droit pour la société de

construire son avenir par la liberté qu'elle se donne de légiférer. Le principe de la Shura que l'Islam politique prétend être la forme islamique de la démocratie ne l'est pas, étant prisonnier de l'interdit de l'innovation (*ibda*), n'acceptant à la rigueur que celui de l'interprétation de la tradition (*ijtihad*). La Shura n'est que l'une des multiples formes de la consultation qu'on trouve dans toutes les sociétés pré-modernes, pré-démocratiques. Bien sûr l'interprétation a parfois été le véhicule de transformations réelles, imposées par des exigences nouvelles. Mais il reste que par son principe même—le refus du droit à la rupture avec le passé—celle-ci enferme dans l'impasse le combat moderne pour le changement social et la démocratie. Le parallèle prétendu entre les partis islamiques—radicaux ou modérés puisque tous adhèrent à ces mêmes principes «anti-modernistes» au nom de la prétendue spécificité de l'Islam—et les partis démocrates-chrétiens de l'Europe moderne n'a donc rigoureusement aucune validité, bien que les médias et la diplomatie des États-Unis y fassent sans cesse allusion pour légitimer leur soutien à des régimes éventuellement «islamistes». La démocratie chrétienne s'inscrit dans la modernité, dont elle accepte le concept fondamental de démocratie créatrice comme l'essentiel de celui de laïcité. L'islam politique refuse la modernité. Il le proclame, sans être à même d'en comprendre le sens.

L'Islam proposé ne mérite donc certainement pas d'être qualifié de «moderne»; et les arguments appelés au secours sur ce terrain par les amis du «dialogue» sont d'une platitude extrême, allant de l'usage des cassettes par ses propagandistes à l'observation que ceux-ci se recrutent dans des couches «éduquées»—ingénieurs par exemple! Le discours de ces mouvements ne connaît d'ailleurs guère que l'islam wahabite qui rejette tout ce que l'interaction entre l'Islam historique et la philosophie grecque avait produit en son temps, comme il se contente de ressasser les écrits plats du plus réactionnaire des théologiens du Moyen Âge, Ibn Taymiya. Bien que certains de ses hérauts qualifient cette interprétation de «retour aux sources» (voire à l'Islam du temps du Prophète), il ne s'agit en réalité que d'un retour aux conceptions en vigueur il y a deux cents ans, ceux d'une société arrêtée dans son développement depuis plusieurs siècles.

L'Islam politique contemporain n'est pas le produit d'une réaction aux abus prétendus de laïcité, comme on le dit malheureusement trop souvent.

Car aucune société musulmane des temps modernes—sauf dans la défunte Union soviétique—n'a jamais été véritablement laïque, encore moins frappée par les audaces d'un pouvoir «athé» agressif quelconque. L'État semi-moderne de la Turquie kémaliste, de l'Égypte nassérienne,

de la Syrie et de l'Irak baathistes, s'était contenté de domestiquer les hommes de religion (comme cela s'était souvent produit auparavant) pour leur imposer un discours destiné exclusivement à légitimer ses options politiques. L'amorce d'une idée laïque n'existait que dans certains milieux intellectuels critiques. Elle n'avait pas beaucoup de prise sur l'État; et celui-ci, emporté par son projet nationaliste a parfois reculé sur ce plan, comme en témoigne l'évolution inquiétante inaugurée du temps même de Nasser, opérant une rupture avec la politique que le Wafd avait adoptée depuis 1919. L'explication de cette dérive est peut être évidente: en refusant la démocratie, les régimes en question lui substituaient «l'homogénéité de la communauté», dont on voit le danger grandir jusque dans la démocratie en régression de l'Occident contemporain lui-même.

L'Islam politique propose de parachever une évolution déjà largement entamée dans les pays concernés, visant à rétablir un ordre théocratique conservateur sans fard associé à un pouvoir politique de type «mamelouk». La référence à cette caste militaire dirigeante jusqu'à il y a deux siècles, se plaçant au-dessus de toute loi (en feignant de ne connaître sur ce plan que la «charia»), accaparant les bénéfices de la vie économique et acceptant—au nom du «réalisme»—de s'intégrer en position subalterne dans la mondialisation capitaliste de l'époque, vient d'emblée à l'esprit de quiconque observe tant les régimes post nationalistes dégradés de la région que les nouveaux régimes prétendus islamiques, leurs frères jumeaux.

Il n'y a, de ce point de vue fondamental, guère de différence entre les courants dits «radicaux» de l'islam politique et ceux qui voudraient se donner un visage «modéré». Le projet des uns et des autres est identique.

Le cas de l'Iran lui-même n'échappe pas à la règle générale, en dépit des confusions qui ont été à l'origine de son succès, dues à la concomitance entre l'essor du mouvement islamiste et la lutte conduite contre la dictature du Shah socialement rétrograde et politiquement pro-américaine. Dans un premier temps les extravagances extrémistes du pouvoir théocratique étaient compensées par ses positions anti-impérialistes, dont il tirait sa légitimité et qui lui donnait un écho de popularité puissant au-delà des frontières de l'Iran. Mais progressivement, le régime devait démontrer qu'il était incapable de relever le défi d'un développement économique et social novateur. La «dictature des turbans» (les hommes de religion) qui avait pris la relève de celle des «casquettes» (des militaires et des technocrates), comme on le dit en Iran, se solde par une fantastique dégradation des appareils économiques du pays. L'Iran qui se targuait de «faire comme la Corée», se range aujourd'hui dans le groupe des pays du

«quart monde». L'insensibilité de l'aile dure du pouvoir aux problèmes sociaux auxquels les classes populaires du pays sont confrontées est à l'origine de sa relève par ceux qui se sont auto-qualifiés de «réformateurs» porteurs d'un projet capable certes d'atténuer les rigueurs de la dictature théocratique, mais sans renoncer pour autant à son principe—inscrit dans la constitution («wilaya al faqih») —sur lequel repose le monopole d'un pouvoir amené alors progressivement à renoncer à ses postures «anti-impérialistes» pour intégrer le monde comprador banal du capitalisme des périphéries. Le système de l'Islam politique est en Iran dans l'impasse. Les luttes politiques et sociales dans lesquelles le peuple iranien est désormais ouvertement engagé devront conduire un jour ou l'autre au rejet du principe même de la «wilaya al faqih» qui place le collège des hommes de religion au-dessus de toutes les institutions de la société politique et civile. C'est la condition de leur succès.

L'Islam politique n'est en définitive rien de plus qu'une adaptation au statut subalterne du capitalisme comprador. Sa forme prétendue «modérée» constitue de ce fait probablement le danger principal qui menace les peuples concernés, la violence des «radicaux» n'ayant d'autres fonctions que de déstabiliser l'État pour permettre l'installation du nouveau pouvoir comprador. Le soutien lucide que les diplomates des pays de la Triade alignés derrière les États-Unis apportent à cette «solution» au problème est parfaitement cohérent avec leur volonté d'imposer l'ordre libéral mondialisé au service du capital dominant.

- Les deux discours du capitalisme libéral mondialisé et de l'Islam politique ne sont pas conflictuels, mais au contraire parfaitement complémentaires. L'idéologie des «communautarismes» à l'américaine que l'air du temps s'emploie à populariser oblitère la conscience et les luttes sociales pour leur substituer de prétendues «identités» collectives qui les ignorent. Cette idéologie est donc parfaitement instrumentalisée par la stratégie de domination du capital parce qu'elle transfère les luttes de l'aire des contradictions sociales réelles au monde de l'imaginaire dit culturel, transhistorique et absolu. Or l'Islam politique est précisément un «communautarisme».

Les diplomates des puissances du G7 et singulièrement celle des États-Unis savent ce qu'elles font en choisissant de soutenir l'Islam politique. Elles l'ont fait en Afghanistan, qualifiant ses Islamistes de «combattants de la liberté» (!) «contre l'horrible dictature du communisme», qui n'était en fait qu'un projet de despotisme éclairé, moderniste, national populiste, ayant eu l'audace d'ouvrir les écoles aux filles. Elles continuent à le faire

de l'Égypte à l'Algérie. Elles préparent probablement en Irak une relève de la dictature du Baas par celle d'Islamistes «amis». Elles savent que le pouvoir de l'islam politique a la vertu—pour elles—de réduire à l'impuissance les peuples concernés et par conséquent de s'assurer sans difficulté de leur compradorisation.

Avec le cynisme qui le caractérise, l'establishment américain sait tirer un second profit de l'Islam politique. Les «dérives» des régimes qu'il inspire—les taliban par exemple—(qui ne sont en rien des dérives, mais bel et bien inscrits dans la logique de leurs programmes) peuvent être exploitées chaque fois que l'impérialisme estime utile d'intervenir, brutalement s'il le faut. La «sauvagerie» attribuée aux peuples qui sont les premières victimes de l'islam politique permet d'alimenter «l'islamophobie». Cela fait accepter plus facilement la perspective d'un «apartheid à l'échelle mondiale» qui est l'aboutissement logique et nécessaire d'une expansion capitaliste toujours plus polarisante.

Les seuls mouvements politiques se réclamant de l'islam qui sont condamnés sans nuance par les puissances du G7 sont ceux qui s'inscrivent—par la conjoncture locale objective—dans des luttes anti-impérialistes: Hezbollah au Liban, Hamas en Palestine. Ce n'est pas un hasard.



On Prospective: Development and a Political Culture of Time

Souleymane Bachir Diagne*

Abstract

This paper interprets the African development crisis as a crisis of *initiative*. Right after the Lagos Plan of Action was adopted in 1980, came in 1981 the Berg Report on which were built the Structural Adjustment Programmes that African countries were soon forced to adopt. Unsurprisingly, the weakened states and impoverished populations lost sight of what was the driving force behind the Lagos Plan of Action; that is, a long-term perspective, a horizon for development. Along with developmental perspective, what was thus lost was nothing less than *meaning*. This crisis of meaning is felt today particularly in Africa's youngest generations who perceive themselves as futureless unless they emigrate. Because meaning flows from the future to the present, and is about shaping the future, this is a philosophical reflection on time which is also a call for the reconstruction of meaning through the cultivation of 'a prospective capacity' in our African societies. Analyzing this philosophical concept as it was developed by Gaston Berger, this paper argues that such a cultivation of 'prospective' amounts to fostering a *political culture of time* which is to be understood in total contrast with the ethnological approach attached to a so-called 'African' notion of time.

Résumé

Cet article voit dans la crise du développement en Afrique une crise de l'*initiative*. Après que les pays africains eurent adopté, en 1980, le *Plan de Lagos*, le Rapport Berg a été publié quelques mois plus tard, avec pour conséquence les différents Programmes d'Ajustement Structurels auxquels, bientôt, les pays durent se soumettre. Ainsi des États affaiblis et des populations paupérisées perdirent de vue ce qui faisait la force du Plan de Lagos: une perspective à long terme, un horizon pour le développement. Ce qui s'est ainsi perdu alors, en même temps que la perspective du développement, c'était, tout simplement, *le sens*. Cette

* Department of Philosophy, Northwestern University, USA; Department of Philosophy, Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal.

crise du sens est aujourd'hui particulièrement sensible au sein de la jeunesse africaine qui se voit privée de tout autre futur que celui offert par l'émigration. Parce que le sens vient se projeter sur le présent depuis le futur, parce qu'il est dans la création du futur, on appelle ici, dans une réflexion philosophique sur le temps, à une reconstruction du sens par le développement, dans nos sociétés africaines, de la 'capacité prospective'. L'analyse de ce concept philosophique mis en chantier par Gaston Berger conduit à dire que cultiver la 'prospective' n'a rien à voir avec l'approche ethnologique si attentive à ce qu'elle appelle une conception africaine du temps.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.
Psalm 90:12.*

Developmentalism in the spirit of the sixties is said to be *passé*. In the name of developmentalism, following the formal political independences of its nations, Africa had adopted almost everywhere on the continent one party political systems assumed to be the best tool for constructing or preserving national unity and at the same time for galvanizing and channelling energies towards socio-economic betterment. Developmentalism thus understood has died from the political and economic failure of that spirit of the sixties and early seventies. Then, while it was repeated that a different philosophy of development was needed, what took place following that failure was the dismantling of what gave meaning to the very notion of development: planning. The actions taken under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank aimed at restoring macroeconomic balance were presented as absolutely necessary—that is urgent and inevitable. Weak African States and impoverished populations were engaged in the same struggle to make ends meet, narrowly on a daily basis. What was lost was long-term perspective, a horizon against which actions taken would make sense, in the context of an open future; also lost was meaning.¹ Behind the recent calls for an 'African Renaissance' or for NEPAD (whatever one might think of their actual content), there is the acknowledgement that the true face of the African crisis is a crisis of *meaning* and *signification* within the context of time. Contemporary Africa is aware of its still contested-for past, the colonial interlude, and the slow disjunctive time of the present, making interpretations of the future problematic. The future is problematic because there is no clear sense of an African *telos* thereby making it possible almost by default for Western generated theories of development to be foisted on Africa without much questioning. A reintroduction of the idea of development as a long-term perspective under

the aeges of African agency would be one way to confront the future. In this regard the idea of African development need not be satisfied with IMF or World Bank recommendations, or the latest position papers on economic development generated thousands of miles away in Western research centres.

For many years, the African Futures project, established in Abidjan has endeavoured to build and develop long-term perspective capacity in the continent. Presenting this project and at the same time the text *Afrique 2025* produced under its auspices, here is what the coordinator of African Futures, Alioune Sall, writes:

After having been decried and relegated to the status of an antiquity along with state-planning (to which it was assimilated), long-term perspective is now re-established in development circles. As a matter of fact, 2015 is the horizon currently considered by the United Nations for the realization of the development objectives of the millennium while 2025 –that is the span of a generation. It is the horizon agreed upon in about twenty national long term perspective studies that have been undertaken in Africa with the technical support of the UNDP program known as *African futures*. Consequently, long term perspective reflection is gaining or regaining legitimacy. We must be satisfied with this new situation and rejoice over it with all those who, not so many years ago, had to spend a great amount of energy to get decision-makers to comprehend the meaning and importance of a long term perspective approach as they were submitted to the dictatorship of urgencies and, particularly in Africa, to the hardships of structural adjustment programs (Sall 2003:11).

Two important points can be made, to comment on this quotation. One about what development is not, the other about what the essential component of the notion of development is. What development is not is dealing on a daily basis with urgencies, trying to meet the demands of structural adjustment programs. What is essential to the very notion of development is *time* understood as *duration*, the political culture of temporality.² It is not only that the many social, cultural and economic transformations that a society undergoes as its ‘development’ need time but, more importantly that, as Alioune Sall again puts it, ‘the future does not come by itself but has to be met and the conditions for its hatching have to be created’ (Sall 2003:11). In other words, at the core of the notion of development, is the exploration of the future, the attitude which is best expressed by the philosophical concept of ‘prospective’,³ coined by the French philosopher Gaston Berger to name the science which explores the future evolution of societies in order to light up the decisions that

have to be made *today*, the actions that are to be taken *today*. In other words, the prospective attitude, which is essential to development, is grounded on the notion that the meaning of the present comes from the future. The central question of development is thus that of fostering *prospective* in African societies.⁴ This means posing the philosophical question of time.

To think a political culture of time is first to get rid, theoretically and practically, of what I would call the ethnological divide between cultures concerning time. Such a question is often translated into cultural terms, very hard to dislodge, such as the 'African conception of time' the stake of which is inevitably whether or not such a conception contributes to the development of a prospective attitude. In this perspective, I would like here to first discuss this 'translation' by revisiting what John Mbiti has written about this so-called 'African notion of time' in his well known work, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Mbiti 1990).⁵ I will argue that those who, like Mbiti, pretend to read a distinctly African concept of time in African cultural attitudes and languages in order to contrast it with the prospective attitude demanded by development misunderstand the very essence of time and hence, of prospective. I will demonstrate that there is nothing distinct or unique about the concept of time drawn from an African culture and I will show that in any case prospective has nothing to do with a culturally defined notion of time.

About the ethnological divide between cultures in relation to time

It may be useful to make a detour and consider seriously John Mbiti's analysis of African concepts of time. First, for the general reason that in prospective studies the cultural parameters are crucial. Exploring the future of values and mentalities is probably more significant than the economic parameters *stricto sensu* for a prospective exercise when considering, for example, a temporal horizon such as the span of a generation.⁶ Because these parameters, on the one hand, oppose the strongest forces of inertia to change but are also, on the other hand, such that when they do change, they make the biggest difference and generate the most decisive transformations in the society. This is the sense in which one may say that development is essentially a cultural question. And at the very heart of this cultural question of development, John Mbiti places the concept of time. From their conception of time, he argues, stem the attitudes, beliefs and practices that are manifested, in particular, in the people's philosophy of work. And he calls for further research to fully take into account the centrality of time-consciousness in the studies of African philosophy in

general and of the cultural dimension of development in particular.⁷ The following are the main affirmations made by John Mbiti as they result from his analysis of African concepts of time:

- 1) *Time is a composition of events.* In other words, the concept of time cannot be understood otherwise than in connection with the events that take place. And we should not even say 'take place *in* it' because this formulation would convey the notion that time could have independent being as some sort of frame which subsists when the events are mentally taken out of it, so to speak. In the same way that 'it is the content which defines space' (Mbiti 1990:26), it is the event that defines time. Time is not the *form* for the events in any Kantian sense; it is not the *order* for their succession in any Leibnizian sense: time *is* these events and *is not* outside of them.
- 2) *The past is the most important dimension of time.* This is an obvious consequence of the first thesis: if time is the stock of events it can almost be totally identified with the past which is but these events once they have occurred.
- 3) *The present is continuously in motion towards the past.* This is again obvious from a physical perspective but also has an important 'meta-physical' corollary: the dynamic of the present and indeed its meaning is oriented towards the past. The 'now' of our consciousness and actions ultimately rests on the ocean of past events receiving again and again, as drops that add nothing to it, the events we call our 'present'.
- 4) *There is virtually no future.* This is of course necessary because there is, by definition, a contradiction in considering a future event. As John Mbiti writes, time really 'is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future' (Mbiti 1990:16). The only aspect of the future that can be said to 'exist' is that which is constituted by what we might call *quasi events*, meaning that the present is pregnant with them, and that they can be read in it, so to say, *now*, in the same way the harvest can be read in the blossoming of the seeds. Practically, this means that one cannot consider the future beyond the close horizon of a few months, beyond tomorrow, beyond the shadow that, already, it retro-projects, *now*.
- 5) *The evidence to support these affirmations comes mainly from the consideration of the African languages and calendars.* The best testimonies for Africans' concepts of time are of course the way in which they reckon time in their languages and also the way in which they cast the flow of temporality into calendars. In fact John Mbiti

presents the study of the east African languages in which he has carried out his research as a 'test [of his] findings'. So examining, in particular, the verb tenses in the Kikamba and Gikuyu languages he comes up with the 'confirmation' that 'there are no concrete words or expressions to convey the idea of a distant future' (Mbiti 1990:17) the one that lies beyond the span of a few months, two years at most. Then he goes on to give an account of African calendars that he calls '*phenomenon* calendars' in opposition to 'numerical', mathematical calendars that are not tied up with concrete phenomena taking place and constituting time. Hence, as watch time is different from the time measured by an activity, hours and months (lunar of course) are named as the time for given events such as 'milking the cattle' in the morning and the evening, or 'the sun [being hot]', from which the month corresponding to October bears its name in the language of the Latuka people.⁸

- 6) *Planning for a distant future is foreign to the society.* This is one of the most crucial consequences of the affirmations made by Mbiti, especially in connection with the project of developing a prospective capacity for development. In Mbiti's words: 'African peoples have no 'belief in progress', the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor 'build castles in the air''. The centre of gravity for human thought and activities is the [past] period' (Mbiti 1990:23). And Mbiti puts great insistence on the point that many sayings, seemingly based on ethnological facts, concerning some distinctive African way of *wasting* time have to be understood as stemming from this metaphysics of time; once what time means for the Africans is fully understood that way, the attitudes associated with wasting time then appear to be truly 'waiting for time or in the process of 'producing' time' (Mbiti 1990:19).
- 7) *The future dimension of time has been forced into African societies from outside and is still in the process of being appropriated by them.* In other words it took a catastrophe, in the literal meaning of this word, to have African societies discover or extend the future dimension of time. This catastrophe has taken the face of 'Christian missionary teaching' or Western-type education or modern technology and has led 'to national planning for economic growth, political independence, extension of educational facilities and so on'.⁹ And the fact that this is a rupture explains why this process, far from being a smooth one, is 'at the root of (...) the political instability of our nations'. So the African

crisis is structural and its ultimate philosophical meaning is to translate the disruption represented by the introduction of the future dimension of time in an environment where the centre of gravity was in the memory of the past, the emphasis on tradition.

John Mbiti's chapter on 'the concept of time' ends with a challenge to scholarship on Africa which has the function of dismissing negative or critical reactions to his affirmations, mainly from those who would think these are bordering the notion of a different African mentality understood *à la* Lévy-Bruhl and would not accept the conclusion that the future dimension of time is absent from the African languages and traditional experience. The challenge is to come up with "another sustained analysis of African concepts of time' instead of just saying 'yes' or 'no' to his theory'.¹⁰ The burden of proof lies on the contradictors who have to produce evidence of contrary theses.

Opposing a political culture of time to a cultural conception of time

One of those who took up John Mbiti's challenge is the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (Gyekye 1987) who opposed to the Kenyan's views on the subject his own exploration of Akan concepts of time. The approach is thus to come up with a counterexample in order to destroy any universal character of John Mbiti's claims about an *African* notion of time. Actually, there is no need to try to come up with counterexamples presented by this or that particular African language where the future tense is seemingly fully present or with traditional calendars used in this or that African group which do not operate the way described by J. Mbiti. The challenge, as formulated would simply lead to some kind of impasse under the form of a futile opposition between philosophical examinations of different African languages and the subtleties of their verbal systems. It is the very assumption upon which the opposition is founded that needs to be questioned and eventually dismissed.

This assumption is indeed the one expressed by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in his account of what appeared to him to be *the* (primitive, hence) African conception of time:

(...) the primitives' minds do not represent time exactly as ours do. Primitives do not see, extending indefinitely in imagination, something like a straight line, always homogenous by nature, upon which events fall into position, a line on which foresight can arrange them in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other. To the primitive time is not, as it is to us, a kind of intellectualized intuition, an 'order of succession'.¹¹

The most appropriate answer is not to defend Africans from 'primitiveness' in their representation of time but to say that it is just not true that there is such a thing as a Western notion of time against which one would actually characterize the African conception of time as 'primitive'. And to insist on this point makes far more sense towards a political culture of time than throwing back and forth examples and counterexamples to illustrate or refute the assumption made. What linear notion of time and what conception of the future is behind the French word 'avenir', for example? This word which translates 'future' literally and etymologically means 'what is to come'. Now what indicates that we have in mind, using the word *avenir* six months rather than two or a hundred years? Nothing but the context is the good answer. And what makes it a good answer is that it is the same for all human languages. For example, the word for 'future' in the Wolof language, *ëllëg*, literally means *tomorrow*. Now does one mean literally 'tomorrow' if one says that one is working *ngir ëllëgu njaboot gi* that is to say 'for her children's future?' The context clearly shows that the scope one has in mind here is the time when the children reach adulthood. And parents often project in time when they visualize and discuss the very future adulthood of their children. Also activities within the precolonial agricultural societies of Africa were focused on planting and harvesting within the context of at least one year and often many years, as when late-bearing fruit trees are planted. But back to the word 'tomorrow': of course, in English or in French for example, the word 'tomorrow' has exactly the same use.

In the same way one could raise the question of the 'representation of time' revealed by the use of a calendar where months are named after the god of war or Julius Caesar or Junius Brutus or Augustus... The answer of course is that no one has these associations in mind when using the names 'March', 'July', June or 'August'. And incidentally this Julian calendar is of African origin being invented by the ancient Egyptians. Note too that the Dogon of Mali, whose knowledge of astronomy was surprising to French anthropologist, Marcel Griaule, celebrate the star Sirius *every sixty years*. And there are other instances to note in this regard. Thus going back to the etymology of the term itself could perfectly allow us to use Mbiti's terminology and speak of a *phenomenon calendar* for the one currently used in the West as well. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is not a clear divide between (African) societies using phenomenon calendars and different (Western) societies using numerical calendars. Calendars in general may have *phenomenon* origins: very quickly their use is just *numerical*.

More generally, the problem with the kind of linguistic philosophy that concludes the way Mbiti does is to *overanalyze* African languages reading, as it were, too much into them as one is too busy seeking the cultural differences they are supposed to reveal between a concrete oriented African mind and an abstract Western mind. Such a preconception leads one to forget, in the process, that the same kind of *over-analysis* can be conducted for virtually any human language and would bear the same kind of conclusions. What this type of linguistic philosophy fails to take into account is that if words do have (often concrete) *origins*, they have above all *uses* which, ultimately, determine their (often abstract) meaning.¹² In so doing one does not only come up with an 'invented' Africa to use Valentin Mudimbe's phrase but with an invented 'West' as well.

In his posthumous works Levy Bruhl came to acknowledge this kind of objection about 'inventing' the other's mentality. But, even more important than the way he invents the 'primitives', he missed the point that the comparison made was flawed in the first place: it was not drawn between comparable terms but between *experience* of time on the one hand and *concept* of time on the other hand. The 'straight line, always homogenous by nature, upon which events fall into position', the 'line on which foresight can arrange [these events] in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other', that line may express a *concept* or rather an image of time. It does not describe an *experience* of time, let alone an experience presented as common to the 'West'. In the 'West' as everywhere else it is the *human* experience of time to measure a distance by what and how long it takes to 'get there', to have not an 'always homogenous' line but rather differences between the time of our impatient desire and the time of our boredom. Everywhere human beings, to use Bergson's image, experience time when they have to wait for their sugar to melt in their coffee and not when they imagine it as a 'straight, homogenous line'. Nobody's experiential time, neither 'ours' nor 'their', is that mathematical time, of which we always speak in spatial terms like a 'line', a 'flow', etc. because that is the language of our intelligence (which means, according to the etymology, the faculty by which we hold things together, in the same mental place, as it were) and not our experience of time as *duration*. This Bergsonian notion of time as duration is an excellent antidote to the ethnological inclination to present an African concept of time (cyclical, futureless, and God knows what) radically different from a Western (linear, mathematical, infinite) concept of time.

In sum, both Mbiti and Levy Bruhl may be criticized for the essentializing respectively of precolonial African sociology and African cognitive processes. Proof of this is that the putative 'Western notion of time' is in reality *modern* Western time. For the most part, time in Europe was impressionistic, non-linear and finite until the period of the Renaissance and the commencement of literacy, some four hundred years ago. And then, there is the question of the isomorphism of time, well-established in modern physics. If the human mind can grasp the past it must also grasp the future. For the past of whatever duration was at one time also a future. So political culture of time is not about how time is lived but how it is *managed* and this is done through 'prospective'.

Developing a political culture of time through prospective

Léopold Sédar Senghor's thought and action have undergone some eclipse now as his philosophy is considered an old story of 'essentialism'. Yet one should not ignore the importance in his thought of the necessity of self-transformation through action¹³ or the centrality of prospective in his political philosophy. He thus wrote: 'When we became an independent nation I had to interrupt my literary work to solve planning problems, those faced by our young state. Now, what is planning but a prospective project? This is what leads me to keep from the Franco-Senegalese philosopher's work only what pertains to his philosophy of action: prospective'.¹⁴ A reader of Gaston Berger, referred to in this quotation as 'the Franco-Senegalese philosopher',¹⁵ he understood how crucial it is to ground development on the notion that our actions today draw their orientation and significance from tomorrow. That meaning, as it were, flows back to the present from the future. This is the very foundation of his insistence on prospective and planning as the substance of development. One example often given to illustrate the failure of developmentalism is to look back at Senghor's projections for the millennium and to ridicule his views about the year 2000 as the year of Senegal's economic take off. Did the projections go wrong? Of course they did, but he was right making them, that is to say assigning the year 2000 as the horizon of meaning for all actions of development. As a philosopher, a poet and a man of action he had grasped the essence of development as prospective and of prospective as a political culture of time.

What is prospective? John Mbiti's ethnologist view considers that planning is founded on the Levy-Bruhlian notion of a time seen as 'a line on which foresight can arrange events in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other'. And since

he considers such a conception to be a characteristic of Western culture, he naturally concludes that the spirit of foresight has to break into African societies through Westernization and Christianity. The main lesson to be learned from Gaston Berger is precisely that prospective, the true attitude of foresight has nothing to do with an image of time and the future as a 'straight homogenous line'. More precisely, such an image is the absolute contrary of what a true understanding of what the future and its exploration mean. The most famous and striking image often used by Berger to illustrate the full significance of a prospective attitude is that of a car running faster and faster on an unknown road, racing along through the night; this car needs to have powerful headlights that can reach further and further if a catastrophe is to be avoided. This image tells us something important about the nature of time, more precisely about its future dimension. We do not know what it will be like just as we do not know what the shape of the road is while it unfolds itself under the lighting of the car speeding along on it. In other words, the concept of a future lying ahead of us and not as continuous creation of our own moving present is not a 'Western' or a 'modern' notion of time. It is an absurdity. This is to say that, contrary to what Mbiti affirms, a future void of events is not the condition for prospective thinking; that would just be an effort to grasp nothingness. On the contrary, prospective is based on the freest possible imagination, but still remains an imagination of *possible scenarios*, of what has been coined in French as '*futuribles*' ('futable' would be the corresponding neologism in English: possible states of affairs that could become real).

One thing also important this metaphor tells us about the meaning of a prospective attitude is this: one has to continuously *anticipate* what the curves of the road will be as this is the best way to be ready to adjust to what will actually present itself. This is to say that the representation of the future changes continuously and so do the decisions we make in the present in order to shape this future. In a word, the image of the homogenous line empty of the events that will occur on it is at the opposite of the true science of the future that prospective aims to be.

There is another lesson in this image of a car speeding in the night with high beams on. A prospective attitude means that we act and operate according to our anticipations and not according to the past, or to what we hold as our 'tradition'.¹⁶ Another way to understand this lesson is to see that prospective is radically different from *extrapolation*, from simply prolonging the past into the future. In that sense, to paraphrase Gaston Berger again, development means that a society is racing towards its youth,

not towards its old age. We could define it then, in Bergsonian terms, as the movement of life and spirit which is the effort to go uphill while matter and its inertia are bound to go downhill. It would be a paradox for African societies where the youth make up everywhere the great majority of the population not to be going, through prospective and developmental political culture of time, towards their adolescence but rather towards a state of senescence signifying a crisis of planning, which in turn is the expression of a crisis of becoming. Such an attitude leaves the African youth with the feeling that it is futureless and condemned to find 'tomorrow' only in emigration. It is for this reason that there is an urgent need for new or modified paradigms of development, new theories of political economy and new critiques of received doctrines. For the African philosopher the task with regard to development lies not with the atavistic work of a Mbiti but with assiduous conversation with the futurist ideas of Fanon, N'Krumah, Senghor, Diop, Hountondji, Amin, and others.

In an important reflection on African initiative titled 'From the Lagos Plan of Action to the New Partnership for African Development and from the Final Act of Lagos to the Constitutive Act: Whither Africa?', Adebayo Adedeji evokes Africa's 'fundamental right and responsibility to occupy the driver's seat of the automobile of its destiny', using the same kind of metaphor Gaston Berger adopted to illustrate the meaning of prospective (Adedeji 2002:35). He rightly states in this reflection that indeed Africans had made attempts to shape their own future with a 'transformation ethics [that] rests on the firm belief that development should not be undertaken on behalf of a people [but] rather that it should be the organic outcome of a society's value system, its perceptions, its concerns and its endeavours' (Adedeji 2002:41). That is precisely one crucial dimension of prospective: the indigenous or 'organic' character of development. Today the question is whether NEPAD could provide the answer to the crisis of initiative that followed the burial of the *Lagos Plan of Action* (1980) under the structural adjustment program built on the philosophy behind the Berg Report of 1981? This question translates itself into that 'of the extent to which the initiative can serve as the foundation for a new optimism about Africa's future' (Olukoshi 2002:88). The answer depends on the true *appropriation* of agency by Africans, expressing their mastery over the very stuff societal development is made of. That 'very stuff' is time.

But how does all of this fit into the issue of development in Africa. First there are the exceptional parameters that Africa has to work with. This continent carries that aura of timelessness with regards to human habitation, being for a very long archaeological time the only habitable

area of the globe. And even its human constructions in history seem timeless: pyramids, Zimbabwe ruins, and so on. Modern-day liberal capitalism focuses on short term profits and constant disruptive change. Could prospective time in the African context extend the amplitudes of development so that development stretches from the next instance to far off time? In this regard growth and development would not just be short-term endeavours but also planned efforts for the long term. With a proper configuration of the idea of 'prospective' an African *telos* would begin to take shape. It is in this context that the idea of development would assume African agency to refashion it according to the dictates of contemporary African political economy, politics, and sociology.

Notes

1. I explore the question of the lost meaning to be restored in a work titled *Reconstruire le sens* (Diagne 2000). A question I was also very fortunate to be able to discuss with Lansana Keita, Nasrin Qader and David Schoenbrun when writing this paper.
2. The phrase 'political culture of time' which appears in the very title of this article is penned by French writer Jean Chesneaux (1998).
3. In English, 'prospective' is an adjective so the equivalent noun for the French word should be the phrase 'long term perspective' which has been used up to this point. But in order to truly capture the philosophical content of Gaston Berger's 'science of the future' the word 'prospective' will be used in the rest of this article, both as a noun and as an adjective (in the phrase 'prospective attitude', for example.)
4. Of course, the past is important and recapturing her own history was a crucial aspect of Africa's liberation. The emphasis put here on prospective as the source of meaning is also a way of seeing the past as a site for useful prospecting. To insist that the future creates the present, which is the basis of prospective attitude, is not to consider the past as divorced from the present but somehow to try to question seriously the situation on our continent where, as Lansana Keita put it in our conversation on this issue, the leaders seem frozen and catatonic in colonial time. To recast the past in its totality is, for example, Cheikh Anta Diop's project and this implied an attitude which, ultimately, is a prospective one. I agree with L. Keita that the central issue is that of a *telos* for the future, ridding Africa of a catatonic state where time is standing still.
5. The first edition, published in 1969 had been reprinted not less than thirteen times!
6. Gaston Berger writes: 'previsions are more likely to be accurate when they concern a long period rather than a short one'. And he adds that this is especially true for economic prevision (Berger 1958:1).

7. '...I propose to discuss the African concept of time as the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts. The concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation (whether of political, economic, educational or Church life). On this subject there is, unfortunately, no literature, and this is no more than a pioneer attempt which calls for further research and discussion' (Mbiti 1990:16) This call for further research seems to have been answered a few years ago by the many contributors to a volume entitled *Time in the Black Experience*, edited by Joseph K. Adjaye (Westport, CN, Greenwood Press, 1994). More recently, H. Kimmerle and myself have published a volume on *the concept of time* in sub-Saharan Africa (Diagne and Kimmerle, 1998).
8. He gives the example of eight months bearing such 'poetic' names as 'Give your uncle water' or 'Grain in the ear' as they are so reckoned among the Latuka people; this example is presented as an 'improvement' on the one given in 1915 in J. Roscoe's study of *The Northern Bantu* people (Mbiti 1990:20, footnote 1).
9. See p. 27. What Mbiti says of Christian missionary teaching here is also valid for the Islamic opening of the religious dimension of *expectation*.
10. (Mbiti 1990:28). 'Nobody else has yet produced' such an analysis, John Mbiti claims.
11. Quoted in Joseph K. Adjaye (1994:3).
12. See, for example, the excellent work of reconstructing the etymologies and distributions of Bantu cultural vocabulary done by David L. Schoenbrun. One interesting instance in particular would be his account of the root *-langa* identified to mean 'report, announce, foresee future, prophecy' and which appears in words meaning 'announce, proclaim', or 'perceive from afar' or 'be clear, illuminated, transparent' or 'hope for, wait for something with much patience and hope'... (Schoenbrun 1997:211-212). The same David Schoenbrun in his review of Adjaye's *Time in the Black experience* rightly points out that 'claiming that 'traditional' African time is somehow concrete and that capitalist European time is abstract or mechanically severed from immediate social contexts' is but 'a rhetorical trap' into which scholars like Mazrui and Mphande fall in their contributions (Schoenbrun 1996, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 172).
13. Senghor who called 'doux ethnologues' (literally 'sweet ethnologists' which is an evocation of the phrase 'doux rêveurs', sweet dreamers) those who fancied an African essence to be kept unchanged liked to think of culture, in 1950, using these words from Marxist thinker Remo Cantoni: 'A culture that does not want to change neither the world, nor man's external relations, nor his conditions of life is a museum culture which fears the fresh air of concrete action because it likes its dust and mold' (Senghor 1964:95-96).
14. This passage from Senghor's *Hommage à Gaston Berger* is quoted by Senegalese philosopher Abib Mbaye (Mbaye 1997:62-63).

15. As a matter of fact, Gaston Berger, the 'father of Prospective', was born in Saint-Louis, Senegal, on October 1st, 1896 and had a Wolof grand-mother, on his father's side, named Fatou Diagne.
16. Berger states: 'In fact, until now, it is the past that provided the answers as it was called here tradition, elsewhere habit, elsewhere common sense, sometimes laziness... Auguste Comte's famous phrase about the dead governing the living seemed to be valid everywhere' (Berger 1958:127).

References

- Adedeji, A., 2002, 'From the Lagos Plan of Action to the New Partnership for African Development and from the Final Act of Lagos to the Constitutive Act: Whither Africa?' in Anyang' Nyong'o, P., Asegedeche, G. and Davinder, L. eds., *New Partnership for Africa's Development: NEPAD. A New Path?*, Nairobi, Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Adjaye, J. K. ed., 1994, *Time in the Black Experience*, Westport: CN, Greenwood Press.
- Berger, G., 1958, 'L'attitude prospective', *Prospective*, Paris, Publication du Centre d'Etudes prospectives, no. 1, Mai.
- Chesneaux, J., 1998, 'Pour une culture politique du temps. Quel dialogue entre passé, présent et avenir', *Futuribles*, no. 234, Septembre.
- Diagne, S. B. and Kimmerle, H., 1998, *Time and Development in the Thought of Sub-Saharan Africa*, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, Rodopi.
- Diagne, S. B., 2000, *Reconstruire le sens: textes et enjeux de perspectives africaines*, Dakar, CODESRIA.
- Gyekye, K., 1987, *An essay on African Philosophical Thought: the Akan Conceptual Scheme*, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Mbaye, A., 1997, 'Léopold Sédar Senghor et Gaston Berger', in Diagne, S.B. ed., *Gaston Berger: Introduction à une philosophie de l'avenir*, Dakar, Neas.
- Mbiti, J. S., 1990, *African Religions and Philosophy*, second edition, Oxford Heinemann.
- Olukoshi, A., 2002, 'Governing the African Political Space for Sustainable Development: A Reflection on NEPAD', in Anyang' Nyong'o, P., Asegedeche, G., and Davinder, L. eds., *New Partnership for Africa's Development: NEPAD. A New Path?*, Nairobi, Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Sall, A., 2003, *Afrique 2025. Quels futurs possibles pour l'Afrique au sud du Sahara?* Paris, Karthala.
- Schoenbrun, D.L., 1997, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary: Etymologies and Distributions*, Koln, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Senghor, L. S., 1964, 'Le problème de la culture', *Liberté, négritude et humanisme*, Paris, Seuil.
- Serres, M., 'Espace et temps', 1981, in Philippe Choquard and Jean-Louis Ferrier eds., *Sur l'aménagement du temps. Essai de chronogénie*, Paris, Denoël/Gonthier.



Africa Development, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004, pp. 71–93

© Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004
(ISSN 0850-3907)

Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look

Lewis R. Gordon*

Abstract

This article examines concepts of imitation, theodicy, and immaturity in Fanon's ideas on development and explores how his critique unfolds in the thought of two scholars influenced by his work: Sylvia Wynter and Irene Gendzier. Wynter, working from a poetistic semiotic perspective, rejects development as a much limited concept premised upon European normativity and calls for building an epistemological revolution. Gendzier, through a genealogical historicist critique of development studies, substantiates Wynter's critique and argues that development studies reveals more about the First World than any others. The author then considers and issues a critique of Amartya Sen's recent effort to rescue development studies through his formulation of development as an economy of freedom. The rest of the article presents an Africana postcolonial phenomenological treatment of freedom as a dialectical relationship between the lived reality of choices and social options and the need for a radical humanistic globalism with which to fight contemporary neoliberal and conservative ones.

Résumé

Cet article analyse les concepts d'imitation, de théodicée et d'immaturité contenus dans les idées de Fanon relatives au développement, et examine la manière dont sa critique transparaît dans la pensée de deux universitaires influencées par son œuvre: Sylvia Wynter et Irene Gendzier. Partant d'une perspective poétiste sémiotique, Wynter rejette le développement, qu'elle considère comme un concept très limité, fondé sur la normativité européenne et prône plutôt une révolution épistémologique. Gendzier, quant à elle, justifie l'argument de Wynter, à travers une critique historiciste généalogique des études sur le développement, et affirme que ce type d'étude est plus centré sur le Premier Monde que sur les autres mondes. Ensuite, l'auteur analyse puis critique les efforts d'Amartya Sen, qui cherchait à «secourir» les études sur le développement, en définissant ce

* The Laura Carnell University Professor of Philosophy, Temple University, USA.

dernier comme étant l'économie de la liberté. Le reste de l'article présente une définition africaine phénoménologique post coloniale de la liberté, sous la forme d'une relation dialectique entre la réalité vécue des choix et des options sociales et le besoin d'un mondialisme humaniste radical, permettant de lutter contre les autres formes contemporaines néolibérales et conservatrices du mondialisme.

Fanon's Encomia

Reflecting on the contemporary social and economic condition of Africa, Olufemi Taiwo found himself drawn to the prescient analyses of Frantz Fanon little more than four decades ago:

Les Damnés de la terre was originally published in 1961, the same year that Fanon died...[That] year takes an added significance when juxtaposed with the historical importance of the preceding year, 1960, for 1960 was the year in which many erstwhile colonial countries won independence from colonial rule. This independence provided the background for Harold Macmillan's euphoric declaration that a wind of change was blowing over Africa. His statement was symptomatic of the enthusiasm and near universal optimism that marked the advent of independent states in Africa. The optimism was not without ground. Given the violence of colonialism and its direct role in retarding the growth and development of colonial territories, it was no surprise that all and sundry thought that independence would usher in a period of development in self-governing nations-states... However, unlike most of his contemporaries, especially those who had secured for themselves a lien on the fruits of independence, Fanon had been a dissenting voice in the chorus of enthusiasm that greeted the advent of flag and independence (nominal independence) and was one of the earliest to posit the limits of the phenomenon. Like a seer, Fanon the dissenter had peered into the future and left us a legacy of forebodings about how precarious that future—our present—might be (Taiwo 1996:257).

Although Fanon is often held to his word of supposedly not offering 'timeless truths' (Gates 1991 and Masolo 1998), the unfolding of history and thought seems to be such that his claim is nothing short of ironic. Form need not hover over matter, as Aristotle showed so long ago, but can meet in that powerful embrace that we have all come to know as 'reality', and in so being, sober up our thoughts under its pressing weight. Fanon was much aware of this in his classic early work, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, from which his qualification was announced. In that work, he presented a complex interplay of intratextual naïveté with metatextual insight as he, as in the fashion of Dante's *Inferno*, invited the reader to follow him through each circle of a claustrophobic, hellish condition. The black is a white construction, he admits, that is a consequence of a

social world that stands between phylogenetic and ontogenetic forces (Fanon 1952,1967:Introduction). Yet creating alternative constructions is not so easy when we take seriously the complexity of signs and symbols which constitute the language of their transmission. The colonizing signs and symbols are not simply at the level of what they assert, but also at the level of *how* they assert themselves. Thus, epistemological colonization should also be understood as lurking even at the heart of *method* (Fanon 1952,1967:chapter 1). A major epistemological problem is the degrading quagmire stimulated by the dialectics of recognition. There, blackness stands as imitation instead of originality or source. All imitations face the original as standard, which makes ownership of the promised national language an elusive dream. The link between language and Fanon's sociogenic observation is that language is in principle communicable, which means that it is inherently 'public', which means that it finds its foundations in the social world. Failure at the linguistic and semiotic level means there is trouble in the social world, and trouble in the social world means that, should one continue to cling to its completeness, its inherent legitimacy, that one should retreat inward, into the bosom of love, for an affirmation of one's worth, for sanctuary.¹ Yet, there too, failure awaits so long as, under the guise of love, the desired desire is to be loved not as black but through the narcissism of whiteness, through a gift of deceiving words. That words of whiteness, words of white recognition as white, within the privacy of love are insufficient resistance against the social world calls for a further retreat to the point of constitutional fantasy. He then rehearsed the retreat autobiographically through his own encounters with words of 'niggerness', to laughter, to words of science, to the rhythms of *negritude*, to tears and then wrestling with psychopathological anxieties in a world bereft of normality. Why did Fanon take such a circuitous path in that early work? Because he knew that reality is difficult to bear; it is that for which preparation is necessary. Facing such difficulties awakens a critical, interrogative consciousness—one that, in the encomium that marks the book's denouement, is appealed to in its author's flesh.

Fanon's philosophy can be summarized by a single conviction: That maturity is fundamental to the human condition, but one cannot achieve maturity without being *actional*, which, for Fanon, is tantamount to freedom. Much of his subsequent writings explore this thesis. In *Les Damnés de la terre*, this march through concentric layers of hell, echoed in the title's reference to *les damnés*, returns, but now in the context of the wider political question of a geo-constituted realm. Recall that Fanon begins with the provocative observation of decolonization as a violent

process. Many commentators overlook his critical rejections of the 'Graeco-Latin pedestal' of Western values. For if those values were instruments of colonization, how can they legitimate themselves as anything other than its salvation? But what happens in a world of suspended values both old and new? Is it not the case that in a world without values, all is permitted? And what could be more violent than such a world, a world without limits?

I have written of that world as one in which there is no hope of everyone both eating and then having their cake (Gordon 1995:chapter 4). When competing communities lay claims to 'right' from value systems that render those rights 'natural' and 'absolute', the stage set is no less than a tragic one. Fanon then takes us into the world faced at the moment of decolonization. His argument, that the absence of an infrastructure both at the level of land and idea, leads to a neocolonial situation through the auspices of a Third World elite and of the need for revolutionary mobilization that required the peasantry and the lumpen-proletariat, stimulated outcries of heretical Marxism.² Having built his thought on the importance of seizing one's freedom and taking responsibility for one's values, Fanon was careful to raise the question of *how* a transition can be made from neocolonialism to a genuine *postcolonialism*. He returns to criticizing *negritude*, for instance, on the grounds that it is more than a negative moment in a historical dialectic but also a form of reductionism akin to nationalism, racism and all self-interests-laden models of group organizations instead of those premised upon the common good. Here, Fanon is making concrete the old problem of participatory politics, where policy can be premised upon a collective of interests or the interest of the collective. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously formulated it in *Du Contrat social*—between the will in general and the general will. Fanon provided case studies of nationalisms collapsed into ethnic conflicts, and offered, in their stead, the option of national consciousness where the task, as he formulated it, is to build the nation. In the course of his critique of neocolonial values, Fanon advanced both a geopolitical and a class critique. The geopolitical critique challenged the necessity of the capital city as the site of political residence and the organization of social life. The modern African city, for example, faces the reality of the complex political demands of rural Africa. The urban elite that emerges in this structure is one, he argues, that lacks material capital but relies on political capital as mediators with colonial metropolises. The result is a neglected infrastructure, mismanaged national loans and the emergence of what can be called a

'lumpen-bourgeoisie', an elite that, he concludes, serves no purpose (Fanon 1961,1991:217, 1963:175-176).

Fanon then returns to the colonial and decolonizing moments to illustrate a chilling point. The colonial condition forces the colonized, he argues, to question their humanity. This interrogation occasions alienation of the spirit in the face of loss of land and thwarted, indigenous teleological processes. The decolonization process unleashes an array of violent forces that bring to the surface the many double standards of the colonial system and contingency in a world that once seemed to be absolute, necessary and law. At the heart of this 'hell', is the classic direction of consumed hatred. As Virgil showed Dante's protagonist's two foes, one of whom is so consumed by hatred that he gnaws on the head of his enemy while frozen from the neck down, Fanon presented the horrific implications of being consumed by hatred. The message is clear: there are some attachments, some values, that we must let go, and in so doing, we will find a way outside at which we encounter the awesome set of possibilities raised by the stars in the night sky. This is what Fanon ultimately means by '*...il faut faire peau neuve, développer une pensée neuve, tenter de mettre sur pied un homme neuf*' (Fanon 1961,1991:376, 1963:316).³

If we return to *Peau noire, masques blancs*, a consideration should be added to this summary. The metatextual Fanon stood in a special relation to the intratextual Fanon's naive investment in the epistemic and political promises of European society. Failing to see that the social world itself was suffering from a colonizing, racist malediction, the naive black subject/Fanon failed to see that it was that *system* itself that required transformation. He thus related to that system with a *theodicean* attitude. Theodicy is the theological rationalization of God's ultimate goodness in the presence of evil, given God's omnipotence and omniscience. On one account, God's actions are all good so evil must be a function of our limited ability to see God's relation to His actions—one of ultimate justice; hence the term theodicy (*theo* [god's] *dike* [justice]). Another account is that God's having given human beings free will means that evil and injustice in the world are functions of humanity, the source of original sin. There is, in other words, nothing wrong with God, but there is much wrong with humanity. The modern world is, however, supposedly governed by secular rationalizations. Yet, although divine terms may not be advanced in modern rationalization processes, it is not always the case that the *grammar* or the *form* of the divine have been eliminated. Two idols that take the place of the divine are science and politics. Where science fills the gap, it functions as a form of *science-dike* a form of ultimate

rationalization of reality. To contradict scientific claims means, then, simply to be wrong and to be a form of rationality that stands outside the bounds of reason. Where politics fills the gap, the result is the claim of a complete political system. The result is the emergence of people who contradict such a system. Since the system is complete, and therefore just, such people must be incomplete and unjust. In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois formulated the situation of such people as one of being a problem.⁴

The problem faced by problem people is how to be actional. Such people live in a world in which the assertion of their humanity is structured as a contradiction of the system. To *assert* their humanity, then, is already structurally ‘violent’, ‘unjust’, ‘wrong’, ‘ill-deserved’ and ‘ill-liberal’. How, then, does one set afoot a new humanity when the status quo’s notion of humanity is treated as just? Both Fanon and Du Bois saw this problem as one of double consciousness. The metatextual relation of which I have been writing is also that second sight, that place behind the veil of false consciousness. It is what people live in the face of a world that bullies them to pretend does not exist. It is the lived world of enslavement under the banner of avowed ‘freedom’. It is the world of racial limits in every place that purports to be colorblind; it is knowing that the normative always benefits from claims of ‘neutrality’. It is knowing that words like ‘development’ and ‘modernization’ sound much better than their practice in parts of the world outside of North America, Europe and Australia. This insight leads to a set of reflections that can be called critiques of development reason. Although there are many, I will, in the rest of this essay, focus on three scholars, two of whom are influenced by Fanon and one of whom continues to keep the intratextual faith: Sylvia Wynter, Irene Gendzier and Amartya Sen. Then, I will offer my own Fanonian-existential, postcolonial, alternative philosophical conception.

‘We The Underdeveloped’: Sylvia Wynter

‘Development’ is a relational and teleological term. To aim at development requires not yet being developed. To be developed implies achieving more than an end but an end that *ought* to be achieved. In terms of an organism, the obvious example is maturation of that organism or its achievement of its adult form. Implicit in not being developed, then, is the condition of childhood at worst and adolescence at best, but in neither instance is there the condition of full responsibility—namely, adulthood. Without responsibility, there is no agency, and without agency, the familiar patterns of dependence follow. In ‘Is ‘Development’ a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological?’, Sylvia Wynter takes on Fanon’s demand to develop

new thoughts. She argues that such a project may require the rejection of 'development' (Wynter 1996:299).

Wynter's argument is as follows. The modern world has set Western civilization and its concomitant white normativity as the standard of development. White normativity emerged through the rise of Europe as a global force that contrasted European humanity with those that constituted its limits, its points beyond which there is, supposedly, no longer a properly human mode of being. This limit she refers to as 'liminality, or *conceptual otherness*' (305). This conceptual otherness emerged as a function of the newly-formed cultural processes that centered Judeo-Christian practices as the foundations of religious life against which secular modernity emerged. In effect, because of the absence of even a Semitic premodern legitimation practice, such populations are twice removed from modern, normative conceptions of the human as white and secular. Although she does not refer to Hegel, a version of this argument can be seen in his infamous introduction to his lectures on history, where he denied Africans of even a *religious* moment.⁵ The result of this double move—of neither a modern present or a religious past—is a designation of the absence of a subjective life that can be correlated with a European subjective life, which eliminates the analogy-oriented conditions for intersubjectivity and empathy. In philosophical language, the liminal is devoid as an epistemic correlate.⁶ Wynter writes:

The paradox here is that the category of liminality, or *conceptual otherness*, functions as the second mechanism by which the West will be able, in the words of the Royal Lady, to conquer without being in the right as traditionally and therefore religiously conceived but rather in terms of a purely secular sense of right. It also functions politically in another cognizing dimension. As the Eritrean anthropologist Asmarom Legesse argues, the liminal category is the systemic category from whose perspective alone, as the perspective of those forcibly made to embody and signify lack-of-being, whose members, in seeking to escape their condemned statuses, are able to call into question the closure instituting the order and, therefore, the necessary 'blindness' of its normative, in this case, 'developed' subjects (Wynter 1996:305).

If white normativity requires black liminality, and development is premised upon white normativity, then it, too, requires the liminal. Development, in other words, at least in its historic instantiation, constitutes liminal people. What then happens when the liminal takes on the project of development? They, too, begin to produce their own sites of liminality. Recall Fanon's point about nationalism in the neocolonial moment, where

xenophobic and racist protection of limited resources lead to the failure of not building a genuine national consciousness. The argument can be extended to the violence that marks a feature of liminality that is, in my view, not quite captured by Wynter's formulation of conceptual *otherness*. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon challenged the dialectics of recognition in racialized slavery. The racialized slave is not considered the normative self or other. He or she or, in many instances 'it', is considered *below* the realm of human intersubjectivity and ethical relations. In effect, as I have argued elsewhere (Gordon 1995, 1997 and 2000), the objective of the racialized slave and the black in an antiblack society is to *achieve otherness*, wherein there is a genuine intersubjective and ethical problematic. If this thesis is correct, then all is permitted on such an 'object'.⁷

Themes of damnation return:

This new form represents metaphysical lack, that of humankind's potential subordination to the dysselected genetically defective aspects of its own human nature on the one hand; and on the other, to that of its potential material overcoming by the Ricardo-defined threat of an external natural scarcity. For in the same way as the liminal category of the *lepers*, prescribed and segregated outside the walls of the town, signified for the feudal-Christian order the *massa damnata*, condemned to their then believed to be incurable fate, so the knight's category of the we-the-underdeveloped equally functions for the now barely secularized and global form of the original Judeo-Christian 'local culture' of Western Europe. The *underdeveloped*, proscribed like the medieval lepers outside the gates of the attained, *civitas materialis* of the developed enclaves, function as the empirical proof of subordination to natural society, and therefore of the affliction of the Malthusian 'iron laws' of nature. Consequently, its 'underdeveloped' state is an indispensable function of our present behavior-orienting projection. The only 'cure' is that of the specific behavioral pathways prescribed by the represented supraordinate *telos* of development and economic growth; of therefore *material redemption* and the *civitas materialis* as the now transumed form of spiritual redemption and the *civitas dei*, as the *telos* that institute our contemporary global order (Wynter 1996:306–307).

The theodicean element returns, wherein the devastation of life, safety, social institutions and the environment in Africa is treated by the current global order as indication of the failings, of the inferiority of African people. The effort, however, of African and African diasporic peoples to 'fix' themselves in the material terms of Europe, North America and Australia, locks us in the processes of a redemption that is not ours and is consequently affirmation, instead of negation, of our damnation. Echoing

Fanon, Wynter concludes: 'Hence it is proposed here that the 'strategy' that we must now elaborate is an epistemological (and therefore culture-systemic) rather than merely economic one' (Wynter 1996:309).

Democracy and Development: Irene Gendzier

Although Sylvia Wynter qualified her conclusions by reminding us that we should work through epistemological categories and 'not merely economic' ones, her discussion so focuses on the question of conceptual conditions that it is difficult to determine how those economic considerations configure in the analysis. Irene Gendzier, author of one of the early studies of Fanon's life and thought, took on this task, in addition to elaborating its political dimensions as well, in her 1995 history of the field of development studies, *Development against Democracy: Manipulating Political Change in the Third World*. Gendzier first points out that development studies emerged in elite, First World universities as an attempt to offer their vision of modernization over the Marxist ones of the U.S.S.R., Communist China, and Cuba. Their model was resolute: A capitalist economy and elite (oligarchical) democracy. We see here the normative telos writ large: The United States. Although Gendzier does not present this as a theodicean argument, those elements are unmistakable. The initial phase of development studies granted the United States the status of utopia, which means that both its contradictions and those that emerge from its application abroad must be functions of the limitations of the people who manifest them. In effect, Gendzier's study is an empirical validation of much of Wynter's and Fanon's arguments. The record of those development policies is universally bad, although there seems to be no example that could meet any test of falsification that would convince, say, members of the Council for Foreign Relations, many of whom are from the neoliberal and conservative wings of the North American academic elite. Gendzier uses an apt term to describe the work such policies have done: *maldevelopment*. Here is her assessment of their record:

For many, terms like Development and Modernization have lost their meaning. They have become code words. They refer to policies pursued by governments and international agencies that enrich ruling elites and technocrats, while the masses are told to await the benefits of the 'trickle down' effect. For many, Development and Modernization are terms that refer to a politics of reform designed to preserve the status quo while promising to alter it. And for many social scientists who have rationalized the interests of governments committed to such policies are accomplices in deception (Gendzier 1995:2).

North American and European development studies set the foundations for U.S. policies that supported antidemocratic regimes for the sake of preserving the economic hegemony of American business elites, and the supposed dilemma emerged, in many countries under the yoke of First World developmental dictates, of whether to reduce social inequalities, which often led to economic decline on the one hand, or increase economic prosperity, which often led to social inequalities on the other. The problem, of course, is that this is a false dilemma since no nation attempts either pole in a vacuum. How other countries respond to a nation's social and economic policy will impact its outcome. It is not, in other words, as though any nation truly functions as a self-supporting island anymore. A good example is the small Caribbean island of Antigua. To 'normalize' relations with the United States, that island was forced to create immigration laws that would stimulate the formation of an underclass, which U.S. advisors claimed would create a cheap labour base to stimulate economic investment and an increase in production and prosperity. There is now such a class in Antigua, but there has, in fact, been a decline in prosperity. The reason is obvious: There was not an infrastructure of capital in *need* of such a labour force in the first place. The island of Antigua has a good education base, which makes the type of labour suitable for its economy to be one of a trained professional class linked in with the tourist economy and other high-leveled service-oriented professions such as banking and trade, all of which, save tourism, the United States does not associate with a predominantly black country. The creation of an underclass without an education or social-welfare system to provide training and economic relief, conjoined with an absence of investments from abroad, has created a politically and economically noxious situation, and the quality of life in Antigua now faces decline.⁸ This story is no doubt a familiar one in nations with very modest prosperity as in Africa.

There has been a set of critical responses to development theory, the most influential of which has been those by theorists of dependency.⁹ The obvious situation of epistemological dependence emerges from the United States as the standard of development both economic and cultural. The economic consequence is a function of the international institutions that form usury relationships with countries that are structurally in a condition of serfdom, where they depend on loans that it is no longer possible to believe they can even pay back. Fanon would add, however, that we should bear in mind that in the case of many African countries who received such loans, the situation might have been different had those funds been spent on infrastructural resources instead of as a source of wealth for

neocolonial elites. That European and American banks hold accounts for leaders who have, in effect, robbed their countries and have left their citizens in near perpetual debt to the World Bank reveals the gravity of Fanon's warnings of forty years past. An additional Fanonian warning has also been updated by sociologist Paget Henry, who warns us that the epistemological struggle also includes fighting 'to save the sciences from extreme commodification and instrumentalization' (Henry 2002–2003:51).

To these criticisms, Gendzier poses the following consideration. The critics of development have pointed out what is wrong with development studies, particularly its project of modernization, but their shortcoming is that many of them have not presented alternative conceptions of how to respond to the problems that plague most of Africa and much of the Third World. Think, for example, of Wynter's call for a new epistemic order. Calling for it is not identical with creating it. This is one of the ironic aspects of the epistemological project. Although it is a necessary reflection, it is an impractical call for a practical response.

Gendzier regards the fundamental problem of development theory as linked to its near religious investment in a union of liberal democracy and capitalism. This commitment has led, she argues, to an endless debate on the *meaning* of development:

Given the premises that led to support for the elitist interpretation of democratic theory, the implications of supporting capitalist development as a motor force behind social and political change appeared to be paradoxical. The former emphasis on elite theory was geared toward controlling conditions that the latter systematically generated.

What, then, was to be done? The confrontation with this paradox and the predicaments in Development theories that it addressed led to a nearly permanent debate on the meaning of the term. Did Political Development imply democracy, equality, and participation? Or did it refer primarily to economic change? And what were the consequences of choosing the one or the other of the two definitions? Far from reflecting a confusion over the meaning of Political Development, these debates circled around the impossible choice clearly understood by Development theorists. To define Political Development in terms of democracy and participation meant accepting the contradiction implicit in the interpretation of political change in Development theories. To reject such a definition meant severing the connection with democracy, which would render theories of Political Development nothing more than instruments for the management of political change. Unmasked, such instruments represented a form of social and political engineering that could hardly be expected to attract the kind of support implicit in the first project (Gendzier 1995:156).

I quoted Gendzier at length here because of the prescience of her observation. Is not the current U.S. foreign policy of preemption but an 'unmasked' instance of a logical consequence of such developmental formulations?

Gendzier points out that the response of development theorists to the critique of development *process* has been a focus on *actors* or agents of change in the Third World. And this response has, following the kinds of theodicean arguments mentioned earlier, taken the form of no less than the usual blame-the-victims variety. Through butchery of Max Weber's analysis of the impact of Calvinism on the development of capitalism, the conclusion unleashed against people in Africa is that they simply lack the capitalist spirit (Gendzier 1995:165; cf. Eisenstadt 1968). The connection between such an argument against Africans and the infamous 'cultures of poverty' argument against African Americans is unmistakable. What is submerged by such arguments is the role of policy in setting the conditions for the emergence and limits of the leadership in 'underdeveloped' communities and the problem of whether such leadership is even representative of the cultural realities of the communities they supposedly lead. Gendzier's historical analysis is, in the end, affirming of at least Wynter's observation of development as ultimately a symptom of Western narcissism when she writes that it '...is more revealing of a particular dimension of American political thinking than it is of Third World societies in transition. From this perspective, then, those who have relied on the paradigms of Development Studies to understand the nature of Third World societies will have learned something of their own political tradition instead' (Gendzier 1995:197).

Liberalism Strikes Back: Amartya Sen's Defense of Development 'as Freedom'

Sylvia Wynter and Irene Gendzier exemplify, respectively, what Paget Henry (2000) has described as poeticist and historicist critiques. The former deals with the semiosis of development; the latter, its historico-material limits. In both instances, the verdict is grim. Amartya Sen (1999) has, however, attempted to rescue the project of development through taking on the struggle of its definition and presenting a case for its use in the political economy of dehumanization, which he describes as 'unfreedom'. He argues that if unfreedom is the problem, then the transition sought should have freedom as its telos. To be developed is to be free. The task, as he sees it, is to organize society in a way that maximizes freedom, and since, in almost Aristotelian fashion, one cannot live freely

without certain material things such as food, water and shelter, certain social guarantees such as security, education, and affirming values, the role of development theory is to present the strongest case for such goods.¹⁰ The strongest case is not only that they are ethical or just but that they are completely compatible with economic prosperity. This claim he substantiates by decoupling production from distribution. Consider the case of hunger. The problem is not that countries are not producing food. The problem is the set of social conditions that regulate the distribution of food. Sen also takes on Gendzier's point about actors by pointing out that freedom as a model requires not impeding the agency of people. In other words, the actors must be taken heed of, but *the* actors must include every member of the society (cf. Sen 1999:4).

An immediate problem with Sen's position, however, rests in his use of the word *freedom*. Consider the U.S. 'war on terror'. President Bush has repeatedly sold his foreign policy as a defense of freedom, which he equates with the United States. Although Sen is willing to say that the United States is not freedom or a nation of freedom, because there are many unfree people living here, he faces the problem of formulating freedom in light of his initial premise of unfreedom. Bush could define the U.S. as freedom precisely because he approaches the U.S. in a theodicean fashion: unfreedom, for him, is *outside* the system. Key to the argument, then, is the location of unfreedom. Although Sen is willing to look at unfreedom as intrasystemic, he encounters problems in his use of the term, which is at times incoherent. Here is an example: 'Very many people across the world suffer from varieties of unfreedom. Famines continue to occur in particular regions, denying to millions the basic freedom to survive' (Sen 1999:15). How can survival be a *freedom*? Survival is a base-level condition *for* freedom, since it doesn't make sense to talk about what one 'has' when one is no longer alive. But more, how coherent is it to talk about *a* freedom?

In Sen's analysis, we come to one of the core problems of development thought, and that is its solipsistic adherence to a conception of political thinking that may be incompatible with its avowed goals. Sen is, after all, attempting to address the problem of unfreedom in the world within the philosophical language that fostered that unfreedom in the first place—namely, modern liberal political philosophy and political economy.¹¹ It would take too much time to elaborate the dynamics here, so I will just summarize it thus: There are alternative philosophical traditions whose focus on the question of freedom would suggest a dialectic in which the

movement is from freedom to unfreedom to liberation. The reason would be because unfreedom makes sense as the curtailment of freedom to begin with (which, in this case are the agents/adults who are the subjects who must take control over their lives and society), and liberation makes sense as the overcoming of unfreedom. Why liberation versus freedom? Because a movement from freedom to unfreedom to freedom suggests the capacity to 'return' to one's prior condition. The historical reality is that one can never return but most find a way to build something positive and new on the misery that constituted the period of bondage. But more, the problem with the analysis is that it also turns the relationship between economics and discourses of freedom on its head. Economics is a discourse that centers rationality, and rationality relies on consistency and instrumental thinking. An insight from the broader tradition to which I am referring (the one, by the way, from which Fanon's thought emerged) is that freedom is a category that is broader than rationality; it is rooted in the fundamental incompleteness of the human condition. That being so, to place freedom under a formal model or system that yokes it in a way that leads to talking about a freedom is to domesticate or colonize it under a particular rational order. Although there could be a good case to link freedom with reason, the problem still emerges by virtue of reason being a broader category than rationality. One of the major projects of modern science, for example, has been to elevate rationality as the model of reason. The problem, however, is that consistency works well for systems not sophisticated enough to evaluate themselves. For the more complex problems of evaluation, including self-evaluation, a more radical model of reason is needed; one that *cannot* be complete.¹²

A tradition that takes on the question of freedom in ways that adhere to its fundamental incompleteness is the existential tradition, and we can find, in the existential phenomenological tradition, one that takes very seriously the social dimensions of freedom. For the remainder of this article, I am going to outline my Africana existential phenomenological approach, which has also become known as postcolonial phenomenology. That it is heavily based upon Fanon's thought is already known and acknowledged (see Gordon 1995, 1997, 2000, Henry 2000). In many ways, it is sympathetic to Sen's choice of focusing on freedom, but it comes from a tradition that rejects the dependency implicit in the neoliberal framework of Sen's thought.

A Postcolonial Phenomenological Look at Freedom

In many ways, the term 'postcolonial phenomenology' is a redundant term. Phenomenology is a form of inquiry in which one suspends one's ontological commitments for the sake of investigating meaningful features of the world. In phenomenology, one takes seriously that all objects of thought are just that—which means that there are intentional features of every epistemological or knowledge endeavour. It is odd that some systems of investigation attempt to eliminate the *investigation* dimension in the search for objectivity. What phenomenologists admit is that objectivity can only be posed as a problem by a pre-given subjectivity. Similarly, subjectivity can only be posed as a problem in light of there not being subjectivity alone. These arguments are called transcendental arguments; they deal with the conditions for the concepts under investigation. An important feature of phenomenological work is the question of grounding phenomenology. The phenomenological approach demands that such a project be as radical as possible, which means that all methods must be subject to ontological suspension (i.e., the rejection of their presumed legitimacy). This critical position must be taken against even logic itself, for if it were not done, then phenomenology would be subordinate to logic without logic having gone through a critical process of legitimation. (And yes, this critical question applies, as well, to the critical process of legitimation that one attempts.) I bring this up to point out the spirit of resistance to epistemic colonization that marks the phenomenological way of thinking. That is why there is some redundancy: phenomenology already means a form of postcolonial thinking.

The postcolonial/phenomenological approach suggests, then, that even phenomenology's history must be engaged with the cautious eye of ontological suspension. What that means is that the history, whether in its European, Asian or African forms, must be seen as factual instances but not as what *legitimizes* phenomenological work.¹³

The existential element comes to the fore when we think of the dual meaning of *existence*. From the Latin words *ex* and *sistere*, it means to stand out or to emerge. It is another way of saying that if one does not stand out, even to one's self, one is as though one were not there. To exist, then, is vital to every human being; it is what it means *to live*.

To stand out or to live means that one is, in a word, metastable. That means that every act of complete containment fails to present a *living* being. Because such living requires emergence, standing out, or, in more grandiose language, *transcendence*, it *is* freedom—always more, always incomplete. How, then, could such a reality be 'unfree', when it *is* freedom?

The answer rests in the social world. The social world is the realm of meaning and creativity. In purely physical terms (for the sake of argument), the material world continues to be its exact content of the relation of energy to matter. But the social world, the world of intersubjectivity, is one in which many new 'things' are created everyday. These 'things' are meaningful in those terms, and they proliferate such things as institutions and forms of life. This is what Fanon means by *sociogenesis*.

A problem emerges, however, in the relation of individual intentions to the framework of intentions that constitute the social world, or in more familiar language, individuals and structures. The former faces the latter in a peculiar relationship that we shall call *choice to options*. A peculiar feature of the social world is that some practices and institutions can become so calcified that they function no differently than would a brick wall. That is to say, just as one cannot go through a brick wall without force; there are social institutions that function similarly. Those are options. They are either material reality or function as material features of reality.

Human beings live in relation to options as the transcendence of options. What this means is this: There are choices that are isomorphic with options, but when options are exhausted, choices can continue on *how to relate to the exhaustion of options*. Such choices tend to be about the chooser. One can choose *how* one deals with one's limits (e.g., happily, angrily, reluctantly, stupidly). Notice the adverbial nature of these 'choices'. With enough time, one could begin to make so many inward-directed choices that the choices become entirely about the constitution of the self. I call this 'implosivity'.¹⁴

Implosivity is a function of oppression. Fanon's words illuminate this observation:

Parce qu'il est une négation systématisée de l'autre, une décision forcenée de refuser à l'autre tout attribut d'humanité, le colonialisme accule le peuple dominé à se poser constamment la question: «Qui suis-je en réalité»? (Fanon 1961,1991: 300, 1963:250).¹⁵

The 'Who am I?' to which Fanon refers is rendered perverse by the adverb *constamment* (constantly). The constant questioning of the self, of one's value, is a function of lost hope in outward-directed choices. In Fanonian language, it is the failure to become *actional*. This failure is not, as we have been seeing, accidental. If we were to set the total number of options in a society as, say, n , and we were to make x number of members of the society have n , but y number of members have n - various random numbers of options, we would find the y members exhausting their outward-directed choices sooner than the x members. Now suppose n becomes what every member of the society is expected to exercise choices over while their n

is denied. The immediate result is that the y members will be seen as the 'cause' of their failure to make choices isomorphic with n . And while they at an earlier period begin implementing the self-inquiry or self-fixing, some of the y members may never face those. The African-American comedian Chris Rock put it this way: 'For whites, the sky's the limit; for blacks, the limit's the sky'. He speaks here of two perceptions of reach.

A consequence of options-disparity is the scope of power. In cases of exhausted options, the inward-directed choices are at the physical reach of the body. Because of this, people with limited options are often associated with force or violence. They cannot have an effect on the world beyond what their body can contact. That makes the field of their actions limited. People who have options are those whose choices can affect the social world. Their bodies do not need to be in the location of their effects. This ability to have an effect on the social world is power. Power is the ability to live outwardly, to make choices that would initiate a chain of effects in the social world that would constitute the set of norms and institutions that would affirm one's belonging in the world instead of stimulating a flight from it to an infinitesimal, inwardly-directed path of madness and despair.

In effect, what Sen ultimately wanted to argue is something with which Fanon, Wynter, Gendzier and I would agree: that the goal is to increase the options available for people to live well in a world in which time and space are increasingly pressurized by the social and consumption demands of each coming generation. The reality of this goal is that it is a form of globalism for which we all would have to fight since the contemporary hegemonic policies of North America, Europe, and Australia suggest an alternative model premised upon maximizing such options for fewer people, each day at the expense of all.

Conclusion

There is, of course, the continued, resounding question from a century ago: What is to be done?

That the context of this discussion is philosophical presents the role of the intellectual. Given the nature of the problems at hand, it would be folly to presume a single role for intellectuals to take. The African intellectual tradition has, for instance, been guided by a healthy tension between concerns of identity and liberation—between questions of being and becoming (cf. Gordon 2000: chapters 1–4). It is the task of some intellectuals to work out questions of being, questions of 'what' and 'how'. And then there are those who focus on 'why' and other questions of

purpose. Some do both. All should consider their work, I here submit, with the following considerations in mind.

Each epoch is a living reality. This is so because they are functions of living human communities, which, too, are functions of the social world. As living realities, they come into being and will go out of being. What this means is that societies go through processes of birth and decay. An erroneous feature of most civilizations that achieve imperial status is the silly belief that such an achievement would assure their immortality. But we know that no living community lasts forever, save, perhaps, through historical memory of other communities. Decay comes. The task faced by each subordinated community, however, is how prepared it is for the moment in which conditions for its liberation are ripe. When the people are ready, the crucial question will be of how many ideas are available for the reorganization of social life. The ideas, many of which will unfold through years of engaged political work, need not be perfect, for in the end, it will be the hard, creative work of the communities that take them on. That work is the concrete manifestation of political imagination.

Fanon described this goal as setting afoot a new humanity. He knew how terrifying such an effort is, for we do live in times where such a radical break appears as no less than the end of the world. In the meantime, the task of building infrastructures for something new must be planned, and where there is some room, attempted, as we all no doubt already know, because given the sociogenic dimension of the problem, we have no other option but to build the options on which the future of our species rest.

Notes

1. I won't rehearse here the many criticisms of Fanon's discussion of this retreat under the taxonomy of women of color and white men, and of men of color and white women. The error of expecting symmetric treatments of these categories abound in the critical literature. For examples, see the various anthologies of these essays in Gibson 1998, Allesandrini 1999, and the critical commentary in Sharpley-Whiting 1997. I provide a detailed discussion of this argument in Gordon (Forthcoming).
2. See, especially, Jack Woddis (1972).
3. '...make a new start, develop new thoughts, and set afoot a new man'. In Dante's *Inferno* (Canto XXXIII, lines 127–139), the redemptive reflection is posed thus:

There is a place below, the limit of
that cave, its farthest point from Beelzebub,
a place one cannot see: it is discovered
By ear—there is a sounding stream that flows

along the hollow of a rock eroded
 by winding waters, and the slope is easy.
 My guide and I came on that hidden road
 to make our way back into the bright world;
 and with no care for any rest, we climbed—
 He first, I following—until I saw,
 through a round opening, some of those things
 of beauty Heaven bears. It was from there
 That we emerged, to see—once more—the stars.

4. ‘...Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduced the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word’ (1903,1969:43-44).

Du Bois is being ironic here since, in effect, his entire career as a social scientist and theorist was devoted to answering this question. For discussion, see Gordon (2000:chapter 4) and Gordon (forthcoming, 2004).

5. This passage on Africans from Hegel’s introduction *Philosophy of History* has received much discussion, so I won’t rehearse it here. See, e.g., D.A. Masolo (1994).
6. For a more developed discussion of this problem, see Wynter’s 2001 essay on Fanon.
7. Although conflicts in Africa often have political and economic causes, the extent of the deaths caused by such are often unreported in the dominant media cannot be ignored. It is as if the ‘enemy’, invariably racialized, were not human. What is often overlooked, however, is how this view is part of a larger, global reality. An infamous example of this is the leaked December 12, 1991 memorandum of Lawrence H. Summers, then Chief Economist and Vice President of the World Bank, and now President of Harvard University: ‘Dirty’ Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn’t the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:
- 1) The measurements of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that underpopulated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. Only the lamentable facts that so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high, prevent world welfare enhancing trade in air pollution and waste.

3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity. The concern over an agent that causes a one in a million change in the odds of prostate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under 5 mortality is 200 per thousand. Also, much of the concern over industrial atmosphere discharge is about visibility impairing particulates. These discharges may have very little direct health impact. Clearly trade in goods that embody aesthetic pollution concerns could be welfare enhancing. While production is mobile the consumption of pretty air is a non-tradable.

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral reasons, social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every Bank proposal for liberalization.

8. See the Eastern Caribbean Community Documentation Center Reports by the Caribbean Development Bank in the 1990s, which are discussed in Paget Henry's paper, 'Globalization and the Deformation of the Antiguan Working Class', presented at the UWI Country Conference on Antigua, November 13–15, 2003.
9. For a recent retrospective on dependency theory, see the special symposium on development, edited by Paget Henry and José Itzigsohn in *Radical Philosophy Review*, 2002–2003, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2, pp. 26–95), which includes discussions by Giovanni Arrighi (75–85) and Samir Amin (86–95).
10. By Aristotelian fashion, I am referring to Aristotle's discussion of ethical life in his *Nichomachean Ethics*.
11. Because of limitations of space, I cannot elaborate the theory of disciplinary decadence that underlay my discussion here. Disciplinary decadence emerges from the ontologizing of a discipline or particular area within a discipline. Think of physicists, for instance, who criticize other areas of thought for not presenting their ideas in terms of physics, or philosophers who collapse philosophy into epistemology. It undermines the relation of thought to being. For some discussion, see Gordon 1995: chapter 5 and Gordon 2003, and Gyekye 1995: chapter 1.
12. The European version of the traditions to which I am referring find their foundations in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and their critique on existentialists from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche

- through to Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In the Africana tradition, these problems have been struggled with not only from the modern encounters with slavery, as we find in Cugoano, but also in Africana existential thought. For discussions, see Gordon (1997, 2000), Henry (2000), and Bogues (2003).
13. For discussion of varieties of phenomenological traditions, see Henry (2000). For explicit discussion of the limits of historicist (and naturalist) legitimization practices, see Edmund Husserl (1910–1911).
 14. A more detailed version of this discussion can be found in Gordon (1995: chapter 3, 2000: chapter 4).
 15. ‘Because it is a systematic negation of the other, an unreasonable decision to refuse to the other all the attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask the question constantly, ‘In reality, who am I?’

Bibliography

- Alessandrini, A.C., ed., 1999, *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, New York, Routledge.
- Amin, S., 2002, ‘Globalization and Capitalism's Second Belle Époque’, *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2, pp. 86-95.
- Aristotle, 2002, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and historical introduction by C. Rowe, philosophical introduction and commentary by S. Broadie, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Arrighi, G., 2002, ‘Global Inequalities and the Legacy of Dependency Theory’, *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2, pp. 75-85.
- Bogues, A.B., 2003, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals*, New York, Routledge.
- Cugoano, Q.O., 1999, ‘Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery’ and Other Writings, ed., V. Carretta, New York, Penguin Books.
- Dante Alighieri, 1982, ‘The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri’, volume 1, *Inferno*. A verse translation by A. Mandelbaum, with notes by A. Mandelbaum, G. Marruzo and L. Magnus, with drawings by B. Moser, Toronto: Bantam Books.
- Du Bois, W.E.B., 1969, *The Souls of Black Folk*, with introductions by N. Hare and A.F. Poussaint, revised and updated bibliography, New York, Signet Classic/New American Library.
- Eisenstadt, H., ed., 1968, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization*, New York, Basic Books.
- Fanon, F., 1991, *Les Damnés de la terre*, preface by J.P. Sartre, presentation by Gérard Chaliand, Paris, Gallimard [1961 edition, published by Maspero].
- Fanon, F., 1967, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C.L. Markmann, New York, Grove Press.
- Fanon, F., 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, New York, Grove Press.
- Fanon, F., 1952, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.

- Gates, Jr., H.L., 1991, 'Critical Fanonism', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 457-478.
- Gendzier, I.L., 1973, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study*, New York, Pantheon Books.
- Gendzier, I.L., 1995, *Development Against Democracy: Manipulating Political Change in the Third World*, Hampton, CT, The Tyrone Press.
- Gibson, N.C., ed., 1999, *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*, Amherst Humanity Books.
- Gordon, L., 2004, Forthcoming, 'Philosophical Anthropology, Race, and the Political Economy of Disenfranchisement', *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*.
- Gordon, L., 2003, 'The Human Condition in an Age of Disciplinary Decadence: Thoughts on Knowing and Learning', *Philosophical Studies in Education*, Vol. 34, Vol. 1, pp. 105-123.
- Gordon, L., 2002, 'A Questioning Body of Laughter and Tears: Reading Black Skin, White Masks through the Cat and Mouse of Reason and a Misguided Theodicy', *Parallax*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 10-29.
- Gordon, L., 2000, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*, New York, Routledge.
- Gordon, L., ed., 1997, *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, New York, Routledge.
- Gordon, L., Sharpley-Whiting, T.D. and White, R.T., eds., 1996, *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers.
- Gordon, L., 1995, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, New York, Routledge.
- Gyekye, K., 1995, *An Essay on African Philosophy: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Philadelphia: PA, Temple University Press.
- Hegel, G.W. F., 1956, *The Philosophy of History*, with prefaces by C. Hegel and translator, J. Sibree, and new introduction, by C. J. Friedrich, New York, Dover Publications.
- Husserl, E., 1910-1911, 'Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft', *Logos*, Vol. I, pp. 289-341.
- Itzigsohn, J., 2002-2003, 'Dependency and Beyond: Elements for an Analysis of Social Change in Latin America', *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2, pp. 54-74.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1998, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood, New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Kopytoff, I., ed., 1987, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Masolo, D.A., 1998, 'Sartre Fifty Years Later: A Review of Lewis Gordon's Fanon and the Crisis of European Man', *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, Vol. 97, No. 2, pp. 24-29.
- Masolo, D.A., 1994, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Mbiti, J., 1990, *African Religions and Philosophy*, second revised and enlarged edition, Oxford, Heinemann.

- Merleau-Ponty, M., 1968, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, edited by C. LeFort and trans. by A. Lingis, Evanston, Northwestern University Press.
- Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Paget, H., 2003, 'Globalization and the Deformation of the Antiguan Working Class', presented at the UWI Country Conference on Antigua, November 13-15.
- Paget, H and Itzigsohn, J., eds., 2002, 'Introduction: Special Symposium on Development', *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2, pp. 26-27.
- Paget, H., 2002, 'Cultural Dependence in the Age of Informatic Capitalism', *Radical Philosophy Review*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2, pp. 28-53.
- Paget, H., 2000, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, New York, Routledge.
- Paget, H., 1997, 'African and Afro-Caribbean Existential Philosophies', in Gordon, L, ed., *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, New York, Routledge.
- Rousseau, J.J., 1998, *Du Contrat social*, unedited facsimile, original edition, comments by Voltaire, Paris, Serpent Plumes.
- Schutz, A., 1970, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. G. Walsh and F. Lehnert, with introduction by G. Walsh, Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press.
- Schutz, A., 1962, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1, *The Problem of Social Reality*, ed., with an intro. by M. Natanson, preface by H. L. Van Breda, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff.
- Sen, A., 1999, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Anchor Books.
- Shaw, T., Sinclair, P., Andah, B. and Okpoko, A., eds, 1993, *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns*, New York, Routledge.
- Taiwo, O., 1996, 'On the Misadventures of National Consciousness: A Retrospect on Frantz Fanon's Gift of Prophecy', in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, Gordon et al., eds., Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 255-271.
- Weber, M., 2002 [1905], *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism and Other Writings*, edited, trans. with an introduction by P. Baehr and G.C. Wells, New York, Penguin Books
- Woddis, J., 1972, *New Theories of Revolution: A Commentary on the Views of Frantz Fanon, Régis Debray, and Herbert Marcuse*, New York, International Publishers.
- Wynter, S., 1996, 'Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological?: A Perspective from 'We the Underdeveloped'', in *Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa*, A.Y. Yansané, ed., Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, pp. 299-316.
- Wynter, S., 2001, 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be 'Black'', in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, M.F. Durán-Cogan and A. Gómez-Moriana, eds., New York, Routledge, pp. 30-66.



Philosophie et politique: Pour une discussion avec Lansana Keita

Paulin J. Hountondji*

Résumé

Dans le cadre d'un échange d'idées avec le co-éditeur, Paulin Hountondji aborde dix (10) questions théoriques sur le rôle historique de la pensée critique dans l'établissement des paramètres d'une transformation économique, politique et technologique de la société africaine. L'ensemble des questions soumis à Hountondji porte sur le rôle historique du philosophe dans le processus de transformation qualitative de la société, mais également sur la question des systèmes économiques que sont le socialisme et le capitalisme dans le contexte africain, sur le retard économique et technologique de l'Afrique contemporaine, sur la relation entre la science, la philosophie et le développement, sur les idées de théoriciens tels que Nkrumah, Fanon et Diop, et enfin, sur le rôle d'une histoire africaine des idées dans le contexte de la formulation d'un programme de développement. Ces questions posées à Hountondji portent généralement sur la façon de transformer la théorie philosophique critique en une dynamique pratique de l'économie, de la politique, des sciences et de la technologie. D'une manière générale, le débat de Hountondji souligne le besoin d'une pensée critique indépendante, l'importance d'une histoire africaine des idées, ainsi que la nécessité pour les intellectuels africains de développer des centres intellectuels africains autonomes. Hountondji prône également une «philosophie engagée», qui se développe dans la bonne direction, et qui soit en accord avec d'autres initiatives et programmes intellectuels critiques. Dans cette perspective, la critique de l'ethnophilosophie a déjà montré la voie à suivre pour l'élaboration d'un programme holistique dynamique en vue d'un développement africain à tous les niveaux.

Abstract

In an exchange of ideas with the guest editor, Paulin Hountondji discusses ten (10) theoretical questions on the historical role of critical thought in establishing the parameters for the economic, political, and technological transformation of African society. The set of questions put to Hountondji deal with the historical

* Département de Philosophie, Université de Cotonou, République du Bénin.

role played by philosophers in the qualitative transformation of society, the issue of the economic systems of socialism and capitalism as they apply to Africa, the economic and technological underdevelopment of contemporary Africa, the relation between science, philosophy and development, the ideas of theorists such as Nkrumah, Fanon and Diop, and the role of an African history of ideas in the formulating of a programme of development. In this exchange Hountondji engages issues about how to transform critical philosophical theory into a dynamic praxis of economics, politics, science and technology. Hountondji's discussion, *grasso modo*, emphasizes the necessity for independent critical thought, a recognition of the importance of an African history of ideas, and the necessity for African intellectuals to develop autonomous intellectual centres. Hountondji also argues for a 'philosophie engagée' that develops in the right direction but necessarily in consort with the ideas of other critical intellectual efforts and programmes. In this regard, the critique of ethnophilosophy has cleared the way for a holistically dynamic programme for African development in all its dimensions.

Dix questions

Lansana Keita me pose dix questions qui sont en elles-mêmes révélatrices de ses propres attentes, de ses propres exigences en tant que philosophe. La première concerne la responsabilité des philosophes et autres intellectuels africains par rapport à l'évolution de leur société. La deuxième concerne le destin du socialisme comme doctrine et sa pertinence pour l'Afrique, eu égard à l'effondrement du communisme dans l'ex-Union soviétique et aux bouleversements économiques en cours dans la Chine d'aujourd'hui. La troisième invite à diagnostiquer les obstacles au développement de l'Afrique contemporaine, et à y proposer des remèdes. La quatrième interroge les rapports entre science et philosophie, et la possibilité pour la philosophie de promouvoir le développement de la science et de la technologie en Afrique au lieu d'y être, comme partout ailleurs, subordonnée au développement de la science. La cinquième est une question très spécifique concernant Nkrumah et la mission qu'il assignait à la philosophie sur le terrain politique. La sixième, évoquant Frantz Fanon et Cheikh Anta Diop, s'interroge sur la pertinence de leur pensée politique par rapport aux tâches actuelles de développement en Afrique. La septième part de mes observations sur le déséquilibre Nord/Sud dans le domaine de la production et de la gestion des connaissances scientifiques, et demande quelle est la solution. La huitième question demande quel système économique, politique et culturel peut redonner à l'Afrique sa souveraineté et son autonomie de décision. La neuvième concerne la valeur réelle du NEPAD par rapport aux exigences d'une Afrique unie et souveraine. La dixième, enfin, concerne l'apport possible des penseurs et philosophes africains

d'autrefois, depuis l'Égypte ancienne jusqu'à ce jour, pour penser ce que Lansana Keita appelle le *télos* du développement.

Est-il besoin de le dire? De telles questions ne peuvent venir que d'un philosophe, et par surcroît, d'un philosophe *engagé*, d'un philosophe préoccupé du destin de sa société, et singulièrement, du drame immense que traverse l'Afrique actuelle; d'un philosophe qui croit que la philosophie doit se pencher sur ces questions et contribuer à les résoudre; d'un philosophe qui, en outre, croit au pouvoir de la philosophie et à sa capacité à répondre aux préoccupations de la société. Je ne sais plus quel personnage de Malraux interpellait Miguel de Unamuno dans *L'espoir*, en ces termes: «Qu'est-ce que tu veux que me fasse ta pensée, si tu ne peux pas penser mon drame?» Lansana Keita reprendrait probablement à son compte cette interpellation, se l'adressant à lui-même comme à tous les philosophes africains.

Je crois devoir dire, d'abord, que cette exigence est légitime. L'Afrique nous interpelle, et l'on ne peut prétendre être un intellectuel responsable si l'on reste sourd à cet appel, à ce cri de douleur qui monte de tout un continent. Il faut faire quelque chose. Il faut mobiliser toutes les forces disponibles, y compris les forces intellectuelles et scientifiques, pour mettre fin à la tragédie. L'art pour l'art peut difficilement trouver place dans un tel contexte. La science pour la science, la philosophie conçue et pratiquée comme une fin en soi, peuvent difficilement montrer leur pertinence et leur légitimité—j'allais dire: leur utilité.

Seulement voilà: les choses ne sont pas si simples. Je suis presque tenté de reprendre mot pour mot une intervention que j'ai dû improviser à Cotonou à la fin des années soixante-dix et qui a paru en 1981 dans *Présence africaine* sous le titre: «Que peut la philosophie?»¹ Ma réponse a dû paraître à plus d'un excessivement négative, donc décevante, mais cette déception est un moindre mal, voire une étape nécessaire pour ne pas se bercer d'illusions, pour ne pas attendre de la philosophie plus qu'elle ne peut donner et pouvoir, de ce fait, mieux en cerner les objectifs: il faut, littéralement, mettre la philosophie à sa place.

J'en appelais donc, d'abord, à la lucidité, et ce sera encore aujourd'hui mon premier réflexe. Pourquoi? D'abord parce que le philosophe, en tant que philosophe, n'est pas forcément *engagé*, et quand il l'est, ne l'est pas forcément *dans le bon sens*. Pour tout dire, il y a des philosophes de gauche et des philosophes de droite ou, si l'on préfère éviter ces métaphores de la latéralité qui ont elles-mêmes une histoire très particulière, il y a toujours eu, dans l'Afrique coloniale et post-coloniale, des philosophes conformistes, prêts à défendre becs et ongles le *statu quo* social et politique, et des philosophes plus audacieux, des penseurs anti-conformistes qui savent

imaginer le possible au-delà du réel, parce qu'ils relativisent le rapport des forces existant, parce qu'ils ont assimilé la dialectique du maître et de l'esclave et compris qu'aucune domination et, inversement, aucune servitude, n'est éternelle. Or nul ne peut prétendre, en toute rigueur, que les philosophes de cette dernière trempe soient plus philosophes que les autres.

Deuxième raison: le philosophe, même engagé, et engagé dans le bon sens, ne détient pas le monopole de l'audace et de la clairvoyance politique. Il partage ces vertus avec des dizaines, des centaines, des milliers d'autres intellectuels, et des dizaines de milliers de citoyens conscients qui ne se perçoivent pas forcément comme des intellectuels, mais qui refusent l'humiliation et la souffrance. Le philosophe engagé a les mêmes exigences, ni moins, ni plus.

Toutefois, quand on a dit cela, quand on a reconnu que le philosophe est homme parmi les hommes, intellectuel parmi d'autres et, dans le meilleur des cas, intellectuel militant parmi d'autres intellectuels militants, on ne peut s'empêcher de constater le rôle effectivement joué dans l'histoire par des doctrines sociales dues à des intellectuels qui se trouvaient être, par ailleurs, des «philosophes». D'où, forcément, une double interrogation: d'abord, sur les modalités spécifiques sous lesquelles le philosophe exerce, le cas échéant, ces fonctions d'intellectuel militant; ensuite, sur la relation (accidentelle ou essentielle? de coïncidence ou d'appartenance réciproque?) entre les volets complémentaires d'une doctrine philosophique donnée.

Je réponds donc très vite aux dix questions de Lansana Keita.

Les philosophes et la cité

Parmi les auteurs cités, les-uns, il faut le remarquer, se sont efforcés de théoriser le capitalisme (Adam Smith, Hume, Stuart Mill) tandis que les-autres (Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Marx) ont cru devoir le mettre en cause en y opposant une alternative. S'ils ont donc en commun de s'être préoccupés, les-uns et les-autres, des problèmes de la société, ils ne l'ont pas fait de la même manière, ni selon les mêmes orientations. On observera en outre que cette préoccupation sociale du philosophe ne date pas du XVIIIème et du XIXème siècle, mais qu'elle est beaucoup plus ancienne. On la trouve chez Platon, on la trouve chez Aristote. L'auteur du *Gorgias*, du *Théétète*, du *Cratyle* a aussi écrit *La République*. L'auteur de la *Métaphysique* et de l'*Organon* a aussi écrit *Le politique*.

Je crois même qu'on peut inverser la question et, plutôt que de monter en épingle les philosophes qui ont explicitement formulé des doctrines politiques ou construit des systèmes d'organisation de la société, se

demander au contraire s'il existe vraiment dans l'histoire de la philosophie des auteurs qui seraient restés, d'un bout à l'autre de leur œuvre, totalement indifférents aux problèmes de leur société. Je crois qu'on n'en trouvera pas un seul. Toute philosophie est porteuse, directement ou indirectement, d'un projet de société. La différence, justement, est dans ce «directement ou indirectement», c'est-à-dire dans le caractère plus ou moins explicite du projet. Les auteurs cités par Lansana Keita ont le mérite de la clarté, tout comme leurs prédécesseurs, Platon et Aristote, que nous avons cités, et bien d'autres encore, qu'on aurait pu citer. Leur doctrine sociale est explicite. En jouant ainsi cartes sur table, ils facilitent la tâche au lecteur qui pourra, sans trop d'efforts, adhérer ou ne pas adhérer, consentir ou ne pas consentir à la vision proposée.

J'ajouterai un détail : n'importe qui peut proposer une vision, mais n'importe qui n'est pas philosophe. L'originalité du philosophe est non seulement de proposer une vision, mais de prétendre la fonder, à charge pour le lecteur d'apprécier le degré de solidité ou, inversement, de fragilité de cette fondation.

Venons-en cependant à l'Afrique, puisqu'aussi bien Lansana Keita ne citait les philosophes européens qu'à titre d'exemple. Oui, bien sûr, nous avons eu et nous avons encore en Afrique des penseurs qui ont explicitement proposé des visions de la société, et pour être plus précis, des alternatives à la dépendance et au sous-développement. Oui, nous avons Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, mentionnés justement plus loin dans le questionnaire. Nous en avons bien d'autres encore: Senghor, qu'on aime ou qu'on n'aime pas, mais qui, tout compte fait, a été d'un apport considérable, Julius Nyerere, qui nous a proposé l'Ujamaa et a tenté, sans grand succès, de la mettre en œuvre en Tanzanie, Césaire, le penseur volcanique des îles qui ne se dit pas philosophe, mais qui est bien plus et bien mieux qu'un philosophe. Dans un autre registre, nous avons eu droit à Sékou Touré, dont les bavardages sur la «communaucratie» ne nous ont menés nulle part, ni en théorie, ni en pratique.

Vous avez dit «philosophes»? Quelqu'un comme Samir Amin ne se dit pas philosophe, mais il me paraît difficile à contourner aujourd'hui, en tant que penseur critique, en tant qu'économiste ouvert et imaginatif, pour toute personne qui voudrait connaître l'origine, la nature, les mécanismes du sous-développement en Afrique et percevoir les alternatives possibles.

Je dirai donc à Lansana Keita et à tous ceux qui s'interrogent comme lui: ce qui importe, ce n'est pas la philosophie comme telle, mais la pensée critique. C'est une telle pensée qu'il nous faut développer aujourd'hui dans nos universités et centres de recherche, pour imaginer le possible

au-delà du réel, faire en sorte que les platitudes du présent ne deviennent pas mesure de toute chose mais soient elles-mêmes mesurées, relativisées, remises à leur juste place, ordonnées et subordonnées à d'autres exigences, confrontées à des normes qui nous poussent en avant et nous arrachent au conformisme et à la résignation.

Destin du socialisme

Quel est donc, aujourd'hui, le destin du socialisme? Plus exactement (et c'est la deuxième question), le socialisme comme doctrine a-t-il encore un avenir? A-t-il quelque pertinence par rapport aux problèmes de l'Afrique? A-t-il quelque crédibilité eu égard à l'effondrement des régimes qui, à tort ou à raison, prétendaient l'incarner en Union soviétique, en Europe de l'Est et, même si on ne le dit pas ouvertement, dans les derniers pays qui s'en réclament encore aujourd'hui, de manière plus théorique que réelle (la Chine, Cuba)?

Contre la compréhension du marxisme alors dominante dans une certaine gauche africaine, j'en appelais, voici quelques années, à une lecture responsable de Marx, de Lénine et de toute la tradition marxiste. Je mettais en garde contre une approche catéchistique et dogmatique du marxisme, contre la tentation d'avaloir, pour ainsi dire, le marxisme en comprimés. J'en appelais à une appropriation critique de cet héritage théorique et politique. Je parlais depuis le Bénin, pays qui s'était, du jour au lendemain, converti au marxisme comme on se convertit à une religion, mais où le verbiage révolutionnaire, inspiré des manuels de vulgarisation soviétiques qui déferlaient alors sur le pays, couvrait mal une dictature policière des plus abjectes, qui faisait bon marché des libertés démocratiques et avait pour effet d'étouffer dans l'œuf toute initiative, toute pensée responsable. Les intellectuels et autres cadres devaient, à mon sens, être plus ambitieux pour eux-mêmes et pour le pays. Au lieu de consommer passivement et, ce qui est plus grave, de faire consommer par les masses, les clichés néo-staliniens, par exemple sur les «lois de la dialectique» (*sic*) dont on avait expurgé, curieusement, la «loi de la négation de la négation» chère à Lénine, ils auraient dû, d'abord, retourner aux sources et voir plus clair, eux-mêmes, dans l'histoire mouvementée de la doctrine, en discuter librement à leur propre niveau, développer une tradition théorique marxiste, plurielle et contradictoire comme toute tradition théorique digne de ce nom.

Or, que s'est-il passé depuis? Suite à l'effondrement mondial du communisme, justement, on est passé sans transition du tout-idéologique au tout-économique, c'est-à-dire, d'un verbiage marxiste-léniniste qui ne

reposait sur aucune recherche collective et aucune tradition théorique locale, à la prose sans fards des experts de la Banque mondiale et du Fonds monétaire international, reprise en chœur par nos gouvernants et nos experts locaux. On a procédé, du jour au lendemain, à cette espèce de «rectification sans autocritique» qu'Althusser déplorait dans la pratique du Parti communiste français, et où il faut voir, à coup sûr, une des pires formes d'opportunisme et d'irresponsabilité.

La question posée était cependant très précise : oui ou non, le socialisme est-il aujourd'hui dépassé? Une première réponse pourrait être: oui, le socialisme est dépassé dans deux sens au moins : premièrement, *il n'est plus à la mode*—mais ce n'est pas un argument sérieux contre le socialisme en tant que doctrine; deuxièmement, l'histoire a démontré, en effet, la capacité inouïe du système capitaliste à s'adapter, à résoudre tant bien que mal ses contradictions internes, à se rééquilibrer et à se surpasser, au moment même où on le croyait condamné. Marx avait sous-estimé cette capacité d'invention et d'adaptation, et ses prévisions sur l'autodestruction du capitalisme, condamné à succomber à ses propres contradictions, se sont trouvées démenties dans les faits, du moins pour l'instant.

Mais la question est celle-ci : quelle était la *place* de ces prévisions dans l'ensemble de la doctrine? Doit-on rejeter celle-ci pour cette unique raison? Doit-on au contraire considérer cette erreur, si tant est que c'en soit une, comme une erreur de détail? Doit-on jeter par-dessus bord l'analyse réelle du capital, cet éclairage sans précédent du fonctionnement du système capitaliste, sous prétexte que cette analyse aurait débouché, chez Marx, sur des prédictions purement fantaisistes? Ou faut-il au contraire remettre ces prédictions à leur place, et les relativiser par rapport à l'analyse elle-même? Et quelle autre doctrine, quelle autre grille de lecture pourrait nous permettre aujourd'hui de comprendre «l'impérialisme, stade suprême du capitalisme» comme l'appelait Lénine, ou «le néo-colonialisme, stade suprême de l'impérialisme» comme le qualifiait Nkrumah, si nous rejetions en bloc ce précieux héritage? Quels moyens aurions-nous de comprendre ce qu'André Gunder Frank appelle «le développement du sous-développement», ou Samir Amin «une croissance sans développement», quels moyens aurions-nous de mettre en perspective historique notre misère actuelle pour pouvoir la relativiser et la dépasser, si nous rejetions en bloc, pour être à la mode ou pour nous mettre au goût du jour, le précieux héritage marxiste?

Je suis donc enclin à répondre très clairement: non seulement le socialisme comme credo, le socialisme comme catéchisme, le socialisme comme ronronnement idéologique est aujourd'hui dépassé, mais il n'a

jamais été fécond, il n'a jamais été productif ni hier ni aujourd'hui. L'effondrement mondial du communisme nous dessille les yeux : il révèle au grand jour l'échec d'un certain usage du socialisme, il invite à une plus grande responsabilité et à davantage de discernement dans la manière de s'approprier le socialisme, et plus généralement, n'importe quelle doctrine politique et sociale. Mais il ne discrédite pas le socialisme comme méthode d'analyse, pas plus qu'il ne le discrédite comme politique ou comme projet de société, exigence de justice et d'égalité dans la gestion des communautés humaines.

Obstacles au développement

Troisième question: quels sont les principaux obstacles au développement? Sont-ils purement économiques, politiques, culturels, psychologiques, ou tout cela à la fois? Les obstacles, *a priori*, sont de plusieurs ordres. Mais les constats ci-dessus appellent l'attention sur un obstacle trop souvent méconnu : l'absence de pensée, la passivité intellectuelle dont l'effet est de suivre, de manière opportuniste, les modes idéologiques changeantes. La solution? Je l'ai déjà écrit quelque part: «réapprendre à penser»² c'est-à-dire, aujourd'hui, aller au-delà des solutions toutes faites proposées par les experts internationaux, pour examiner soi-même les problèmes de la société. J'insiste donc sur le rôle des intellectuels et des cadres, ou plus exactement, sur leur responsabilité. J'insiste sur la nécessité d'une appropriation collective du savoir existant, d'un débat interne du plus haut niveau sur les options sociales, économiques, politiques et les raisons qui militent pour les-unes et les-autres.

Science et philosophie: la place du politique

Oui, vous avez raison: il faut se garder d'une vision trop étriquée de la philosophie. La lecture d'Althusser m'avait paru éclairante. Elle a pour effet de mettre la philosophie à sa place en la rappelant à plus de modestie. La philosophie a toujours prétendu, en effet, fonder les sciences, prescrire à l'avance leurs conditions de validité, tracer *a priori* le cadre dans lequel elles viendraient se loger, les sentiers dans lesquels elles viendraient s'établir. Althusser nous avertit qu'en réalité, c'est le contraire qui se passe: les grandes révolutions philosophiques font toujours suite aux grandes révolutions scientifiques. Ainsi on ne comprend rien, ou pas grand'chose, à Platon si on ne perçoit pas l'essor des mathématiques grecques à son époque. On ne comprend rien à Descartes si on ne reconnaît pas dans sa philosophie, comme disait Judith Miller, une «métaphysique de la physique galiléenne». On méconnaît les enjeux du kantisme si on ignore

l'admiration de Kant pour Newton et la fascination profonde exercée sur sa pensée par la nouvelle physique. On apprécie mal la signification réelle de Husserl si on ne perçoit pas la nouveauté de la logique mathématique par rapport au champ scientifique traditionnel.

Toutefois, la science n'est pas l'unique déterminant d'une pensée philosophique. Althusser lui-même devait le reconnaître dans ses *Éléments d'autocritique*: la philosophie n'est pas seulement théorie de la science, admettait-il, mais aussi, mais d'abord, lutte des classes dans la théorie. Même si on doit aujourd'hui manier avec plus de prudence les notions de classe et de lutte des classes, cette autocritique dit bien ce qu'elle veut dire: la théorie de la science n'est pas le tout de la philosophie. Au-delà de ses enjeux théoriques, la philosophie a aussi des enjeux pratiques. Ignorer ces enjeux pratiques, c'est tomber dans ce qu'Althusser appelle une «déviation théoriciste».

Malgré cette mise en garde, l'hypothèse de départ me paraît toujours féconde à plus d'un titre. La théorie de la science, sans être le tout de la philosophie, reste un volet essentiel et, d'une certaine façon, le noyau le plus dur, la préoccupation spécifique d'une pensée philosophique authentique, en ce qui la distingue des autres formes de discours. Car il faut bien trouver un fil conducteur pour circuler, sans se perdre, à travers cette débauche d'inventions verbales proposée aujourd'hui, en Afrique comme ailleurs, par toutes sortes de vendeurs de systèmes qui se présentent comme philosophes, et qui n'ont pas toujours, hélas! la patience du concept.

Nkrumah, Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop

Au fond, pour être honnête, je me méfie de la philosophie, ou de tout ce qui se présente comme tel. Je demande toujours à voir de plus près. Et puisque vous m'interrogez sur Nkrumah³, je ne vous le cache pas : le *Consciencisme* me paraît beaucoup moins solide, beaucoup moins convaincant que des ouvrages comme *Africa must unite*, *Neo-colonialism, the last stage of imperialism*, et même *Class struggle in Africa*, où se déploie une finesse d'analyse remarquable, appliquée à l'économie et à la politique. L'apport le plus considérable de Nkrumah est dans cette vision d'une Afrique unie et souveraine, dans le projet, plus que jamais actuel, de construction des États-Unis d'Afrique. *Le consciencisme* a voulu superposer à ce projet d'unification politique un autre projet, celui d'une unification des consciences. Ce dernier projet n'était ni nécessaire, ni cohérent.

Vous m'interrogez sur Frantz Fanon et Cheikh Anta Diop? Bien sûr, ils font aussi partie de notre héritage, et des armes intellectuelles dont nous disposons pour penser la construction d'une Afrique nouvelle, unifiée,

autosuffisante, souveraine, capable de constituer un pôle autonome de développement dans une mondialisation à plusieurs voix.

J'ajouterai cependant une remarque. Qu'il s'agisse de Fanon, de Nkrumah ou de Cheikh Anta Diop, ils ont vécu à une époque où le grand problème était celui de la souveraineté et de la reconquête de l'autonomie perdue, par rapport au colonialisme et au néo-colonialisme. Résultat : ils n'ont guère abordé le problème, devenu de plus en plus brûlant depuis lors, des droits de l'homme et des libertés démocratiques à l'intérieur des États. On sait aussi que, dans le cas précis de Nkrumah, le théoricien politique a été aussi un chef d'État, dont les pratiques dictatoriales ont été dénoncées par de nombreux opposants. Il ne faut donc pas se voiler la face : l'apport de ces auteurs reste considérable, mais marqué au coin d'une limite objective. Il faut aujourd'hui s'approprier cet apport de manière lucide, critique et responsable.

L'accumulation mondiale du savoir

Je ne m'étendrai pas sur la septième question. Il m'a paru fécond, en effet, pour comprendre le retard technologique et scientifique de l'Afrique, d'appliquer à l'activité scientifique et technologique la même grille de lecture que celle qui a permis aux économistes néo-marxistes (Samir Amin, par exemple) de mettre en perspective historique le «sous-développement» en général pour mieux en saisir la genèse, le développement et les remèdes possibles. Je me suis donc employé à décrire, d'abord, «le pacte colonial en matière de recherche», ce système qui consistait, à l'époque coloniale, à développer dans les territoires dominés une activité fébrile de collecte d'informations, destinées à être traitées dans les laboratoires et centres de recherche métropolitains; puis la continuation de ce système à l'époque post-coloniale, malgré les progrès, parfois remarquables, réalisés dans certains secteurs.⁴ J'ai attiré l'attention sur cette «logique de l'extraversion» qui régit, en conséquence, l'activité du chercheur africain et la met toujours, directement ou indirectement, au service de l'accumulation des connaissances au centre du système, en Europe ou aux États-Unis.

Quel remède? demandez-vous. Le même, en substance, que celui qui a été proposé pour les économies sous-développées : la «déconnexion». Cette métaphore est très équivoque, sans doute, mais elle indique bien dans quelle direction il faut chercher. La question sera seulement de savoir ce que peut signifier pour l'activité scientifique périphérique, ce nécessaire recentrage, cette conquête de l'autosuffisance, et comment elle peut, comme l'activité économique en général, «sortir du marché mondial».

Que vaut le NEPAD?

Je répondrai d'un trait aux questions 8 et 9: quel système économique, politique et culturel peut libérer cette Afrique balkanisée, endettée et devenue de ce fait la proie facile des institutions occidentales telles que la Banque mondiale et le Fonds monétaire international, et cette nuée d'ONG paternalistes qui déferlent sur le continent? Le NEPAD, dont on fait aujourd'hui grand bruit, serait-il le système recherché, ou n'est-il qu'un trompe-l'œil inventé par l'Occident face à la menace que représenterait pour lui une Afrique organisée? Quelle est la portée réelle du NEPAD?

J'ai presque envie de dire: je n'en sais rien! Et ce n'est pas par coquetterie: j'attends d'étudier la question. Mais je puis d'ores et déjà exprimer une inquiétude: qu'il n'arrive au NEPAD ce qui est arrivé au Plan d'action de Lagos, c'est-à-dire qu'il demeure lettre morte. J'ajoute que je n'aime pas beaucoup le mot «système». Le Plan d'action de Lagos portait bien son nom: c'était un plan d'action. Par ailleurs, je ne vois pas derrière le NEPAD une mobilisation réelle de l'intelligentsia et des forces vives de l'Afrique. Sans une telle mobilisation, rien de durable ne pourra se faire, quelle que soit la valeur intrinsèque du programme proposé.

S'appropriier l'héritage

La dixième question est en apparence banale, et trop évidente pour qu'on s'y attarde. Oui, en effet, il faut interroger les auteurs anciens sur nos problèmes actuels, leur poser les questions qui nous préoccupent aujourd'hui, tirer parti de leur apport et de leur enseignement. Le plus intéressant, cependant, c'est ce qui se cache derrière cette question : le projet d'une histoire de la pensée africaine. Personne n'y aurait songé voici quarante ans. Personne, parce que la préoccupation alors dominante était celle de l'identité, et conduisait à imaginer la pensée africaine, composante essentielle de cette identité, comme un système clos et sans histoire. La grande affaire, alors, pour les philosophes, était de décrire, de décrypter, de reconstruire ce système. Les philosophes africains se croyaient obligés, dans ce contexte, de pratiquer la philosophie comme un chapitre particulier de l'ethnologie ou, comme on l'appellerait aujourd'hui, de l'anthropologie culturelle.

Les choses ont bien changé depuis. La critique de l'ethnophilosophie a pu être jugée excessive, mais elle aura eu pour effet, au moins, de libérer le projet d'une histoire de la philosophie africaine, d'une histoire de la pensée africaine, et plus généralement, de ce que Abiola Irele appelle une histoire intellectuelle de l'Afrique.⁵

C'est là-dessus que je conclurai. Nous devons aujourd'hui nous approprier ce riche héritage, de manière critique et responsable. Nous devons aussi nous approprier librement, avec la même vigilance critique, ce qui a été produit sous d'autres cieux, et qui peut nous servir, parce qu'en cherchant bien, on découvrira toujours que nous avons contribué, à notre façon, à ces inventions. Non, l'histoire n'est pas finie. Elle ne fait que commencer, ou, plus exactement, recommencer.

Notes

- 1 Paulin J. Hountondji, «Que peut la philosophie?», *Présence africaine* (Paris), 119, 1981: 47-71. Traduit en hongrois par Sipos Janos dans *Magyar filozofiai szemle* (Revue hongroise de philosophie), 1981 et en anglais sous le titre «What philosophy can do» dans *Quest: Philosophical Discussions* (Lusaka), I, 2: 2-28
- 2 «Alors, que faire? Au-delà du repli nationaliste sur nous-mêmes, de l'inventaire laborieux et interminable de nos valeurs culturelles, du narcissisme collectif induit par la colonisation, réapprendre à penser» (P. Hountondji, *Sur la «philosophie africaine»: critique de l'ethnophilosophie*, Paris, Maspero, 1976, p. 47). Qu'on me pardonne de me citer moi-même, contrairement au bon usage. Je le fais surtout pour signaler une fois de plus un malentendu regrettable créé par la traduction, excessivement littérale, de cette phrase: «So what is to be done? Apart from a nationalistic withdrawal into ourselves, a painstaking, unending inventory of our cultural values, a collective narcissism induced by colonization, we must relearn how to think» (*African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, London, Hutchinson 1983:52-53). On aurait probablement fait l'économie de certaines critiques en traduisant plutôt: «we must start thinking again».
- 3 Je préfère écrire *Nkrumah*, sans apostrophe, comme l'intéressé lui-même écrivait son nom. Les francophones ont pris la mauvaise habitude d'écrire *N'krumah*.
- 4 Dans une solide thèse de sociologie de la science soutenue à Bielefeld, en Allemagne, Maxime Dahoun rend compte de ses recherches sur le terrain, qui confirment entièrement ces vues. Cf. Maxime Dahoun, *Le statut de la science et de la recherche au Bénin. Contribution à une sociologie de la science dans les pays en développement*, Berlin, Logos Verlag, 1998. J'ignore encore, à ce jour, si des recherches semblables existent pour d'autres pays de la sous-région. Il y a là, en tout cas, un champ d'investigation qui gagnerait à être exploré de façon systématique.
- 5 Cf. F. Abiola Irele, «Réflexions sur la négritude», *Éthiopiennes* n° 69, 2^{ème} semestre 2002, p. 83-106



Africa Development, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004, pp. 107–129

© Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004
(ISSN 0850-3907)

African Development and the Primacy of Mental Decolonization

Messay Kebede*

Abstract

The drastic and manifold difficulties Africa faces suggest that something more than mere delay, unfavorable conditions or misguided policies is obstructing the goal of development. The suggestion calls for a serious reflection on the experience of colonialism, but in a way different from those studies tracing African predicaments back to colonial or imperialist misdeeds. This does not mean colonialism is not the real culprit, just that such a stance is necessary in light of the fact that many studies have not focused on the real source of Africa's ills: the phenomenon of mental colonization. Those scholars who bring out the detrimental impact of mental alienation either fail to totally emancipate their views from Western constructs, or cannot produce an alternative to Eurocentrism. This paper discusses the contributions of African philosophical debates to the elucidation of the negative impacts of colonial discourse on Africa's development effort. It draws attention to the limitations of the contributions and proposes an alternative conception vindicating the view that the great task of freeing the African mind from Eurocentric constructions takes priority over the design of development policies.

Résumé

Les nombreuses et graves difficultés que traverse l'Afrique laissent penser qu'il existe d'autres éléments qu'un simple retard, des conditions défavorables ou encore des politiques inadaptées, faisant obstacle au développement. Cela appelle à une sérieuse réflexion sur l'expérience du colonialisme, qui soit différente des autres études, qui, elles, affirment que les problèmes de l'Afrique seraient causés par les abus coloniaux et impérialistes. Cela ne signifie pas que le colonialisme n'est pas le réel coupable, mais plutôt, que la plupart des études n'ont pas analysé les véritables sources des maux dont souffre l'Afrique, notamment le phénomène de la colonisation mentale. Les universitaires qui cherchent à démontrer l'effet négatif de l'aliénation mentale n'arrivent pas à se détacher des visions

* Department of Philosophy, University of Dayton, USA

occidentales, ou alors ne parviennent pas à définir une alternative à l'eurocentrisme. Ce papier analyse la contribution des débats philosophiques africains à une meilleure compréhension de l'impact négatif du discours colonial sur les efforts de développement de l'Afrique. Il présente les limites de cette forme de contribution et propose une conception alternative selon laquelle, la mission consistant à libérer le mental des Africains des conceptions eurocentristes aurait préséance sur la conception de politiques de développement.

Introduction

According to the basic belief of the modernization school, modernization occurs when traditional values, beliefs, and ways of doing things give way to innovative views and methods. 'A society is traditional', writes Everett E. Hagen, 'if ways of behaviour in it continue with little change from generation to generation', if it 'tends to be custom-bound, hierarchical, ascriptive, and unproductive' (Hagen 1962:56). To define modernization by the rise of innovative capacity has the interesting twist of putting the blame for Africa's failure to modernize less on the persistence of tradition than on the internalization of the colonialist discourse, which in itself has become a new tradition imposed on older traditions. For no resurgence of innovative capacity can take place so long as internalization of the colonialist argument paralyzes the African mind. Mental decolonization thus emerges as the top priority in Africa's development agenda. To admit the priority of mental decolonization is to acknowledge the precedence of the subjective factor over objective conditions, and so to recognize the importance of the philosophical debates generated by the attempts of African scholars to counter Europe's colonial discourse on Africa. This paper reviews some key moments of the debates for the purpose of showing both how African philosophical positions constitute various attempts to disentangle the African self from colonialist constructions, perceived as the major obstacle to Africa's modernization, and how specific limitations get in the way of these attempts.

From Traditionality to Decolonization

Before reviewing the position of the different schools, let us pose clearly the terms of the problem. Even though the political decolonization of Africa occurred some forty years ago, many African scholars trace the extreme difficulties of the continent in initiating a resolute process of modernization back to the ills of the colonial legacy. What is less frequent, however, is the equation of African societies with backward cultures as the chief infirmity of the African continent, obvious as it is that analyses

of political and economic obstacles take precedence over the disability induced by the colonial discourse.

The eminent French anthropologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, standardized the colonial discourse when he baptized rationality as a Western appanage, thereby granting what he termed 'mystic' or 'prelogical' (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: 63) thinking to non-Western peoples. The underestimation of the repercussions of the colonial discourse by African scholars is all the more surprising as the accusation of having no contribution whatsoever to civilization singles out blackness. Who today would argue that G. W. F. Hegel's statement that of all cultures, Africa 'is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit' (Hegel 1956:99), no longer preserves its original upsetting impact?

Doubtless, Africans strongly reject the characterization of their legacy as primitive. All the same, both the process of Western education and the normative equation of modernization with Westernization condition them to endorse the charge of backwardness. Worse still, their denial only succeeds in pushing the charge to the dark corners of the unconscious. Take the teaching of world history. Not only are all the great breakthroughs and achievements of modern history mostly assigned to European actors, but the whole historical scheme is constructed so as to exclude Africa while presenting the West as the centre and the driving force of history. The example shows that modern schooling is for Africans nothing else than the learning of self-contempt through the systematic exposure to Africa's utter insignificance. Africans cannot but internalize this view, given that their ability to echo the Western idea of Africa is how they acquire modern education.

Africans are all the more compelled to endorse the colonial discourse as the way they defend themselves hardly avoids appealing to Western concepts. Such is notably the case each time Africans use the notion of race to articulate their solidarity and common interests in opposition to the West. The West used race attributes to codify differences through the selection of criteria favoring its normativeness, the most conspicuous of which is the exclusive claim to rationality. As a result, whatever differs from the West becomes irrational and primitive. When Africans define themselves by racial attributes, they are sanctioning this Western codification, and hence their alienation from rationality. Self-assertion, thus obtained through the denial of human capability, puts Africans at odds with the basic requirement of modernity, to wit, the ability to develop science and technology.

No exceptional insight is required to understand that Africans cannot modernize if they internally acquiesce to the allegation of backwardness. Amartya Sen's idea that economic development should be posed in terms of 'human agency' rather than just economic indicators leads to the interesting approach depicting 'development as freedom' (Sen 1999:188). When human agencies are involved and given priority, development becomes an issue of human capabilities in terms of freedoms and opportunities. The focus shifts the question of development from pure development economics to issues of entitlement and empowerment. This centrality of freedom to development issues does no more than invite the proposal that what people can do and be is largely dependent on the representations that they have of themselves. If they define themselves in enhancing terms, the likelihood is that they will set themselves great goals and will believe that they have what is required to make them happen. By contrast, if they have a low opinion of themselves, they will be less ambitious and less inclined to think that they have the calibre to achieve great goals. But more yet, self-debasing representations can lead to behaviours that militate against the idea of agencies and the creating of opportunities.

African philosophical views have emerged from the clear perception of the deep damages caused by the internalization of the colonial discourse. Convinced that no development policy will bear fruit so long as the African self is weighed down by the spectre of backwardness, African philosophers have devised theories to counter the colonialist discourse in order to achieve the decolonization of the African mind. Consider the basic question that feeds on debates, often acrimonious, between the various African philosophical schools, namely, the issue of the existence of a precolonial African philosophy. The importance of the issue is directly linked with the colonialist discourse, since the denial of philosophy, that is, of rational thinking, is how colonialism corroborated the undeveloped nature of African modes of thought. Each school tries to tackle the issue by inserting the refutation of the colonialist allegation into a vision liable to reconcile Africans with their legacy, given that the reconciliation must be such that it takes into account African realities, especially the undeniable technological lag of Africa. This recognition of a major shortcoming complicates the task of rehabilitation: Is there a way of finding a definition of Africans that removes the charge of backwardness even as it grants the African delay in the control of nature?

The definition of African philosophy according to the need of overcoming the aftermaths of colonization provides the means of evaluating the various intellectual paradigms from the vantage point of modernization. The way the question of the existence and nature of a precolonial African philosophy is resolved also provides an answer to the question of the African potential for development. To the extent that development involves scientific and technological aptitudes, it is bound to be elusive without the propensity to think rationally. Similarly, the debate over the philosophical status of the precolonial past challenges the usual definition of modernization as a process of dissolving traditionalism. Granted that modernization implies increasing rationalization of life, the fact remains that the entitlement of the African past to a philosophical status raises the question of knowing whether development should not be defined in terms of continuity rather than discontinuity. If the past is valid, the question of its preservation arises, not to mention the fact that Africans cannot want the repudiation of the past without endorsing the colonial discourse. Decolonization, it follows, is unachievable if the discontinuity imposed by the colonial conquest and its disparaging discourse on Africa's historical legacy are not radically challenged.

The best way to give an account of the complexities involved in Africa's rehabilitation as a prelude to development is to review the major schools of thought on the topic of African philosophy. Three main schools can be identified: (1) Ethnophilosophers, who consider the defence of African otherness as the only non-derogatory way of justifying the technological retardation of Africa. Otherness disputes both the normativeness of the West and the Western definition of philosophical thinking. The thinkers of negritude best represent this trend through the racialization of identities. (2) The universalists or "professional philosophers" who reject the defence of otherness as an endorsement of the colonial denial of rationality and perceive the African retardation as nothing more than an evolutionary lag. (3) The particularists who attempt to strike the middle course by presenting more acceptable notions of African philosophy and difference. Ranging from the hermeneutical orientation to the deconstructionist school, these attempts present the common characteristics of rejecting the negritude concept of blackness, without however succumbing to the universalist stand of the professional philosophers. To take the full measure of the complexity of the effort of rehabilitation, let us begin with the most extreme and controversial of African philosophical schools, to wit, negritude.

Otherness as the Road to Modernity

Without doubt, the main thrust of negritude is to explain the technological lag of 'black Africa' in terms that do not negatively affect Africa's historical sense of itself and confidence in its indigenous cultures. Though the negritude thinkers take the lag as an undeniable fact, they strongly dismiss all evolutionary explanation. Since social evolution has been defined according to criteria establishing the normativeness of the West, such as science and technological advancements, it cannot avoid presenting Africans as culturally and technologically underdeveloped peoples. Imperative, therefore, is the need to go around evolutionary concepts if decolonization is to be achieved. Hence the conviction that the defence of otherness is the only vehicle for the refutation of the colonial discourse and the rehabilitation of Africa. Universalism sets the theoretical framework for interpreting differences as advancement or retardation by assigning similar goals to all cultures. Otherness dismantles this unilinear construction of history by defying the idea of placing all the peoples and cultures of the world in the same universal and progressive path.

Consider Hegel's notion of universal history. After placing all the cultures of the world in the same unilinear time, he devises the idea of gradual progression through the selection of characteristics peculiar to European history and culture. He then easily arrives at the belief that the selected items, especially individual freedom and rational knowledge, exist in much less developed forms in non-European cultures. This selective parallel allows him to construe differences as earlier stages and to define the evolution of universal history as a process that 'assumes successive forms which it successively transcends; and by this very process of transcending its earlier stages, gains an affirmative, and, in fact, a richer and more concrete shape' (Hegel 1956:63). The succession promotes Europe to the rank of most advanced and driving force of universal history, and so classifies those cultures that exhibit the greatest disparity with Europe as most backward or primitive. On the strength of this normative role of Europe, Hegel defines Africa (excepting pharaonic Egypt) as 'the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night' (Hegel 1956:91).

Faced with this formidable construction, Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of the founders of Negritude, could find no other recourse than to appeal to otherness, which he provocatively defines by the predominance of emotion over rationality. Unlike the European who uses objective intelligence to fix and analyse the object, the African 'does not keep the object at a distance, does not analyze it'; he rather 'touches it, feels it', he

writes (Senghor 1995:118). His assumption is clear enough: the ascription of a different mental orientation to the black essence is alone liable to give a non-derogatory explanation of the African technological lag. Africans did not advance technologically, not because they were primitive, undeveloped, but because their distinct mental orientation gave them different pursuits and methods. On the other hand, the European predilection for technology does not denote a normative quality, but a specific turn of mind with positive and negative outcomes. Just as the African turn of mind does not encourage technology, so too the European mental direction is not propitious for penetrating the essence of reality, still less for providing an integrated vision.

For Senghor, Europe's technological advances derive from a mental orientation dominated by a conquering impulse. For the European, to know is to dismantle, decompose the object into constituent parts for the purpose of manipulation. An approach so driven by the need to subdue is perforce little in touch with the deeper reality of things. The downside of conquest is metaphysical superficiality. By contrast, the African gift of emotivity wants to sense things, to communicate with their inner essence. The basic condition for sensing things is to give up subduing them: only a sympathetic intention can have access to their intimacy. Compared to the European way of knowing things, Senghor finds that 'what emotes an African is not so much the external aspect of an object as its profound reality' (Senghor 1995:127).

Far from being an outcome of backwardness, non-technicalness is thus the expression of a different way of being in the world and of dealing with phenomena. As Jean-Paul Sartre comments, the 'proud claim of non-technicalness reverses the situation; that which might appear to be deficiency becomes a positive source of riches. A technical rapport with Nature reveals it as a quantity pure, inert, foreign; it dies' (Sartre 1963:43). The stage approach by which peoples are defined as advanced or retarded flies in the face of civilizations perceived as different in the radical sense of having dissimilar means and goals. Nothing is more arbitrary than to ignore this dissimilarity by placing divergent civilizations in the same universal and progressive time.

To the question whether there is such a thing as an African philosophy, the answer is, therefore, a definite 'yes'. What makes the answer confident is that it points to a philosophy whose originality is imparted by a unique racial gift. In place of the dismantling technique of Western episteme, the deeper penetrating insight of negritude promises a vision of the world emphasizing cohesion and integration. Whereas the West perceives the

world as a collection of fixed and juxtaposed objects, African emotivity sees the world as a living reality. It thinks of being as vital force and individuals as communal beings. Being neither premodern nor antirational, negritude presents the inspiration of a different epistemology as an alternative conception of things and of being in the world that pursues integration and harmony in lieu of conquest and domination.

Predictably, a strategy of decolonization based on the assertion of a different epistemological orientation was bound to provoke a flood of hostile reactions. In particular, rationality being the major criterion that Europe used to classify peoples as advanced or backward, the renunciation of reason in favour of emotion could not but convince critics of 'the correspondence of certain aspects of Senghor's ideas of the basic African personality with Western racist theories and with the 'primitive mentality' of Lévy-Bruhl' (Irele 1990:83).

What is more, the claim to non-rationality puts Africans at variance with scientific thinking, and so deprives them of the means to catch up with the West. Since without the mastery of science and technology Africans cannot get out of their marginal existence, the surrender of the rational faculty can only perpetuate their marginality. Given this crucial role of reason, Senghor's definition of the particularity of black peoples according to cognitive styles founded on emotivity amounts to accepting the reality of different and unequal aptitudes. The inevitable outcome of this inequality is 'to leave intact . . . the racial hierarchy established by the colonial ideology' (Irele 1990:83). The notion of otherness does not ensure emancipation and autonomy; it simply approves the idea of Africans playing a minor role in a world shaped and dominated by Western rationality.

According to critics, the defence of a particularism drawn from the past confirms the acquiescence of the negritude movement to a subordinate position. The return to and the apology of the past can only entail the indefinite postponement of the modernization of Africa. To quote Abiola Irele, 'we cannot meet the challenges of the scientific and industrial civilization of today by draping ourselves with our particularisms' (Irele 1992:213). The philosophy of negritude is problematic because the cult of peculiarities does not rehabilitate Africans. On the contrary, it steers them away from the need and the means to construct those machines that the West used to marginalise Africa. Unable to rescue Africa, the appeal to the black essence by the negritude philosopher thus leads to nothing else than the acceptance of marginality.

However strong and pertinent these objections appear to be, the impression remains that they underestimate the deconstructive message of negritude. The virtue of the explanation by otherness of the negritude thinker is that it champions self-acceptance by relativizing the West. When the West is dethroned from the position of archetype, the African ceases to be a failure. Relativization dismisses hierarchical conceptions: in being different, particular, each civilization is good for some pursuits, less so for others. No other way exists to decolonize the African mind than the relativization of the West. The great goal of modernization can never become real if Africans are prone to self-debasement, which ceases only when they are reconciled with their legacy.

Modernization cannot result from the total assimilation of Africans, the condition of which is the complete extirpation of their historical past. The requirement to wipe out the past is contradictory: although it claims to reject the colonial discourse, it defines modernization in terms of exporting Western institutions and ideas. To import everything from the West is obviously to endorse the notion of African technological and cultural backwardness. African scholars cannot portray colonialism as unjust and colonial discourse as false and demeaning if at the same time they define modernity as a full-fledged Westernization. Moreover, what Westernization actively advocates is the servile imitation of the West. By passively importing Western ideas and institutions, 'all that can happen is that we [Africans] become pale copies of Frenchmen, consumers not producers of culture' (Senghor 1976:490). No mistake about it: if modernity is defined by the rise of innovative spirit, the passive imitation of the West does not promote modernization; it simply postpones it.

For Senghor, then, the reason why Africans must retain their tradition is that its revival and adaptation makes them creative and original. So understood, modernization becomes the adaptation of a living culture to the new condition caused by the expansion and technological advances of the West. 'When we have made this analysis' Senghor writes, 'the problem is to determine the present value of the institutions and style of life born of these [African] realities and how to adapt them to the requirements of the contemporary world' (Senghor 1959:292). Instead of Westernization or assimilation, modernization becomes a process of synthesis in which the peculiar legacy of Africa merges with borrowings from the West. The need to adapt a traditional culture to modern conditions makes modernization conditional on the liberation of African creativity, in line with the spirit of modernity. Taking root in Africa's legacy while reaching out to the West remains the only promising road to modernization.

All the more reason for positing modernization in synthetic terms is that important values of the past concur with modern life. Contrary to the colonial stigmatization, African tradition exhibits characteristics congruent with modern life. In the words of Senghor, 'negritude, by its ontology (that is, its philosophy of being), its moral law and its aesthetic, is a response to the modern humanism that European philosophers and scientists have been preparing since the end of the nineteenth century' (Senghor 1970:184). The African ontology of vital force emphasizes force and energy, and so is more in tune with the assumptions of modern science than Aristotle's static conception of being or Descartes' mechanical view of matter. As suggested by negritude, such notions as relativity, wave mechanics, electron and neutron confirm the existence of a dynamic microscopic world behind the static appearance of things.

Equally remarkable is the fact that the abstract style of the vanguard schools of contemporary Western art attests to the neo-modernity of pre-colonial African art. It is under the direct influence of African art that contemporary Western artists, giving up their conception of art as imitation of the given object, attempted to capture, behind the given material reality, of things their intrinsic form and structure. The African influence was revolutionary, since 'a world of life forces that have to be tamed is substituted for a closed world of permanent and continuous substances that have to be reproduced' (Senghor 1970:188). The substitution clears the way for a conception that connects life with deeper realities beyond the visible and the tangible.

Another, but no less important proof of the modernity of the African past is provided by the persistent aspiration to socialist ideals emanating from the womb of capitalist societies. The contradictions of capitalism, the rise of powerful socialist movements in the West, and the impact of the doctrine of Marxism are consonant with the traditional communal life of Africa as reflecting an optimal world, notwithstanding the present popularity of neoliberal capitalism. In addition to condemning the individualistic and class-divided society of the West, the socialist aspiration proposes the communal values of African tradition as a remedy for the evils of capitalism.

This position of forerunner shifts the return to the African legacy from the unearthing of outdated and useless values to a modernizing venture. In particular, it rises against the depiction of modernization in terms of modernity versus tradition. The disclosure of the modernity of African conceptions and the Western appeal to African values to get out of the crises of capitalism refute the colonial discourse. The rejection of values

even as they prove to be so supportive of modernity would be inconsistent and self-damaging on the part of Africans. Some such reversal credits negritude with an original theory of African modernization. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity is replaced by the conviction that the major impediment is the colonization of the mind, as evinced by the propensity of African ruling elites to 'importing just as they stand the political and social institutions of Europe, and even their cultural institutions' (Senghor 1959:290)

No Modernity without Universalism

For the opponents of negritude, however judiciously the African past is embellished, the fact remains that the theory, far from decolonizing Africa, capitulates to the colonial discourse. Though otherness is called on to defend the existence of a traditional African philosophy, the price for the recognition of such a philosophy is an identity that alienates Africans from rationality and science by imposing the defence of a collective and uncritical set of beliefs. To present negritude as the philosophy of Africans is to suggest that all Africans are so prone to think alike by virtue of their collective identity that they are incapable of individual and critical thinking. The best way to avoid these detrimental outcomes is to repudiate the very notion of precolonial African philosophy.

In whichever way the notion is contrived, a collective and unconscious philosophy is a contradiction in terms. Philosophy is an individual and systematically critical reflection; as such, it runs counter to the idea of collective thinking. Conversely, religions, mythologies, and worldviews do not appeal to the critical effort of the individual. Instead, they call for the spontaneous, uncritical adherence of individuals to a common and transmitted set of beliefs. So that having none of the attributes by which a philosophical discourse is usually defined, what is identified as traditional African philosophy presents all the characters of a religious system or worldview, not of philosophy. Marcien Towa denounces the notion of 'traditional African philosophy' as a 'dilation of the concept of philosophy to such a point that this concept becomes coextensive with the concept of culture' (Towa 1991:189). Besides being based on the fraudulent identification of philosophy with culture, a philosophical system that is particular to Africa is a direct confirmation of the colonial discourse. Those who have a different nature cannot philosophize like Westerners; they need a philosophy commensurate with their otherness, that is, a collective and uncritical philosophy. Paulin Hountondji calls the acceptance of otherness "folklorism" a sort of collective exhibitionism which compels the 'Third

World' intellectual to 'defend and illustrate' the peculiarities of his tradition for the benefit of a Western public' (Hountondji 1983:67).

For Hountondji, in addition to confirming the colonial discourse, the attempt to revive the past, nay, to baptize it as philosophy, betrays the reactionary stand of negritude. Though the negritude thinkers speak of reproducing a past philosophy, in reality they disguise their own individual philosophies as African. The conservative content of this deceiving identification becomes obvious as soon as we understand that

behind this [implicit and collective worldview] usage . . . there is a myth at work, the myth of primitive unanimity, with its suggestion that in 'primitive' societies—that is to say, non-Western societies—everybody always agrees with everybody else. It follows that in such societies there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems of belief (Hountondji 1983:60).

When an individual thinking is metamorphosed into an African trait, the purpose is to obtain a collective sanction without providing rational arguments. It is to demand unanimous approval in the name of African authenticity and the authority of tradition. Furthermore, the attribution of philosophy endows an ensemble of uncritical beliefs with the value of indispensability and permanence. As purported products of rationality, such beliefs cease to be tied to outdated particular contexts and epochs. The connection between the unanimist reading of African tradition and the various totalitarian ideologies of Africa, such as African socialism, the one-party system, authenticity, president for life, etc., is not hard to establish.

Does this mean that Hountondji recommends the complete rejection of the past? No, his position is rather to submit the traditional and collective thoughts of Africans to a critical assessment before claiming them as relevant; it is to study them as a philosopher, that is, 'outside of all apologetic perspectives' (Hountondji 1995:191). In other words, Hountondji is against ethnophilosophy because it advocates the indiscriminate consecration of traditional knowledge, not because it wants to reappropriate it. Those aspects of the traditional culture that stand the test of critical examination will be retained as being useful for modernization. The critical appraisal of the past, be it noted, will necessarily lead, unlike the unanimist reading of negritude, to a pluralist interpretation of the traditional thinking.

For Hountondji, then, the reappropriation of past knowledge is not the revival of a traditional philosophy, for African philosophy is yet to come;

‘it is before us, not behind us, and must be created today by decisive action’ (Hountondji 1983:53). The creation implicates the incorporation of the useful aspects of the past, which is made possible by the submission of the past to a critical assessment. To underline his divergence from the way negritude resurrects the past, Hountondji calls the critical reflections on and reconstruction of African legacy ‘learned ethnophilosophy’ (Hountondji 1995:173). Hountondji’s enlightened, critical ethnophilosophy follows the Marxist method of deriving the thought process from the conditions of material life. It attempts to elucidate the genesis of traditional conceptions by connecting traditional African beliefs and practices with the then prevailing conditions of life. The exposure of the correspondence of the form and contents of the thinking with the conditions of life confirms the limitation of conceptions to specific times and places. Unlike the racial fixation of negritude, the method reveals the historical and transient nature of these thoughts, and hence avoids changing them into eternal African categories.

There remains the question of knowing whether Hountondji’s rejection of otherness achieves the decolonization of the African mind. In his eyes, the only pertinent challenge to the colonial discourse is the refutation of the assumption that Africans have by nature intrinsically different ways of thinking or even a different kind of mind. For one thing, the historical genesis of traditional beliefs underscores the rationality of the thought process by displaying the relevance of the thinking to the mode of life. African thoughts and beliefs are no longer the mere products of magic; they are reflections, albeit idealized, of real conditions of life. For another, the method does not petrify the African lag in the manner of negritude; by establishing a correspondence between the mode of life and the mode of thinking, it proposes the notion of delay in development.

Delay means that the disparity between the West and Africa is ‘merely in the evolutionary stage attained, with regard to particular types of achievement... merely in quantity or scale’ (Hountondji 1983:61). As Hountondji sees it, what is most detrimental is not the admission of Africa’s technological lag, but the ascription of the lag to an epistemological difference. Unlike otherness, the stage disparity puts Africa in the same unilinear process as the West, and so attributes the lag to the conditions of life rather than to the mental unfitness of Africans. A difference in quantity promises the rapid narrowing of the gap, given that it views Western achievements as an expression of universal qualities that are shared by Africans as well.

For critics, what Hountondji adds to qualify his harsh evaluation of African tradition does not succeed in removing his uncritical attitude toward Western philosophy. Since Africans are denied philosophy in the name of Western norms, the net outcome of the denial is the consecration of the normativeness of the West. The allegiance to Western philosophy is such that the anthropological characterization of African thinking as collective, spontaneous, and irrational is literally reproduced. The allegiance prevents Hountondji and Towa from developing the slightest doubt about the accuracy of the terms used to describe African traditional thinking. Speaking of Hountondji, one critic writes that Hountondji 'fails to do that preliminary work of questioning the Eurocentric structures as he appropriates European notions of philosophy' (Imbo 1998:87). On account of this failure to challenge Western philosophy, Africa appears to Hountondji as the land of myths and irrational beliefs.

Unless the West is relativized, no critical view emanating from the accepted normativeness of the West will ever be fair to Africans. When a norm is erected, the outcome is the denigration of all differences. This explains the paradox of Hountondji: though he makes pertinent criticisms of anthropology, which he considers as a 'pseudo science', (Hountondji 1983:61), he does not get to the point of accusing Western concepts of misrepresenting African traditions. What failed him is the use of Marxist philosophy and concepts to criticize both the West and the African past. A Marxist critique of the West does not really question Western hegemony; it only advocates assimilation to the European culture defined as the universal and most progressive culture. Since the definition reinstates the backwardness of African cultures, real and radical criticism cannot start unless Eurocentrism and its model of philosophy questioned. Only when the normativeness of the West is rejected does the affirmation of difference become legitimate.

This means that the problem is not so much the reality of the difference as the formulation of African difference in terms that are free of Eurocentric stereotypes. The need to emancipate the representations that Africans have of themselves from Eurocentric biases posits mental decolonization as a prerequisite to development. A serious and forceful will to develop cannot arise while the internalized Eurocentric stereotypes keep telling Africans that they are not equipped for human progress. The only way to extirpate these stereotypes is the relativization of the West, which creates and affirms the idea of difference. True, to define the difference in terms opposed to Western rationality, in the manner of negritude, is little conducive to

invigorating the resolution to modernize. Is there a way of relativizing the West without placing Africans in the box reserved for ‘the Other’?

Deconstruction as a Prerequisite to Development

The need to liberate African self-representations from Eurocentrism emphasizes the necessity for the deconstruction of Western concepts and methods. No view of African difference and philosophy can be authentic and liberating if it remains entangled in Eurocentric distortions. The deconstructive standpoint relativizes the West, just as it unravels the hidden motives and mechanism of its thinking. It offers the best possible tools both to critically analyse the colonial discourse on Africa and to approach Africa from a new perspective.

According to V. Y. Mudimbe, the leading thinker of the African deconstructionist school, what passes for African philosophy and knowledge of Africa is essentially a product of the Western episteme. He writes:

modern African thought seems somehow to be basically a product of the West. What is more, since most African leaders and thinkers have received a Western education, their thought is at the crossroads of Western epistemological filiation and African ethnocentrism. Moreover, many concepts and categories underpinning their ethnocentrism are inventions of the West (Mudimbe 1988:185).

So pervasive is the dependence of African views on Western concepts that it perverts even the attempts to argue in support of African difference, as shown by the negritude movement, which fully maintains ‘the binary opposition between European and African, civilized and primitive, rational and emotional, religious and idolatrous’ (Diawara 1990:82). Some such opposition reflects the Western normative standpoint and reasserts the superiority of the West over Africa. What is intended to be a protest turns into an acceptance of hierarchy. No less loyal to Western prejudices are the opponents of negritude. Hountondji finds negritude unacceptable because the primacy of rationality, as established by the West, is not consistent with the products of African thought. Likewise, the idea of a traditional African philosophy is questioned because Western thought rejects the conflation of culture with philosophy.

Yet, seeing the gross misconceptions of anthropology, the suspicion should have been that the anthropological discourse is not accidental. Nor are the demeaning descriptions of Africans mere errors. As a product born of the epistemological specificity of the West, anthropology was first conceived as a reductionist enterprise at odds with a positive idea of

human diversity. Its reductionism is inscribed in the very idea of positing the European as an archetype, the outcome of which is that non-Western peoples are defined as deficient variations. To say that anthropology is a product of Western rationality is to underline the goal of domination as the initial project of anthropology. According to Mudimbe, anthropologists 'speak about neither Africa nor Africans, but rather justify the process of inventing and conquering a continent and naming its 'primitiveness' or 'disorder' as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods for its 'regeneration' (Mudimbe 1988:20).

The purpose of anthropology is not so much to study other peoples as to construct their particularity in a way that sets them against the West. The opposition marginalises these peoples, and so singles them out for domination. The epistemological inspiration of this opposition is found in Western philosophy whose essence is to manufacture representations and explanations of history drawn from epistemological values centring the West. As a means of constructing and structuring the world around the centrality of the West, the Western philosophical paradigm is unfit to provide an objective study of other cultures. Objectivity is illusory if it disregards the basic principle that 'no one enjoys the privilege of being at the center while others remain peripheralized' (Masolo 1994:179). This strong denunciation of Eurocentrism suggests that Mudimbe welcomes the idea of African difference, provided that it does not reflect the anthropological opposition between the rational and the primitive. He writes:

there are natural features, cultural characteristics, and, probably, values that contribute to the reality of Africa as a continent and its civilizations as constituting a totality different from those of, say, Asia and Europe. On the other hand, any analysis would sort out the fact that Africa (as well as Asia and Europe) is represented in Western scholarship by 'fantasies' and 'constructs' made up by scholars and writers since the Greek times (Mudimbe 1994:xv).

As to the question of the existence of a traditional African philosophy, the best answer is to say, to paraphrase a scholar, 'No! Not yet!' (Maurier 1984:25). The main problem is to find an approach free of Western premises and stereotypes before the attempt to reconnect with the past is made. The problem is less the particularity of Africans than the misconstruction of the perception of particularity by the insidious influence of Eurocentric concepts. To underestimate the impact of these Western concepts is a great mistake. Such concepts are no longer what Westerners

say about Africans; they have been internalized to the point of becoming the unconscious references of Africans.

Most interesting is the correlation that Mudimbe establishes between the socioeconomic reality of Africa and its mental setup. The colonial system of economic exploitation necessitates the inculcation of a subservient mentality into colonized peoples, especially into the educated elite. It presupposes a policy of domestication based on the production of intellectual representations and beliefs inducing mental dependency. The missionary's project of disseminating Christianity and civilization was an important tool of implanting dependency. 'The outcome of these policies was the process of underdevelopment' (Mudimbe 1988:3), which is neither poverty nor backwardness, but the product of domestication. The production of a dependent mode of thinking and producing in colonies shows that what exists in Africa is no longer the traditional society, but a peripheralized, marginalised society.

By showing that economic dependency is a consequence of mental dependency, Mudimbe's theory of underdevelopment improves on the position of the neo-Marxist school of dependency. In its heyday, the dependency school, as articulated, for instance, by André Gunder Frank, associated economic dependency with the tendency to rebel rather than to submit, thereby imbuing the third world with a strong tendency to confront imperialism. The tendency was believed to be so firm that the underdeveloped world was often described as the new birthplace of socialism, in contrast to the weakening of revolutionary spirit among the working class of the West as a result of the corrupting effect of imperialist expansions. To quote Frank:

As the solutions to the problems of underdevelopment become ever more impossible within the capitalist system which creates them . . . the long exploited people themselves are being taught and prepared to lead the way out of capitalism and underdevelopment (Frank 1976:217–218).

Mistaken also was Frantz Fanon's ascription of a revolutionary potential to the dependent world. The trend to accommodate to a world dominated by the West greatly overtook Fanon's vision of a 'Third World . . . rising like the tide to swallow up all Europe' (Fanon 1968:106). In revealing the injection of dependency right into the self-representation of the third world, Mudimbe portrays a situation in which the alleged rebellious stand of underdeveloped peoples is erased by the acceptance of marginality.

Clearly, Mudimbe's approach places the colonization of the African mind at the centre of Africa's problems of modernization. If the mental is

so conditioned as to promote Western dominance, even as Africans seem to contest that dominance, liberation is unthinkable without the complete emancipation from Western categories whose purpose is to marginalise other peoples through the universalization of the West. Subjective liberation, that is, the decolonization of the mind, is thus the forced prerequisite to Africa's modernization. The priority of mental liberation establishes the primacy of deconstruction: when Western concepts are deconstructed, the affirmation of difference without hierarchy or opposition becomes possible. Deconstruction debunks Eurocentrism, and so inaugurates the authentic phase of pluralism by dismissing the antagonism between Europe and Africa.

One major implication of the deconstruction of Eurocentrism is the rejection of the antithesis, so dear to modernization school, between modernity and tradition. In view of the systematic deformation of the African past by Western concepts, nothing justifies 'the static binary opposition between tradition and modernity, for tradition (*traditio*) means discontinuities through dynamic continuation and possible conversion of *tradita* (legacies)' (Mudimbe 1988:189). The very process of modernization in Europe and elsewhere gives confirmation of the capacity of tradition to integrate discontinuities by means of a dynamic continuity. When Europeans refer to the Greek, Roman, and Christian roots of modern Western civilization, what else do they underline but the continuity of European history through the integration of discontinuities? If integration is good for Europeans, why would it be retarding when Africans want to achieve a similar continuity by integrating their encounters of the West into their own legacy? When Africans conceive of modernization as a synthesis of African legacy—communalism, dynamic conception of being, etc.—and Western ideas of science and technology, they are attempting to construct a dynamic continuity that centres and protects them from alienation and dependency while opening them to novel encounters and events.

Granted that the great merit of the deconstructionist school is to have understood the extent to which the internalization of Western representations blocks the African initiative, still critics point out that the disengagement and freedom promised by deconstruction are severely curtailed by the underlying relativist philosophy. Though Mudimbe establishes a sharp distinction between the facts of Africa and the Western representations of these facts, critics wonder whether the deconstructive equation of knowledge with construction allows the distinction between facts and representations. Mudimbe has no valid reason to believe that

his own descriptions of Africa are not also inventions. Put otherwise, the availability of an alternative way to Western rationality, by which alone Mudimbe's perceptions of Africa can claim to be real and authentic, is not perceptible. As Masolo puts it, 'he fails, in *The Invention of Africa* and elsewhere, to show clearly how the 'usable past' should be used by 'experts' to construct an 'authentic' African episteme' (Masolo 1994:179).

Viewed from the need to decolonize the mind, the acceptance of relativism dilutes the authenticity of identification, which is then wanting in conviction and power. Without a forceful belief in the objectivity of identities, effective decolonization cannot be achieved. The suspicion is that this receptivity to relativist philosophical premises may well be an imprint of mental colonization, there being no doubt that the relativization of the West to shake off Eurocentrism leads to disbelief, not to say cynicism. Moreover, deconstruction is unable to make a discourse on Africa that secures a vision superior to or better than the one suggested by negritude. In relativizing the West, it assigns the best qualities (rationality, science) to the particularity of the West so that only the lower attributes of non-rationality remain for African particularity. Add that the quest for authentic particularism tends to downplay those characteristics of the West that produced the modern world. Since African authenticity passes through these characteristics being denounced as Western, the need to be different dampens the resolution to learn from the West, to understand the secret of its power. Relativism cripples the African determination to embark on a competitive course with the West.

Development as Freedom

The apparent drawbacks of African philosophical responses to the colonial discourse draw attention to what can be termed the African dilemma. The attempt to refute the characterization of Africans as underdeveloped by the assertion of difference ascribes a non-rational mode of thinking to the African self, and so works toward the perpetuation of its marginality. Modernizing ventures, including scientific and technological realizations, are incompatible with a turn of mind alien to rationality. Those African philosophers who reject otherness do not escape the charge of endorsement of the colonial idea of Africa. Their commitment to the universality of the human mind cannot but explain the disparity between Africa and the achievements of the West by a difference in the attainment of progress. The explanation resurrects the evolutionary terms of backwardness. Though they promise that Africa will catch up with the West, the consent to the idea of backwardness paralyses the march toward progress.

The merit of the deconstructionist school is to understand the extent to which the internalization of Western representations blocks the African initiative. Unfortunately, its philosophical premises make the disengagement of Africa dependent on the acceptance of relativism. As a result, the liberated African self lacks the sense of its own objectivity, and hence the power of conviction, without which effective decolonization cannot be achieved. Even so, the deconstructive standpoint correctly prioritizes the issue of African modernization. So long as the African mind is bogged down by Western representations, no development policy, however thoroughly contrived and however skillfully planned, can initiate a sustained process of development.

If the weakness of the relativist strategy, whether that of otherness or particularism, is to take away rationality in addition to racializing or relativizing its commitment, such drawbacks are not without remedy. Take the case of negritude. What is wrong with negritude is less the claim to difference than the conception of difference as otherness by the appeal to racial attributes. Instead of originating the difference from racial, natural characteristics, negritude should have resorted to an act of choice, the very one that led Sartre to argue that, in the case of human beings, 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre 1957:13). The precedence of freedom over physical or cultural determinations assigns differences to historicity, thereby construing human diversity as a product of subjective contingency.

The historical approach diversifies without racializing: it relates to an initial and *sui generis* option unraveling potentials which, though inherently universal and human, are used diversely as a result of divergent choices. The involvement of choice overcomes the debate over the reality or non-reality of the African essence as a racial entity. Choice refers to freedom, and so excludes objective determinations even as it reinstates the universality of human potentials. The recovery of universality avoids the limitative relativism of deconstruction, just as the foundational role of freedom supplies the power of conviction that deconstruction is unable to offer. The initiative of freedom being the foundational moment of self-determination, it inserts the absolute into the relative.

This agency of choice underlines the crucial role of freedom in the generation of civilizations by tracing the particularity of each civilization back to the contingency of human choices. Since the initial value orientation of a given culture determines the use of rationality, provided that non-technicalness is ascribed to an act of choice, the opposition between Africa and the conquering ethos of Europe is, therefore, perfectly acceptable. Not only a disparity resulting from different choices does not

exclude the rationality of Africans, but by removing the racial barrier it also warrants the possibility of changing lanes, of passing from one conception to another by an act of choice. Most importantly, it invalidates all evolutionary approach. If instead of backwardness, choice accounts for differences, the West is relativized as much as Africa is. Since the selection of some goals always requires the suppression or the giving up of other equally valid goals, there is no room for the ranking enthusiasm of evolutionism. This selectiveness of choice shows that the price for the option to make Westerners 'masters and owners of nature' (Descartes 1978:46) is the inhibition or loss of other ways of relating with nature. At the same time, it salvages Africa by attributing its non-technicalness more to the pursuit of a different purpose, with its positive and negative sides, than to evolutionary retardation.

Some such approach points to what must be the first task of a serious attempt to decolonize the African mind, namely, the radical transformation of what African students learn at schools and universities. The elimination of Eurocentric concepts from the curriculum and their replacement by conceptions whose basic purpose is to centre Africa takes priority over all other decolonizing measures. In particular, the Hegelian scheme of world history advancing by stages that display the progression from the most backward to the most advanced—a notion that carries the basic tenets of most Western philosophies of history, including the Marxist approach—must be cast aside. This scheme enables Hegel to write: 'the History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History' (Hegel 1956:103). Having arbitrarily universalized European characteristics, Hegel, as we saw, has no difficulty in painting the characteristics of other cultures as backward, lagging manifestations of Europe. This theoretical construct must be dismantled in favour of a pluralistic view of history that views each culture as evolving autonomously in pursuit of particular goals stemming from an initial and founding choice. Only thus can Africans dissolve the stigma of backwardness and regain the freedom to define themselves in terms appropriate to their own historical initiatives.

To involve choice is to replace the unilinear scheme of evolutionism by the concept of divergence. Divergence refers to splits within the same unity developing in different directions; unlike the cumulative and unilinear conception of evolution, it exhibits, in the words of Henri Bergson, the process of evolution 'splaying out like a sheaf, sunders, in proportion to their simultaneous growth, terms which at first completed each other so well that they coalesced' (Bergson 1944:130). Though the

directions are particular by their development, they are also complementary by their original unity. Both the particularity and the complementariness of the directions rule out the hierarchical conception of the process. The human effort should not seek the dominance of one direction—which is what Westernization is targeting—but the harmonious development of human potentials. But note that this harmonious development remains unattainable so long as the West is infatuated with material power. The one-sidedness of the Western path gives Africans no other choice than to strive to narrow the technological gap.

To sum up, the divergent conception of social evolution is the solution to the African dilemma. To the extent that it involves choice, it dismisses the colonial discourse in terms liable to stimulate the African resolution to seek parity with the West. The relativization of the West by the disclosure of its initial choice challenges its normativeness and invites the development of Africa as a reciprocating act of choice. When the West is raised to the level of norm, Africans are reduced to the status of imitators, or to speak a more familiar language, to dependency. When the West is relativized through a divergent conception, it becomes an object of utilitarian and pragmatic inquiry. Contrary to the mere capitulation stemming from the normative approach, the relativizing impact of choice puts Africans in the self-asserting situation of asking such questions as: What can we adopt and adapt from the West? What has the West adopted from Africa? What must we reject as detrimental? How can we integrate what we borrow into our own continuities? These questions are the very ones that Africans would have raised were they not colonized. Developing this type of utilitarian relation with the West is indeed dependent on the prior decolonization of the African mind, which is neither more nor less than the recovery of freedom.

Bibliography

- Bergson, H., 1944, *Creative Evolution*, New York, The Modern Library.
- Descartes, R., 1978, 'Discourse on the Method', *Descartes: Philosophical Writings*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing.
- Diawara, M., 1990, 'Reading Africa Through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Re-Affirmation of the Subject', *Quest*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 76-88.
- Fanon, F., 1968, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, Inc.
- Frank, A. G., 1967, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Hagen, E. E., 1962, *On the Theory of Social Change*, Homewood, Ill, The Dorsey Press.

- Hegel, G. W. F., 1956, *The Philosophy of History*, New York, Dover Publications.
- Hountondji, P., 1995, 'The Particular and the Universal', in Albert G. Mosley ed., *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs.
- Hountondji, P., 1983, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Imbo, S. O., 1998, *An Introduction to African Philosophy*, New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Irele, A., 1992, 'In Praise of Alienation', in V. Y. Mudimbe ed., *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Irele, A., 1990, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L., 1985, *How Natives Think*, Princeton, N J., Princeton University Press.
- Masolo, D. A., 1994, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Maurier, H., 1984, 'Do We Have an African Philosophy'? in Richard A. Wright ed., *African Philosophy*, Lanham, University Press of America.
- Mudimbe, V. Y., 1994, *The Idea of Africa*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Mudimbe, V. Y., 1988, *The Invention of Africa*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Sartre, J-P., 1963, *Black Orpheus*, Paris, Présence Africaine.
- Sartre, J-P., 1957, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, New York, Philosophical Library.
- Sen, A., 1999, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
- Senghor, L. S., 1995, 'On Negrohood: Psychology of the African Negro', in Albert Mosley, ed., *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.
- Senghor, L. S., 1976, 'Prose and Poetry', in John Reed and Clive Wake, eds., London, Heinemann.
- Senghor, L. S., 1970, 'Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century', in Wilfred Cartey and Martin Kilson, eds., *The Africa Reader*, New York, Vintage Books.
- Senghor, L. S., 1959, 'Constructive Elements of a Civilization of African Negro Inspiration', Paris, Présence Africaine.
- Towa, M., 1991, 'Conditions for the Affirmation of a Modern African Philosophical Thought', in Tsenay Serequeberhan, ed., *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings*, New York, Paragon House.



Africa Development, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004, pp. 131–160

© Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004
(ISSN 0850-3907)

Philosophy and Development On the Problematic of African Development: A Diachronic Analysis

Lansana Keita*

Abstract

The idea of development is generally seen as central to any discussion of the economic, cultural, and political sociologies of the world's nations. Nations of the West are seen as 'developed' and members of the 'First World', while those of Africa, Latin America and some of those of Asia are seen as 'developing' and belonging to the 'Third World'. I propose to examine the meaning and application of the term 'development' with respect to Africa, then discuss whether Africa was ever developed—recognizing that the term is temporally relative. I will also discuss the idea of what Africa 'would look like' were it at the frontiers of development. I will then examine theories and applications of theories of development for Africa. Finally, I will examine current theories of development and their potential for success in Africa. Theories to be examined are the neoclassical theory, dependency theory, post-structuralism, and developmentalism.

Résumé

Le concept de développement est habituellement considéré comme central à toute discussion portant sur les sociologies économiques, culturelles et politiques des pays du monde. Les nations de l'Occident sont considérées comme «développées» et faisant partie du «Premier Monde», tandis que celles d'Afrique, d'Amérique Latine et certaines d'Asie sont perçues comme étant «en développement» et constituent le «Tiers-monde». Je suggère que l'on procède à un examen de la signification et de l'application du terme «développement», dans le cas de l'Afrique, puis que l'on cherche à savoir si l'Afrique a jamais été développée (considérant que ce terme possède une temporalité relative). J'évoque également «ce à quoi l'Afrique ressemblerait» si celle-ci se trouvait au seuil du développement. Ensuite, j'analyse les théories et applications des théories de développement à l'Afrique. Et pour finir, j'étudie les actuelles théories de développement, ainsi que leur potentiel de réussite sur le continent. Les théories examinées sont les suivantes: la théorie néoclassique, celle de la dépendance, du post-structuralisme et du développementalisme.

* Department of Philosophy, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone; Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, USA.

Introduction

The term 'development' is generally understood etymologically to mean 'expansion by a process of growth' or 'growth and differentiation of some entity along lines natural to its kind'. The processes of transformation and growth described by the term typically apply to biological processes where the stages of growth are usually described as development. But the development of the modern social sciences in Western Europe some 200 to 150 years ago and the recognition by its practitioners that societies have undergone and do undergo transformations in history established parallels between the processes of biological change and those of society. The theories of prominent European social scientists such as Comte, J.S. Mill, and Marx, with the important North African precursor Ibn Khaldun (1868) also in mind, were founded on the idea that human societies were not static but underwent periodic transformations. What is interesting too is that the progress or movement observed in social transformations were normatively viewed in moving from states of being less developed to ones of being more developed. One recalls Marx's quasi-Darwinian thesis that human history was naturally evolutionary progressing from less developed stages to those that were more developed. Thus, for Marx, a developed capitalism would eventually give way to socialism then communism, eventually reflective of a mature human society.

It is in this context that post-Enlightenment European thinkers such as Comte and Marx argued that human society progressed from stages that were less developed to stages that were more developed. Marx specifically argued that human society progressed through the stages of 'primitive' communism, slavery, feudalism, and capitalism to culminate in the future with communism, the most developed phase of human existence. Marx's deterministic theory of the dynamics of history argued that it was the historic function of capitalism to spread itself into societies that were not as developed, thereby setting the conditions for their eventual progress into socialism and communism.

It is instructive too to note that the post-Enlightenment idea of development as intrinsic to the path of human history was central to the philosophy of history formulated by the German thinker Hegel, a major influence on Marx, in the nineteenth century. For Hegel (*Philosophy of History*), the developmental path of human history was characterized by the idea of increasing self-consciousness on the part of humans. This process was facilitated by the movement of 'Spirit' (*Geist*) as it progressed from East to West. The result of this was to be discerned in the increasing amounts of freedom gained by the individual within his or her society

over time. An interesting point about Hegel's 'dialectics of history' is that his philosophy of history granted no developmental path for Africa. Africa, according to Hegel, had not entered into the path of human history, therefore it did not contain the necessary criteria for development. In this regard, Africa would be permanently undeveloped.

On account of technological transformations made within Western Europe dating from the sixteenth century, the idea developed among European thinkers that in comparative terms, the societies of Western Europe were more developed than those in the non-European world. European travel to other parts of the globe, aided by the use of the compass within the context of newly acquired knowledge of the world and nature in general, should be seen as the catalyst that produced the European Enlightenment with its subsequent development of the social and human sciences. Anthropology was created to study the cultures of non-European societies and it was born necessarily with a plethora of theoretical biases. One of its major premises was that the European world was civilized and developed, while many of the non-European societies were 'primitive' and undeveloped. It was assumed that undeveloped societies would increasingly become developed, the more they resembled the developed societies of Europe.

This was the context in which the contemporary concepts of 'modern' (literally meaning *à la mode*) and 'backward', 'civilized' and 'primitive', and 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' were first formulated. When reference was made, for example, to the economic systems and technologies of Africa during the era of Europe's irruption thither, the received doctrine was that Europe was 'developed' and Africa was 'underdeveloped'. But there is an evident problematic here concerning the terms 'developed' and 'underdeveloped'. 'Developed' suggests a completed or finished process, while 'underdeveloped' tends to imply stasis or lack of progress. But the technological and economic structures of European society fifty years ago have undergone palpable changes and continue to do so. Consider the fact that computers, cellular phones, solar energy, and so on were not commonplace in European society some fifty years ago. Thus the idea that European societies are 'developed' is obviously questionable. European societies are in the process of development just as other societies deemed 'undeveloped' or 'developing'. For this reason, the automatic contrast between 'developed' and 'developing' societies should be subject to debate.

The obviously confirmable difference between contemporary developing European societies and those of Africa is that the former societies are the producers and users of more novel forms of technology

than the latter. What is also evident is that social structures of the former are eventually made to conform to the novel forms of technology.

Was Africa Ever the Source of Novel Forms of Development?

Having established that the term 'developed' should not be used with regard to societies that are perennially in the process of transformation—as all societies are, to lesser or greater degrees—a pertinent question now is whether Africa was ever the site of novel sociological transformations. The human species differentiates itself from other species of living organisms in that it possesses the peculiar characteristic of not only adapting to its environments as other living organisms do, but of transforming its environments to suit its needs, wants, and purposes. Presumably, the specific biological structures of the fauna of the East African savanna are the result of millennia of slow evolutionary pressures, according to the principles of natural selection. This punctilious process has never been witnessed, but it is assumed that the elongated neck of the giraffe and the running capacities of the cheetah are results of this adaptive process. It is claimed too that the present biological structure of humans is also the result of adaptive pressures deriving from the environment. But humans differentiate themselves from other biological species in that they have developed a greater active capacity for adaptation to their environments by a continuing transformation and utilization of the environment for their own purposes. This active capacity is certainly present with some nonhuman organisms, but it is humans who have developed this capacity to the fullest extent. For example, hymenopterous insects such as bees, wasps and ants, arachnids such as spiders, and mammals such as beavers do transform nature for their own purposes but their adaptive capacities seem driven more by instinct rather than otherwise in that their capacities seem restricted only to species-specific niches. The transformational capacities that humans demonstrate seem rather to be motivated by reflexive consciousness rather than by instinct. In other words, humans are endowed with the capacity to modify their operational programmes to suit the environment as they see fit. It is for this reason that the human capacity to transform or modify the natural environment to satisfy needs and wants is a constant and ongoing phenomenon. It is in this context that one may argue that the human capacity to transform nature according to more effective techniques of such over time may be seen as forms of technological development.

This human capacity in the form of technological development was first evident in what is now known as Africa as early as 2.5 million years

ago (MYA) (Klein 1989:164). The archaeological evidence suggests the manufacture of stone and bone implements by proto-humans or early members of the species *homo*. According to archaeological evidence, the species *homo* attained its most evolved level some 160 thousand years ago (KYA) in what is now known as East Africa and Southern Africa. Until some 55KYA all human technological developments took place in Africa because no *homo sapiens sapiens* lived elsewhere. Some archaeologists claim that a qualitative change in human technology and sociology took place in Europe some 40-50KYA, thereby hoping to prove that a distinction must be made between 'anatomically modern humans' and 'behaviourally modern humans'. But there is the counterclaim that this 'human revolution' took place tens of thousands of years earlier in Africa (McBrearty and Brooks 2000). Reference here is to the 'African Middle Stone Age' with its specific microlithic technologies, trade, use of pigment, bone tools, and so on.

The end of the Neolithic approximately some 10KYA witnessed a qualitative change in the way humans sought to transform their environments for survival purposes. The age of agriculture is claimed to have begun in what archeologists call the Middle East, which includes Northeast Africa and West Asia. Agriculture required domestication of animals, development of tilling technologies, plant breeding and nurturing. With the discovery of the greater effectiveness of metal implements over other types (lithic and bone especially), usage of copper and bronze increased. Eventually iron became the metal of choice for much of Africa's societies. What is of importance, though, within the context of the development of technology, is that usage of any metal for whatever purposes requires furnace construction and smelting to specific temperatures. There is some controversy over whether the practices of agriculture and metal smelting were developed independently in different parts of the globe or whether they were spread through a process of diffusion. In any case, suffice it to say that there is archaeological evidence of agriculture, settled societies and metal smelting in Africa more or less simultaneously with similar evidences elsewhere especially in West Asia and its environs. The time period in question here ranges from 5,000 BCE (the Egypto-Nubian culture complex) to 900 BCE for the earliest approximate times. It is instructive to point out too that iron working in Africa has been much studied by archaeologists with the recognition that furnace construction seems to have been accompanied by local and indigenous considerations (Miller 1997).

But what provides incontrovertible evidence for parts of Africa being more developed than anywhere else on the globe from at least 4,000 BCE

until 500 BCE are the technological and sociological structures of the Egypto-Nubian complex and its environs, which is now the Sudan. Writing, engineering, astronomy (which produced the first, accurate annual time measurement—the calendar), building in stone, mathematics, surgery and all the known human arts and sciences had their origin in this sociological complex (Diop 1991). The Greek and Roman civilizations, which respectively developed in what is now called South East Europe and Southern Europe, were both founded on the technology and general knowledge developed predominantly in the African locales of Egypt-Nubia and the subtropical West Asian society of Sumer.

Since the present era (i.e. AD), the level of development in Africa has been comparable to and even more technologically advanced than other parts of the globe. The Islamic presence in Europe may be said to be directly responsible for the transmission and diffusion of more developed forms of knowledge to Western Europe. But it was the technical knowledge of the Egypto-Nubian complex embellished by the culturally hybrid Greeks that served as the technological catalyst for the European Renaissance. By contrast, Medieval Africa north of the Equator was technologically and sociologically more developed than most of Europe until the tenth and eleventh centuries (Diop 1987). In that part of Africa there was long distance trade, manufacture and monetary transactions using gold bullion. The towns of Jenne, Timbuktu, and Mopti in the Sahel were well known locations of trade and manufacture. In general, agriculture, animal husbandry and long distance trade all with their required technology were present in Africa. Historians of Africa are well acquainted with Africa's technological specificities not only in the Egypto-Nubian complex, but also in what is now known as Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Nigeria (for example, leather works and other items manufactured in Kano were transshipped to Europe by way of Morocco as early as the thirteenth century), the Sahelian economic and trade areas of Ghana, Mali and Songhay, and parts of Southern Africa.

There was a decisive transformation in the world's technological level of development when Western Europe began applying the technical knowledge it acquired from other areas to travel to other areas of the globe. Travels to China and the Americas by individuals such as Magellan, Da Gama and Columbus opened up new economic opportunities for Western Europeans. The compass, printing, and gunpowder (invented in China) were used to telling effect by Europe within the context of the rapidly spreading economic system later known as capitalism. The exploitation of captive labour in the Americas and the violent acquisition

of lands and gold were the crucial ingredients for the increased trade and the accumulation of capital. African labour and the gold reserves of the Americas served as the catalysts for trans-continental trade, urbanization, and qualitative transformations in technology. Economic historians write of the Industrial Revolution which produced the steam engine and other forms of mechanical energy. The technological advantages that accrued to Western Europe under the aegis of mercantilist capitalism in turn served as the basis for further technological developments in sea transport (the steamship) and weaponry (long range cannon, and the Gatlin and maxim guns). The colonization of vast areas of the globe first effected by force of arms then using the vanquished populations as forced labour, all served as added catalysts to a burgeoning commercial and industrial capitalism. The combination of commercial and industrial capitalism coupled with rapid technological changes resulted in a world split along zero-sum game lines. The economic and technological gains of Western Europe resulted in economic and technological losses and disadvantages for the rest of the world, especially for the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa. The economic relations between African societies then under European sway and the relevant West European nations were in reality those of unequal exchange. Europe advanced and developed economically at the expense of its colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas. This is the historical explanation for the sociological structures of what are now called the 'developed' nations and the 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' nations.

Given the comparative economic and technological disadvantages experienced specifically by the nations of Africa with regard to those of Europe, the desire on the part of the disadvantaged is to eradicate those disadvantages which carry real costs in strictly economic terms. But these comparative disadvantages have been so institutionalized in structures protective of economic advantages that radical solutions are needed. Myriad theories of economic and sociological theories of development have been developed over the years, but they have not borne fruit when empirically applied, and those that would seem to augur positive results are never tested in any authentic manner. The intriguing theoretical question is an instrumental one. What would Africa look like if correct theories of development were implemented?

The Hypothetical Structures of a Developmentally Transformed Africa

If Africa were at the vanguard of economic and technological development this would manifest itself in three areas: technological, economic, and sociological. They are explored in the following:

The Technological

If Africa were now at the vanguard of human development, its technological level would be qualitatively different from its present state now. Africa would be at the forefront in the production and manufacture of those items which now require the most advanced knowledge and skills in the world today. Thus, the continent would be the area where technologically advanced items such as airplanes, automobiles, ships, computers and other durable goods would be manufactured. These enterprises would also be supported by local research centres in technology and engineering which would be attached to them. These enterprises would be for the most part owned by their workers, who would have the right to the majority of the productive stock.

The same technological self-sufficiency would apply in the area communication. The kinds of advanced research in communications technology now monopolized by Scandinavia and the East Asian nations of Japan and Korea would also be found in Africa, again supported by research centres in engineering and applied natural science.

In the area of agricultural production, Africa would be home to the most efficient and environmentally rational modes of production with all technologies and needs produced on the African continent. Technologies appropriate for all types of agricultural units and enterprises would also be produced on the continent, supported by ongoing research in Africa's research centres. There would also be serious ongoing research to reclaim the deserts in Africa for agricultural purposes with the funding and implementation of such deriving from African sources. In other words, an Africa developed in technology would be practically autonomous in supplying the most advanced technologies for whatever purposes.

The Economic

An Africa at the vanguard of economic growth and development would have transcended the balkanized, economically dependent status bequeathed to it from the colonial experience. An advanced Africa would be one in which the Bantustan-like mini-states that characterize the African continent would be a thing of the past. There would be intra-African trade,

movement, and communication in an economic landscape in which a single monetary unit that would be on par with the other major currencies of the world. One of the reasons for the persistent unequal exchange between African nations and the West especially is the greatly debased nature of Africa's currencies. Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage based on an international division of production coupled with the flexibility of currencies as a function of balance of payment outcomes has not proven to be viable for Africa, given that Africa's currencies continue on their debased route without respite. In short, the economic matrix for an Africa experiencing mature economic growth would be one of a common market of some 850 million individuals who would be free to trade, travel and exchange without the impediments imposed during the colonial era. One of the noted historical and archaeological facts about the African continent is that there was untrammelled trade and travel for millennia until the advent of the colonialists. Given the geographical extent of the continent and its relative ecological variety, the question of massive unemployment with individuals having to migrate extra-continentially to areas of greater capital depth would become a thing of the past. Furthermore, Africa's economic system would be one in which the major goal would be the maximization of human welfare in a sociological context which recognized that economies exist first to satisfy human needs and not primarily for the accumulation of wealth on the part of some individuals and nations. In this regard, major and prior considerations would be given to investment in human capital for all individuals so that the individual could realize his or her full potential in terms of interests and dispositions. In this regard, it would be practically impossible for individuals to be unemployed because Africa's educational systems would guarantee that every individual be trained in a variety of skills and be privileged with access to capital for purposes of business and otherwise. In contemporary Africa, the situation is the reverse. Enterprising individuals who might have some business idea in mind experience great difficulty in obtaining capital for the purpose in mind. Lending agencies, of course, always seek to reduce risk when capital funds are made available to the public, but that situation could be easily remedied by initially offering small amounts of capital for projects that carry high probabilities of success. This is where state and public capitalization of such institutions would be of great assistance. Capitalization costs would be held at a minimum if the capital equipment needed for the prospective enterprise were to be leased at manageable interest rates as an option.

The contemporary age we now live in is one which touts the virtue of the market and the neo-liberal economy. With the demise of the Soviet Union, ideological arguments are routinely mounted against what are perceived as the limitations of socialism. But it must be recognized the banking system which is at the heart of capitalism is admittedly founded on a socialist principle. Banks operate on the socialist principle of collecting large amounts of public capital which is then loaned to individuals singly. The incentive on the part of the public to loan funds to banks is determined in part by the returns determined by the going rate of interest.

This brings up the important question of the role of government or the state in any programme for economic development. Theorists who support liberal economic theory and market economics argue that the role of the state in economic development should be reduced to a minimum. Ideologically, they are committed to privatization of as many economic enterprises as possible and the reduction of state funding of socially beneficial programmes such as investment in human capital, health and commonly shared infrastructure such as roads, railways, and the like. Such theorists also express much opposition to subsidies directed at enterprises the demand for whose products are subject to inelastic demand in the areas of housing, basic education, and welfare.

But the economic history of those nations that have successfully broken free from the constraints of underdevelopment demonstrates that the state has played an important guiding role in rational economic decision making and economic growth. Germany's economic growth and technological development in the latter part of the nineteenth century was determined to a great extent by the mercantilist practice of protecting growing enterprises from outside competition. This theory of autarky was argued for by political economists such as Frederic List. List argued for tariff protection of infant industries imposed by the state which itself should embark on a nationalist programme of economic development (List 1983; Roussakis 1968). The same may be said for Japan in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and more recently nations like Korea and Malaysia. Economic transformations and economic growth took place in nations such as Korea because 'they showed that the role of the state need not merely be to protect certain industries or to promote exports. It can also perform functions like planning; it can own key sectors, create social infrastructure, and serve as a focus for ideologies and identities' (Biel 2000:202). Similar arguments have been made by admittedly prominent adherents of neoclassical economic theory such as Joseph Stiglitz (Hoff and Stiglitz 2001:415-425).

Thus, an Africa that is at the vanguard of development would be one in which there would be a judicial partnership between government as an institution and a sovereign, free and politically dominant public, composed of both single individuals and collectivities. At this juncture, a crucial distinction must be made, however, between two key institutions of any modern society: that between government as consisting of cadres whose function is to attend to economic needs such as education, housing, health, public safety, and so on, that are most efficiently served in communitarian fashion, and the state whose function in this instance would be essentially and mainly ceremonial. The functions of the state and government, both completely beholden to their creators, the people will be strictly delineated and maintained by constitutional statute. One might note in this regard that there is an increasing tendency in the modern nation state for the state to be dominant over government and even to absorb it. Much has been written on the role of the state in modern society with some theorists arguing that the real function of the state is to safeguard by implicit force the economic, political, and cultural interests of its dominant classes. In a revised theory of the African state, its role would be reduced to something akin to the ceremonial role played by the remnants of the traditional monarchies of Europe and elsewhere. The modern state, in most instances, has been usurped by secular governments beholden to concentrated capital that protect their rule legally by self-serving statutes and physically by security apparatuses that often operate in secret and with impunity. Caricatures of this kind of governmental structure have been adopted widely in post-colonial Africa.

In an Africa that is advanced economically, the state would be allocated very limited powers with its appointees such as presidents and prime ministers serving almost ceremoniously, and fully beholden to the populace. The different ministries whose government functions are to provide for and oversee the general welfare would be fully divorced from the state. Heads of the different ministries and their appointees would be drawn purely from the government sector with its career employees. The point of this approach to government and the state in an advanced Africa would be to demonstrate that its economic structures would necessarily entail political economic issues involving the role and function of both government and the state. As suggested above, in an advanced Africa, human welfare in all its dimensions within the context of a constitutionally enforced communitarian ethos would be the primary consideration of such an economy. Human welfare in all its dimensions within an African context would involve not only economic decision making on the part of

individuals, but also economic decision-making on the part of government. But in order to ensure a maximal human welfare in the form of the human capacity for self realization, the state would have minimal powers to control free expression within the context of a rationally determined maximum negative and positive rights for all persons. The general political-economic context would be one of individual states within a larger collectivity of politically federated states with governments at the supranational level. From a standpoint of strict rationality, an advanced Africa would contain no more than four or five nation states, all members of a wider African commonwealth whose members would include the nation states of overseas Africa.

And yet contrary to popular belief, for the most part, the practiced and cherished ideas of freedom have historically been an intrinsic element of African society. Who feels more free than Africa's eternal nomadic herdsman as he leads and follows his cattle on their wandering ways, paying little attention to the arbitrarily imposed boundaries of the colonialists, now slavishly followed by their appointed governments? Who feels more free than the African peasant who tills, plants, and harvests as seen fit without the controls and regulations of the imposed colonial and neocolonial government?

On Human Capital and the Division of Labour

One of the problems faced by contemporary post-colonial African economies is that of the very evident unemployment and underemployment of individuals who graduate from Africa's institutions of modern education. The kinds of education now extant in Africa's pedagogical institutions at all levels derive for the most part from the colonial systems imposed during the colonial era. Hence, we have French, British and Portugese systems of education in various parts of Africa, all reflective of mostly colonial modes of knowledge transmission. In an advanced Africa, education would be geared necessarily to future meaningful employment to such an extent that the crucial element in education and human capital investment would be that each student would have been already apprenticed to some productive enterprise before graduation. Individuals whose interests would lead them to establish individual enterprises would also be apprenticed to other individuals in similar situations while receiving the adequate financial support from cooperative banks and other credit granting agencies.

But the essential issue here would be that in an advanced Africa educational instruction would be not only theoretical and practical but also eclectic. Thus, as a ready example, all individuals would be trained

in the various arts required for modern agriculture, architecture, business operations, automotive repairs, and other instruction in the mechanical and scientific arts. In this regard, every individual after the necessary period of instruction would have the real option of self employment or otherwise. Thus, the division of labour in this context would not require the specialization that is so evident in the West and elsewhere.

Politics and the New Republic

In a developmentally advanced Africa, the question of its political landscape is of paramount importance. The political systems imposed or bequeathed to Africa by way of the colonial project have been tried and have been found wanting. The reason for this is obvious: the political structures of contemporary Europe are the local products of historical processes that have roots in the specific feudal and post-feudal structures of Europe. It is because of these different political histories that the political systems of France, Germany, Britain, and Italy are easily distinguishable. Africa itself has had its variegated political structures all relevant to essentially agrarian, commercial and nomadic societies, but contemporary African society has been radically transformed—as European and Asian societies—in recent times, mainly on account of the impositions of the colonial era.

To answer the question concerning the political life and structures of an advanced Africa, I begin by posing a thought experiment question. The question is: If one were about to be born but without knowledge as to one's prospective economic and sociological status, gender, talents, health, family, and so on, into what kind of society would one wish to arrive? The answer is that any individual would hope to enter a society in which he or she would be guaranteed economic security for survival purposes, optimal conditions for self-development and self-realization and maximal conditions for freedom and self-expression. In other words, the individual about to enter human society would necessarily hope to enter a society that is structured in such a way that human welfare in all its dimensions would be maximized—even for potential masochists with their perverted sense of 'welfare'.

If humans lived single and solitary lives, the issue of human welfare and the appropriate social structures would be determined by the individual. Matters involving economic arrangements, the extent of one's freedom of rights, freedoms, and autonomy. But the passive, post-serf classes of Europe allowed their recently won rights and freedoms to be confiscated by the new bourgeoisie, the class that provided the capital

and assets for a growing capitalism. The superficial aspects of democracy such as voting and the temporary service in government by those appointed by capital (private or state) have been touted to post-colonial African governments as necessary and sufficient criteria for democratic 'good governance'.

But economic imbalances between those who own or control capital and those who are employed by the owners of capital have led to great distortions in the process now referred to as democratic. It is instructive to point out, in this context, that when voting was first introduced in the post-feudal societies of Europe, only individuals with adequate amounts of capital and property were accorded the right to vote. The reason for this was that capital and property owners sought to establish political mechanisms whereby the new governors of bourgeois society would attend to the specific interests of the former in terms of legislation, taxes, and economic privileges. The expansion of the choice-making process took place only after literacy and knowledge spread to the working classes and the increasing numbers of the new town bourgeoisie—in short, the superficial aspects of the democratic process, that is the right to vote, became more widespread and accepted in the context of rights with the growth of what is now known as civil society.

It was this kind of system that was introduced to the new nations of Africa as they became independent. But this political graft from Europe was essentially problematic. The development of the political process in Europe was determined by local processes. Urbanization with literacy and increased numbers of workers was a crucial element in the shaping of the political landscape of Europe. In Africa, urbanization was taking place, but at a much slower pace than in Europe. The populations of post-independence Africa were still predominantly rural and agricultural. Literacy did not grow as quickly, given that the languages of instruction were predominantly those of the European metropolis. But what was of critical importance in this situation was that emerging civil societies were bereft of any real political power, given that such societies had relatively few organs of media expression such as newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and so on. In other words, Africa was relatively bereft of industrializing, capital-rich productive elements except in South Africa where settlers from Europe found it relatively easy to obtain capital for industrial, mineral exploiting, and industrial purposes. The result of these post-colonial structures was that most political and economic power accrued to the state, often beholden to the ex-metropolis according to the dictates of neo-colonialism. Under these circumstances, the political

process was necessarily flawed despite the touted superficial requirements of 'free and fair elections'. But as I mentioned above, even in the European societies where the modern idea of 'democratic governance' was organically developed, there are still serious distortions of the political process on account of the imbalance of wealth and the great influence of capital.

The collective approach advocated here with regard to these considerations is one based principally on the idea of economies of scale; pooled resources yield economically more efficient results than when invested from single sources. Natural resources such as minerals and the environment would be owned collectively by all citizens. In an adequately developed Africa, the goals of the political process would entail the direct involvement of citizens at all levels, especially at local levels. The function of elected officials would be that of attending to the already prescribed functions of government. The most important functions of government for which the citizens would have agreed to support fiscally by way of their own contributions would be the maintenance and improvement of infrastructure, the collective needs of education and the collective needs of health, administered by adequately trained government officials. Again, a distinction must be made between the government and the state. Government officials would require the appropriate training for their tasks, which would be established legally by way of a general constitution. State officials who are elected according to the political process would be completely beholden to those who elected them for the sole purpose of ensuring that the prescribed tasks of government officials be efficiently effected. Questions relating to budgetary expenditures would be determined only by those individuals employed by government and deemed competent to effect such. In other words, the role of the state and its officials would be primarily ceremonial. The political situation would amount to what one might refer as direct democracy with citizens having direct access to those whom they have elected to serve their own interests. The problem arises however when the state and government are conflated with the state appropriating for itself the economic tasks that are better handled by government. Matters are also compounded when the state, by way of its officials, imposes its will on the people and seeks to curtail their naturally ascribable political freedoms. In all this is forgotten the fact that the state is comprised of ordinary individuals who are required to dispatch their functions at the behest of the people who remunerate them as they see fit.

A Note on Development in Europe

The history of the world could be seen as one in which humans have sought to increase their freedoms by improving their understanding and control of the forces of nature for their own ends. These attempts at understanding and control were always attempted by appeal to the dual epistemologies of metaphysics and empirical technology. And instead of being beholden to nature and its caprices, humans have constantly and persistently sought to increase their agencies, hence, their freedoms by understanding how nature actually works. This understanding of nature has always been the major task of metaphysics (the transcendental) in its various forms, and what we now call empirical science (limited to the sensory world). But humans have also sought to increase their freedoms within their social structures over time, *pari passu*, as they expressed their increasing freedoms in their explorations of nature. In the case of Europe it must be recognized that this now-influential area is essentially an arriviste technological civilization, having attained such status long after Africa and Asia had attained such. Until Roman civilization became dominant a mere two thousand years ago, the sociological landscape of Europe was one of roaming groups of individuals who survived principally by plunder and mayhem. The Vikings, Vandals, and Saxons have acquired a deserved reputation in this regard.

But when Rome pacified most of Europe a long period of unfreedom set in for Europeans in the form of slavery and serfdom. And even before the Romans, Greek civilization, from which modern Europeans drew their cultural inspirations, was characterized by its slave classes. The same may be said for Roman civilization. As Roman civilization drew to a close in the fifth century, its institutions of slavery and peonage were replaced by that of another kind of servitude, historically referred to as serfdom. During the long era of serfdom, the serf was tethered to the land and subjected to the will of his lord, whose class acclaimed to itself the title of landed aristocracy. European feudalism lasted more than one thousand years, and its demise marked a central and significant point of European history. The 'freeing of the serfs' in Europe from approximately the fifteenth century onwards marked a quantum increase in the amounts of freedom for the European. The freeing of the serf and the birth of the new class of town burghers armed with new knowledge and novel technologies were practically simultaneous events, and the justification for the new freedoms was assigned to the new philosophers of the European post-Renaissance. But Montesquieu, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and others all belonged to the maturing post-feudal class of the European bourgeoisie.

Their critical theories and disquisitions all established the intellectual conditions for the justified demise of feudalism and the birth of the modern European state. The French Revolution was the culminating point of this process. Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality meant that hereditary rule and monarchical tenure were things of the past. The people were now ideologically justified in choosing their governmental representatives through the power accruing to them under the concept of parliamentary democracy.

But freedom is elusive. The rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe was a function of the economic power that accrued to that class according to its own ideology and practice of the economic system known as capitalism. The post-serf peasant, now an urban dweller, saw his freedoms whittled away under the power of capital. The mine and factory were now the replacements for the fields of the manor. It was this new unfreedom that inspired the idea of socialism, first with individuals like St. Simon, then later with Marx. The increasing freedoms of the bourgeoisie under capitalism were gained at the expense of the lack of freedoms for others. But the freeing of the captive serf in Europe was soon after accompanied by the organized capture of free West African labour for the plantations of the Americas and parts of Africa (Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, etc.). The new captive labour of Africa was wedded to capital to produce wealth and novel technologies for Europe. Africa in captivity meant the increasing freedoms for Europe for the period dating from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. The culminating point to this formal period of unfreedom was the end of the colonial era. In the case of Africa, the departing colonialists had the last word. They imposed on Africa their own self-serving versions of government and democracy.

Contemporary African Attempts at Development

I have argued above that the major reason for the colonization and economic exploitation of Africa was its relative technological retardation with regard to Europe. The struggle for independence was primarily a struggle against economic exploitation and political subservience. Like Japan in the mid-nineteenth century, some leaders for African independence recognized that it was imperative to reduce the technological gap between Africa and the West. After being the world's leader in technology for 155,000 years—culminating in the autonomous and seminal technological civilization of the Egypto-Nubian complex, and the technologically innovative structures of Axum, Zimbabwe, Ife-Nok-Benin, and so on—out of the 160,000 years that homo sapiens has been extant,

Africa found itself in the sixteenth century in technological arrears, thereby facilitating its subsequent control and exploitation by some of the nations of Western Europe.

Since the days of decolonisation, there have been three noteworthy theoretical attempts at economic development: the Lagos Plan of Action, Tanzania's Ujamma Cooperative Development Theory, Libya's Green Book Prescriptions, and Ghana's African Pan-African Socialism. Yet the only attempt at development which bore fruit and offered promise was that of Ghana under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah. The reason for the success of the Ghana model was that it was based on actual empirical study of the economic development of Europe, a careful study of the history of Africa (explaining why the 'Gold Coast' of European provenance and agency became Ghana—the well-known state of medieval Africa) and the recognition of the intra-continental aspects of African history. Ghana's theory of economic development was patterned after the many theoretical writings of Nkrumah expressed in such texts as *Consciencism*, *Africa Must Unite*, and *Neocolonialism—The Last Stage of Imperialism*. It is instructive to examine some of the ideas expressed in *Neocolonialism—The Last Stage of Imperialism* because it offers insights into the recognition by Ghana that structural changes in the organization of post-colonial Africa had to be made before meaningful development could take place. It must be pointed out first of all that most theorists of African development tend to offer prescriptions for development without raising questions about the viability of the myriad post colonial political entities hastily constructed by the colonial powers as they yielded formal political power to their erstwhile colonies. The idea of development is usually couched in nebulous terms about market freedom, privatization and corruption. But consider the following from Kwame Nkrumah:

Neo-colonialism is based upon the principle of breaking up former large united colonial territories into a number of small non-viable States which are incapable of independent development and must rely on the former imperial power for defence and even internal security (Nkrumah 1965: xiii).

Consider too these prescient observations: 'Unless small states can combine they must be compelled to sell their primary products at prices dictated by the developed nations and buy their manufactured goods at the prices fixed by them' (Nkrumah 1965:xiv). Statements such as these offer examples as to why one of the key principles in Nkrumah's theory of Pan-Africanism is the idea of continental institutions.

But for Nkrumah, the issue of development was not restricted only to the political but also to the economic. He writes:

The existence of separate monetary zones is having a harmful effect on the growth of trade in Africa. It is leading to illegal trade and revenue losses in many countries and makes an African Common Market difficult. Like the old, artificial political boundaries which are a relic of the colonial period, the various monetary zones help to emphasize differences when the independent African States should all be working for unified economic development. They perpetuate links with former colonial powers and strengthen the forces of neocolonialism (Nkrumah 1965:227).

The idea of the political and economic pooling of resources as a necessary condition for economic development was not unique to political theorists such as Nkrumah. Consider the following written more than thirty years ago:

The only way to achieve the economic reconstruction and development essential to fulfill the aspirations, needs and demands of the peoples of Africa is through a sustained shift to continental planning, so as to unite increasingly the resources, markets and capital of Africa in a single substantial economic unit (Green and Seidman 1968:22).

But Nkrumah's programme was not just only about the political and economic integration of Africa, it also involved the restructuring of Ghana's economic system along socialist lines. Nkrumah's socialist agenda was seen as highly controversial in Euro-American and African political circles in an era when there was a fierce ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and the West. The Soviet Union, founded on the principles of Communism, was seen by many in the non-European world as a promising alternative to the Western capitalism, for purposes of development. The socialist model which Nkrumah found attractive was one which empowered the state with the major tasks of development in the form of the harnessing of capital for rapid growth in the areas of technological infrastructure and universal education. The Soviet Union under the theoretical guidance of Lenin was able to accumulate enough capital in a relatively short period of time to create sectors of state-controlled heavy industries and manufacture. It was on account of this rapid technological transformation that the West saw the Soviet Union as a very serious competitor in the area of political economy. In fact, this rapid technological change was what could be viewed as the major reason why the Soviet Union was able to defend itself during World War II and to launch outward thrusts into Eastern Europe following the defeat of Germany.

The question now is, How successful was Nkrumah's programme of development? With regard to the theory of Pan-Africanism, suffice it to say that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) a supra-national organization based in Addis Ababa and the founding of the Economic Community of West African States, constitutes the practical results of this idea, but extra-continental forces mindful of the potential of a genuine implementation of the Pan African ideal were less than enthusiastic about offering the needed economic support for such. In strict economic terms, Ghana embarked on state administered seven year plans that produced some rapid growth in areas of needed infrastructure in the construction of the Tema harbour, and the Akosombo dam and power grid. And it should be pointed out that the capital for such indigenous projects derived from tax duties, especially in the area of cocoa. But there were externally imposed difficulties when Ghana tried to coordinate the mining and smelting of its own extensive deposits of bauxite with Guinea to produce aluminium *in situ*. But what makes elements of Ghana's development programme useful for the future is the rapid success it experienced in investments in human capital. The effect of Ghana's educational programme is still felt in West Africa many years after the demise of its ambitious experiment under Nkrumah.

Contemporary Theories of Development

One of the very evident paradoxes on the issue of development is that despite the vast amounts of research done on the topic, the issue itself seems impervious to solution. This research topic was first undertaken in the 1950s with the explicit goal of explaining and offering prescriptions as to the causes of wealth and technology differentials between the nations of Western Europe and North America, and most of those of Africa, Asia and Latin America. As a result of this interest, a number of research paradigms have been formulated to this end. One standard point of departure for the development models is that in order for development to take place there must first be economic growth. Growth is seen as a necessary quantitative accumulation of surpluses that would eventually be transmuted qualitatively into development. One basic assumption that the development theorists made was that mechanisms had to be developed that maximized output in society's two major sectors: the agricultural and the industrial. It was argued that the developed world (mainly Northern hemisphere Western nations) was industrialized and demonstrated regular economic growth, while the developing world was primarily agricultural and experienced difficulties demonstrating economic growth. In this

regard, development was seen predominantly as a matter of economics, thereby yielding theory construction to theorists in economics who normally analyzed the problematic of development from within the theoretical assumptions of their own particular paradigms. Thus theorists in development (I name just a few) viewed the problem of development from the standpoint of classical or neoclassical economics (Hirshman 1958; Lewis 1955), Marxian political economy (Baran 1957), sociological theory (Rostow 1960), Dependency Theory (Prebisch 1950; Frank 1967; Furtado 1963; Emmanuel 1972; Amin 1974), and more recently critical development theory (Pieterse 2001).

What is also evident from a consultation of the research efforts on matters of development is that the vast majority of the researchers are based in the research institutes of the developed world and determined by the need for 'analytical tractability' and an ignoring of the fact that 'the human economic agents who are objects of interpretation and understanding do not represent inconcrete and disconnected entities 'out there' in the sense of being isolated from their environment in space and time, or from the theoretical and empirical constructs of would-be interpreters' (David 1997:217).

In what follows, I will offer brief analyses and discussions of the main theories of development so as to demonstrate how they differ fundamentally from the theory I have sketched above. The theories in question are the neoclassical theory, dependency theory, poststructuralism, and developmentalism.

Neoclassical Economic Theory

The literature on the economics of contemporary development theory is dominated by theorists who have been schooled in what is called neoclassical economics. With the development of the modern social sciences as separate disciplines dating from the mid-eighteenth century, the theory of economics evolved from its classical phase into neoclassical economics, founded on the idea that economic decision making should be studied as rigorously as possible with appeal to the quantitative methods of mathematics. In its present guise, the neoclassical paradigm views itself as decidedly objective and scientific, given its reliance on a set of fundamental axioms and mathematical derivations. On account of its commitment to a scientific orientation, its theorists argue that its strictly scientific side represents positive economics, while its applied or policy side should be viewed as normative or welfare economics.

In this regard, neoclassical economics may be viewed as a species of engineering with its fundamental axioms that stress consumer sovereignty, transparent markets, transitive preferences that are conformed to by the ideal construct, *homo oeconomicus* or 'economic man'. But what is remarkable about this construct, to whom all the postulates, axioms and theorems of neoclassical economics apply, is that its behaviour is motivated only to 'maximize expected utility subject to real costs constraints' according to a prescribed postulate of rationality. His behaviour is a function only of one value judgment, that of maximization or gain. It is according to this foundational theory that the majority of the economists at the IMF and World Bank formulate and implement policy. In this regard, economics as a science has no tolerance for considerations regarding politics, sociology or the value judgmental considerations of political economy. The stated justification for this approach is that economics is first and foremost a scientific discipline and that its primary operational goals are results based on efficiency rather than on normative considerations such as equity.

But is neoclassical economics a science? Science, as it is defined, consists of a set of empirically testable theories whose function is to predict and explain experiential phenomena in the world. To these ends, scientific theories must rely on general laws expressible in quantitative or structurally discrete terms. Neoclassical economics offers the appearance of a science given its explanatory models founded on mathematical propositions. But appearance is not necessarily reality. Epistemological concerns have been raised about the predictive accuracy of neoclassical theories and the fact that some theorists have argued that the realism of a theory's assumptions is not important in determining its scientific content (Friedman 1953). This would be acceptable on instrumentalist grounds if the predictions of the theory in question were actually borne out. But as mentioned above, the predictive record of neoclassical theories have not been encouraging. It seems rather that neoclassical economics as any discipline dealing theoretically with human behaviour is necessarily founded on value judgments in the service of some chosen orientation. In this connection, neoclassical economics serves as the evaluative basis for neoliberal market economics as it presents itself as being universally valid on essentially scientific grounds. But it must be recognized that the economic behaviour of humans on strictly empirical grounds reduces to aspects of sociology or anthropology reflective of the cultural values invoked by them as they barter and exchange items among themselves. For example, the culturally derived exchange habits of some society might eschew the principle of

interest altogether, while the whole dynamic of neoclassical market economics is founded on the idea that 'interest' is its major catalyst. In this regard, let us view neoclassical economics not as an universal science, but rather as a research anthropological paradigm reflective of the historical cultures of the societies of Western Europe. This is an important constraint for those who would wish to employ this particular paradigm in the service of development for contemporary Africa. For example, the relatively large amounts of debt owed by the nations of Africa to the IMF and Western banks are based on the extending of credit based on initial considerations of interest. What this means, of course, is that the fundamental principle of neoclassical economics is that of self interest.

Key Applications of Neoclassical Economic Theory

It is instructive to discuss at this point some of the key theoretical models within the context of development theory and to demonstrate their relative ineffectiveness with regard to general economic development. Following the work of J.M. Keynes, who argued that an economy can achieve equilibrium at much less than full employment of labour resources, the theoretical question became: What role should government play in stimulating economic growth so that the maximum amount of labour resources be employed? The research programme that developed around Keynes's arguments became known as Keynesian economics. Given that the perceived problem with underdeveloped economies was that of lack of adequate and sustained growth, attempts were made by Western theorists to formulate the problem and solution in theoretical terms. In this regard, two neoclassical models became popular: 1) the Harrod-Domar (H-D) model and the Solow growth model and 2) the Lewis growth model.

In brief, given the assumption of general production functions $Y=F(\text{Capital, Labour, Technological Knowledge...})$, the Harrod-Domar model ($G=s/C$) claimed that the growth rate was a function of the relationship between the rate of savings and the Capital-Output ratio. This model was then tuned to the important issue of the warranted (necessary rate for constant growth) rate of growth and actual rates of growth. But the observed dynamics of the neoclassical economy showed that there were serious concerns about the accuracy of Keynes's famous Savings = Investment recipe for growth. Market economies did not grow in strict linear fashion but rather along quasi-sinusoidal lines because of the fact that dynamic growth was periodically compromised by overcapacity and under-capacity of labour resources. Later modifications to this model were attempted by Robert Solow who formulated what became known as the

Solow growth model (Solow 1970). Solow focused on the issue of technology and argued that changing technologies was a better guarantor of constant growth than was suggested by the H-D model.

The problematic with these growth models is that they were more suited to the industrialized world than those areas where there was a constant shortage of capital whose provenance was not indigenous. With regard to the developing world, the established growth models had little relevance except maybe to demonstrate that growth was maximally an affair of macroeconomic policies. Similar criticisms could be leveled against the Lewis model that argued that the best path to growth was the utilization of surplus rural labour in the industrializing urban sectors which would in turn be the recipient of capital inputs from the industrialized world. The empirical evidence shows that this two sector growth model proved not to be viable. The reason is that the industrialized world was not prepared to help in creating competitors from areas that traditionally produced cheap agricultural goods.

Dependency Theory

While neoclassical economic theory produced unworkable models of economic development, its intellectual nemesis, Marxism, sought to approach the problem of development from its theory of exploitation. Dependency theory, in general, explains development as being constrained by the unequal exchange relationships that exist between the nations that are developed and those that are viewed as developing. The literature on dependency theory is substantial, so it would be preferable to list just the more important figures. Prebisch (1950), Baran (1957), Frank (1966), Amin (1974), et al. are some of the better known theorists. But it should be pointed out that the issue of dependency in its broadest sense of political economy and sociology was better explicated by theorists such as Nkrumah (1965) and Fanon (1968), speaking for the African continent. What is instructive about dependency theory is that it points out that development is virtually impossible, given present existing structural relations between the industrialized nations and their ex-colonies. While neoclassical theory is shorn of all historical and sociological context, dependency theory is founded on the historical and sociological dynamic that determines the existing structural relationships between the industrialized and the non-industrialized.

The general theme is that of unequal exchange with the industrialized nations deriving surpluses from their relationships with the non-industrialized. It points out the role of the IMF, World Bank, weak currencies

and the political pressures employed to maintain the unequal relationships. It is in this context that political economy is a better analytical tool than neoclassical economics. Dependency theorists argue, in general, that the solution to the problem would derive from revolutionary activity with workers in the vanguard with the ultimate goal being some version of socialism. Yet this has not yet been tried in the vast areas of economic underdevelopment. The only possible exceptions are China and Vietnam. Cuba has made some progress, but its political situation is problematic. Furthermore, it has been unable to move from a predominantly agricultural society to one of some industrial and technological development. Yet it must be noted that its research and production in pharmaceuticals have been impressive. The neoclassical market theorists point, on the other hand, to the East Asian nations of Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia as nations that have demonstrated movement towards industrialization. But this development took place only because of great amounts of capital from the United States coordinating with investments in human capital. But these large inputs of capital were injected by the West for purely political reasons in its conflict with the communist nations, especially the Soviet Union and China. The problem of development is not a difficult problem to explain. The question is, From where would the instruments to transform the existing situation come? In the final analysis, things reduce to a question of ethics: Would capital be forthcoming on grounds of a 'win-win' situation for all, or would it be forthcoming only in terms of self-interest for those who provide it? If history should serve as precedent, then Africa is obliged to provide its own capital in whatever creative ways it can.

In response to this approach based on hard realism one may point to the touted successes of the microfinancing of small enterprises by the Grameen bank of Bangladesh as a potential escape from the impasses of development theory in practice. But the results here are too negligible, even though useful. Such efforts do not really deal with key structural problems such as unequal exchange and the actual political economy of underdevelopment. The World Bank can easily finance with positive and genuine monitoring, hundreds of projects requiring minimal amounts of capital. But it does not do so because the providers of international capital make economic decisions purely according to principles of political *real politik* and zero-sum game considerations. That is why development in the case of Africa must ultimately be based on the indigenous formulation and analysis of bold and innovative paradigms.

Post-Structuralism and Developmentalism

While dependency theory is essentially the theoretical enterprise of political economists of the non-industrialized world, the development issue in the West itself has developed a kind of trendy aura. Development has now been transformed into 'sustainable growth and development' and the need to 'reduce poverty' in so-called 'Third World' nations. Post-structuralism is the most convenient label for this approach to development, given that it is based on fluid and inchoate structural analysis. In this regard, there is room not only for large projects but for mini-projects administered by the proliferation of what are called NGOs. But in general this approach is reformist. It does not seek radical transformations in the relationship between the industrialized world and the non-industrialized world. Post-structuralism may be seen as just variations on the Peace Corps theme: small scale volunteer work for those who seek the 'exotic' while they prepare for something else to do when they return to their respective metropolises. In sum, this modernist version of development transports the latest fads from the industrialized world to the developing world, hence, its tendency to focus on issues piece-meal such as gender rights, environmental and ecological concerns, food security and the ever increasingly popular 'sustainable development' (Pieterse 2001). This is not to deny the importance of such issues, but implicit in these new approaches is the idea that genuine development that would lead to an Africa on par technologically with the West is not something they consider seriously.

Developmentalism is merely the name used by those who accept poststructuralist discourse and seek to counter the traditional view of development as leading to 'progress' and 'modernism'. In this regard, developmentalism is seen as embodying a 'hegemonic discourse' that would include all strands in the critique of the idea of development itself. But some authors argue that there is a progressive side to developmentalism that includes theories that argue for 'different trajectories of development of dependent societies(as with dependency theory) and advocate different logics of development for different societies(as with democratic Marxism)' with the purported goal of empowering the poor(Peet 1999:155). Thus for Peet it would be problematic to lump this approach with 'neoclassical economics, modernization theory, and World Bank policies'(Peet 1999:155). In this regard, individuals who are engaged in radical practice are much more important than 'poststructural philosophers who meet in the salons of Paris....' (Peet 1999:155). It is in this context that one must understand the post-developmental theories that deal with 'gender and

development', 'critical modernism', 'radical democracy', and 'alternative development'. Admittedly the ideas expressed in these theories may be useful, but there is an evident problematic. None of these theories emanate from the areas where development is needed most. Thus the idea of hegemonic discourse remains. For genuine development to take place, the presumed subaltern must have the principal voice.

Development and Real Constraints

Despite the plethora of theories and disquisitions on the question of development in Africa there are real constraints that militate against easy solutions. The post-colonial legacy of Africa is one in which the continent is truncated into a large number of relatively small states which do not have effective agency to operate politically or economically in the world. The Washington Consensus is naturally at loggerheads with the theoretical telos of the African Union in the image of Kwame Nkrumah. The real implementation of a Pan-African telos is thwarted first of all by mentalities frozen in colonial time as the continued existence of 'francophonie' and 'Commonwealth' suggest. But there is an ongoing dynamic in which minds and resources are struggled over and competed for. Frantz Fanon explicated the African colonial and post-colonial ethos and dynamic, Cheikh Anta Diop reestablished the African past according to its own internal logic while Kwame Nkrumah formulated the general outline for Africa's historical telos. Thus an adequate theory of African development exists but constraints against implementation are maintained both internally and externally. The draconian dictates from the West's economic taskmasters in the form of the IMF and World Bank constitute the external constraints. The internal constraints are maintained by Africa's intellectually catatonic and psychologically ahistorical neocolonial classes, creatures all of metropolitan post-colonial culture.

It is the mental structures created in post-colonial time that prevent Africa's neocolonial classes from recognizing, for example, that the principles of economic transactions that govern international economics are merely normative rules reflective of Western culture. Critical analysis would make it evident that Western bank credit is created out of thin air and that the so-called 'hard currencies' of the West are made of the same paper that African currencies are made of. There seems to be a reluctance to believe that an intra-African currency could be created in exactly the same way that the European Union created the euro. In their intellectually catatonic state, Africa's neocolonial classes merely sit back and await the next bit of 'advice' from the West which they then hasten to implement in uncritical fashion.

Conclusion

The history of the world could be seen as one in which humans *by their very nature* have sought to increase their freedoms by improving on their understanding and control of the forces of nature for their own ends. These attempts at understanding and control were always effected by appeal to the dual epistemologies of metaphysics and empirical technology. And instead of being beholden to nature and its caprices, humans have constantly and persistently sought to increase their agencies, hence, their freedoms by understanding how nature actually works. This understanding of nature has always been the major task of metaphysics (the transcendental) in its various forms and what we now call empirical science (limited to the sensory world). But humans have also sought to increase their freedoms within their social structures over time, *pari passu*, as they expressed their increasing freedoms in their explorations of nature. This could be what is meant by 'development'. In this regard, Africa has been at the forefront of this human journey for most of human history. Only in the last 2,000 years or so out of a history of at least 150,000 years have individuals who migrated to other parts of the globe been able to claim knowledge and technological ascendance over the African continent. But even so, the foundations of such knowledge derive ultimately from Africa.

In this paper, the issue of development was approached from a somewhat different position. The normal position is that not only is Africa perpetually 'developing', but also that it was never developed and that the best advice could come only from the theoreticians of those societies deemed as 'developed'. It was shown, however, that historically, Africa was for a long period of time the most developed area of the globe and that the arguments of underdevelopment apply to a relatively recent period. It was also pointed out that an Africa at the vanguard of development would not resemble the technologically advanced nations of the West in the nature in terms of civil society, government, and state structure. The reason is that the political histories of Africa's societies are different from those of Europe. But in addition to the main positions taken in this essay, an Africa in the vanguard of development would be one structured along Pan-African lines with federal states linked together with free and untrammelled trade and travel. The general point is that development in Africa would entail maximal amounts of African agency on parity with other continental groupings. Thus Africa's languages, currencies, and status in international organizations would be on par with those of the other continents and areas. This specific configuration of Africa is usually overlooked by most theorists. For such theorists the future of Africa is to

be determined by the shallow ministrations of 'experts' and NGO cohorts of Western origin. It is evident therefore that the issue of development for Africa should be primarily the responsibility of Africa's theoreticians. It is incumbent on them that they be constantly aware of Africa's technological, sociological, and economic history. They should also be vigilant epistemologists in their appraisals of the myriad theories of development that emanate continuously from the think tanks of the West.

Bibliography

- Amin, S., 1974, *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Baran, P., 1957, *The Political Economy of Economic Growth*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Biel, R., 2000, *The New Imperialism—The Crisis and Contradictions in North/South Relations*, London, Zed Books.
- David, W. L., 1997, *The Conversation of Economic Development—Historical Voices, Interpretations and Reality*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe.
- Diop, C.A., 1987, *Precolonial Black Africa*, New York, Lawrence Hill Books.
- Diop, C.A., 1991, *Civilization or Barbarism—An Authentic Anthropology*, New York, Lawrence Hill Books.
- Emmanuel, A., 1972, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*, New York, Monthly Review Press.
- Fanon, F., 1968, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press.
- Frank, A.G., 1967, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Friedman, M., 1953, *Essays in Positive Economics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Furtado, C., 1963, *The Economic Growth of Brazil*, Berkeley CA, The University of California Press.
- Green, R. and Seidman A., 1968, *Unity or Poverty? The Economics of Pan-Africanism*, Baltimore MD, Penguin Books.
- Hirshman, A., 1958, *A Strategy of Economic Development*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.
- Ibn Khaldun, 1868, *Prolegomenes Historiques*, translated Slane, 3 vols., Paris.
- Klein, R.G., 1989, *The Human Career—Human Biological and Cultural Origins*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Lewis, W.A., 1955, *The Theory of Economic Growth*, London, Allen and Unwin
- List, F., 1983, *The Natural System of Political Economy*, London, Frank Cass.
- McBrearty, S. and Brooks, A.S., 2000, 'The Revolution that Wasn't: A New Interpretation of the Origin of Modern Human Behaviour', *Journal of Human Evolution*, Vol. 39, No. 5, pp. 453-563.

- Miller, D., 1997, 'Ironworking Technology', in J.O. Vogel, ed., *Encyclopedia of Precolonial Africa*, London, Altamira Press.
- Nkrumah, K., 1965, *Neocolonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, London, Heinemann.
- Peet, R. and Hardwick, E., 1999, *Theories of Development*, New York, Guilford Press.
- Pieterse, J. N., 2001, *Development Theory—Deconstructions/Reconstructions*, London, Sage Publications.
- Prebisch, R., 1960, *Economic Development for Latin America and Its Principal Problems*, New York, United Nations.
- Rostow, W. W., 1960, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Roussakis, E.N., 1968, *Freidrich List, The Zollverein, and the Uniting of Europe*. Bruges, Belgium, College of Europe.
- Solow, R.M., 1970, *Growth Theory and Exposition*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Stiglitz, J. E., and Hoff, K., 2001, 'Modern Economic Theory and Development', in G.M. Meir and J.E. Stiglitz, eds., *Frontiers of Development Economics*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 389-459.



Africa Development, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004, pp. 161–184

© Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004
(ISSN 0850-3907)

A Relevant Education for African Development—Some Epistemological Considerations

Francis B. Nyamnjoh*

Abstract

This paper argues that education in Africa is the victim of a Western epistemological export that takes the form of science as ideology and hegemony. Under the Western epistemological export, education in Africa and/or for Africans has been like a pilgrimage to the Kilimanjaro of Western intellectual ideals, the tortuous route to Calvary for alternative ways of life. Sometimes, with rhetorical justification about the need to be competitive internationally, the practice has been for the elite to model education in Africa after educational institutions in the West, with little attempt at domestication. Education in Africa has been and mostly remains a journey fuelled by an exogenously induced and internalised sense of inadequacy in Africans, and endowed with the mission of devaluation or annihilation of African creativity, agency and value systems. Such cultural estrangement has served to reinforce in Africans self-devaluation and self-hatred and a profound sense of inferiority that in turn compels them to 'lighten their darkness' both physically and metaphysically for Western gratification. The paper argues that the future of higher education in Africa can only be hopeful through a meticulous and creative process of cultural restitution and indigenisation even as African scholars continue to cooperate and converse with intellectual bedfellows in the West and elsewhere. If Africa is to be party to a global conversation of universities and scholars, it is only appropriate that it does so on its own terms, with the interests and concerns of ordinary Africans as the guiding principle.

Résumé

Le présent article pose comme postulat que l'éducation en Afrique est victime d'une exportation épistémologique qui présente la science comme idéologie et hégémonie. Conformément à cette logique d'exportation épistémologique occidentale, l'éducation en Afrique et/ou pour les Africains est comparable à un

* Head of Publications, CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal.

pèlerinage au Kilimanjaro des idéaux intellectuels du Nord, comme le chemin tortueux du calvaire, à la recherche désespérée de moyens de survie. Parfois, sur la base d'une rhétorique justificative quant à la nécessité d'être compétitif sur le plan international, la pratique pour l'élite a toujours été de calquer l'éducation en Afrique sur le modèle des institutions éducatives de l'occident, sans le moindre effort d'adaptation. L'éducation en Afrique a toujours été et demeure largement un parcours alimenté par un sens d'inadéquation induit et intériorisé de manière exogène chez les Africains, avec pour mission d'annihiler le sens créatif, le dynamisme et les systèmes de valeur des Africains. Cette aliénation culturelle n'a servi qu'à cristalliser chez l'Africain le sentiment d'auto dévaluation et de haine contre soi-même, ainsi qu'un profond sentiment d'infériorité qui à son tour l'oblige à «éclaircir sa noirceur» tant physique que métaphysique pour faire plaisir à l'occident. Cet article soutient que l'avenir de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique ne peut être prometteur que s'il subit un processus de restitution et d'inculturation culturelle méticuleux et créatif, bien que les intellectuels africains continuent de collaborer et de converser avec des collègues intellectuels du Nord et d'ailleurs. Si l'Afrique souhaite participer au débat mondial des universités et des intellectuels, il n'est que convenable qu'elle le fasse en ses propres termes, avec pour principe directeur les intérêts et les préoccupations de l'Africain ordinaire.

Introduction

Development for Africa is a theme fraught with a multiplicity of Western-generated ideas, models and research paradigms, all with the purported goal of 'alleviating poverty'. This discourse is carried on mainly by economists and other social scientists who limit the question of development to the problematic of achieving economic growth within the context of neo-liberal economic principles. Notwithstanding the fact that there are now novel paradigms of development that search for solutions under the theoretical rubric of 'alternative development', the problem is rarely studied in a holistic manner.

One of the important aspects of economic growth and development is investment in human capital, or more simply put, investment in education. But education is not just the inculcation of facts as knowledge but a set of values that in turn appraise the knowledge being acquired. When the values are not appropriate for progress, the knowledge acquired is rendered irrelevant and becomes merely cosmetic. In this paper I propose to show how the values acquired during the colonial era that teach the superiority of the West have set the tone for the imbibing of knowledge. The obvious result is that the knowledge needed for African development is rendered irrelevant by a dysfunctional set of values. In this regard, development in Africa is greatly hindered and retarded. Hence, the need for Africa to revisit the dominant epistemological underpinnings of Western education

that are not always sensitive to the predicaments and expectations of ordinary Africans.

Dominant and Dormant Epistemologies in Africa

In a recent publication, I raised the issue of the problematic nature of the dominant Western epistemological export to Africa in connection with witchcraft and the occult (cf. Nyamnjoh 2001). The export reduces science to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' preoccupation with theories of *what* the universe is, much to the detriment of theories of *why* the universe is. By rendering science 'too technical and mathematical', this epistemology has made it difficult for those interested in questions of *why* to keep pace with developments in scientific theories (cf. Hawking 1990:171–175), and increased the risk of branding as 'intellectual imposture' the appropriation of scientific concepts by philosophers and other 'non-scientists' (cf. Sokal and Bricmont 1998). Such a narrow view of science has tended to separate the universe into the physical and the metaphysical or the religious, and to ignore the fact that people are ordinarily 'not content to see events as unconnected and inexplicable'. In other words, this epistemology has little room for popular cravings to understand 'the underlying order in the world' (cf. Hawking 1990:1–13). Although science has since moved beyond this limited version to contemplate 'the big bang and black holes', and 'a quantum theory of gravity' (cf. Hawking 1990), its narrow and hegemonic 'certainties' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to make waves and to inform the social sciences, attitudes, policies and relations in general, especially between the West and the rest.

I have argued that this Western epistemological export has serious weaknesses, especially when compared with the popular and more traditional epistemologies of the African continent. It tends to limit reality to appearances, which it then seeks to justify (without explaining) with meta-narratives claiming objectivity and a more epistemologically secure truth status. Under this kind of epistemology, reality is presented as anything whose existence has, or can be, established in a rational, objective manner, with universal laws operating only in perceived space and time. In the social sciences, such a perspective has resulted in an insensitive pursuit of a *physique sociale*, informed almost exclusively by what the mind (Reason) and/or the hierarchy of senses (sight, taste, touch, sound, smell) tell us about society and social relationships. The science inspired by such an epistemology has tended to celebrate dichotomies, dualisms, teleologies and analogies, dismissing anything that does not make sense

in Cartesian or behaviourist terms, confining to religion and metaphysics what it cannot explain and disqualifying as non-scientific more inclusive epistemologies. The world is perceived and presented as dichotomous: there is the real and the unreal. The real is the rational, the natural, the physical and the scientific; the unreal is the irrational, the supernatural, the religious, the metaphysical and the subjective. This epistemology's logic is simple: if truth is one and universal, then there should be a one best way of attaining it; and those who have been there before are the best guides of the rest still in search of truth. This evokes the image of a Jacob's ladder to Heaven, where those highest up the rungs are best placed to tell everyone else what paradise is or could be. We may all be blind and animated by partial theories—like 'the six blind men and the elephant', but some are more likely to claim authority and to silence others about the nature of the universe and the underlying order of things, thanks to the hierarchy of blindness made explicit in this epistemology.

This dominant epistemology has engendered theories and practices of social engineering capable of justifying without explanation almost everything, from colonialism to neoliberalism, through racism and imperialism. Whole societies, countries and regions have been categorised, depending on how these 'others' were perceived in relation to Western Cartesian rationalism and empiricism. The epistemology has resulted in disciplines and fields of studies that have sacrificed morality, humanity and the social on the altar of a false objectivity. In other words, it has allowed the insensitivities of power and comfort to assume the moral high ground, dictating to the marginalised and the disabled, and preaching salvation for individuals and groups who repent from 'retrogressive' attitudes, cultures and practices. As an epistemology that claims the status of a solution, there is little room for introspection or self-scrutiny, since countervailing forces are invariably to blame for failure. The assumption is made here that such messianic qualities have imbued disciples of this epistemology with an attitude of arrogance, superiority and intolerance towards *creative* difference and appropriation. The zeal in them to convert creative difference has not excluded violence as an option, for the epistemology from which they draw knows neither compromise nor negotiation, nor conviviality. To paraphrase Okot p'Bitek, the ways of your ancestors may be good and solid with roots that reach deep into the soil, their customs neither hollow, nor thin, nor easily breakable or blown away by the winds; but this does not deter the epistemology and its disciples from inviting you to despise these ancestral customs and world view, in favour of foreign customs you may not even understand or admire (p'Bitek

1989:19). Because this epistemology is closely entangled with ideology and hegemony, it leaves little room for critical thinking even as it celebrates Cartesian rationalism. The result, quite paradoxically, is an emphasis on doing rather than thinking, and all attempts at serious questioning are rationalised away. This is well captured by Okot p'Bitek in the following excerpt from his *Song of Lawino*:

My Husband
Has read at Makerere University.
He has read deeply and widely,
But if you ask him a question
He says
You are insulting him;
He opens up with a quarrel
He begins to look down upon you
Saying
You ask questions
That are a waste of time!

He says
My questions are silly questions,
Typical questions from village girls.
Questions of uneducated people,
Useless questions from untutored minds.

My husband says
I have a tiny little brain
And it is not trained,
I cannot see things intelligently,
I cannot see things sharply.
He says
Even if he tried
To answer my questions
I would not understand
What he was saying
Because the language he speaks
Is different from mine
So that even if he
Spoke to me in Acoli
I would still need an interpreter.

My husband says
 Some of the answers
 Cannot be given in Acoli
 Which is a primitive language
 And is not rich enough
 To express his deep wisdom.
 He says the Acoli language
 Has very few words
 It is not like the white man's language
 Which is rich and very beautiful
 A Language fitted for discussing deep thoughts.

Ocol says
 He has no time to waste
 Discussing things with a thing like me
 Who has not been to school.
 He says
 A university man
 Can only have useful talk
 With another university man or woman.
 And that it is funny,
 That he should stoop so low
 Even to listen
 To my questions (p'Bitek 1989:65-66).

Popular epistemologies in Africa are different. They create room for *why* questions, and for 'magical interpretations' where there are no obvious explanations to 'material realities' (cf. Moore and Sanders 2001). To them, reality is more than meets the eye; it is larger than logic. Far from subscribing to the rigid dichotomies of the dominant epistemological import from the West, the popular epistemologies of Africa build bridges between the so-called natural and supernatural, physical and metaphysical, rational and irrational, objective and subjective, scientific and superstitious, visible and invisible, real and unreal, explainable and inexplicable; making it impossible for anything to be one without also being the other. They constitute an epistemological order where the sense of *sight* and *physical evidence* has not assumed the same centrality, dominance or dictatorship evident in the Western export's 'hierarchies of perceptual faculties' (van Dijk and Pels 1996: 248-251). It has equal space for all the senses, just as it does for the visible and the invisible, the physical and metaphysical. The real is not only what is observable or what makes cognitive sense; it is also the invisible, the emotional, the sentimental or the inexplicable (Okri 1991). In

this epistemological order, emphasis is on the whole, and truth is negotiated, something consensual, not the result of artificial disqualification, dismemberment, atomisation or mutilation by a science of exclusion.

In this popular system of knowledge, the opposite or complement of presence is not necessarily absence, but invisibility. Thus, as Mbembe (1997) argues, understanding the visible is hardly complete without investigating the invisible. We misunderstand the world if we ‘consider the obverse and the reverse of the world as two opposite sides, with the former partaking of a ‘being there’ (*real presence*) and the latter as ‘being elsewhere’ or a ‘non-being’ (*irremediable absence*) or, worse, of the order of unreality’ (Mbembe 1997:152). The obverse and its reverse are also linked by similarities which do not make them mere copies of each other, but which unite and at the same time distinguish themselves according to the African ‘principle of *simultaneous multiplicities*’ (Mbembe 1997:152). In other words, far from merely being the other side, the mask or substitute, of the visible, the invisible is in the visible, and vice versa, ‘not as a matter of artifice, but as *one and the same* and as external reality simultaneously—or as the image of the thing and the imagined thing at the same time’ (Mbembe 1997:152). The questions here, of course, are, What role could Africa’s less restrictive epistemologies play in the issue of development, and has not the wholesale import of the modern West’s epistemology so ensnared the dominant class elements of African society that they treat it as if it were some kind of invincible magic? Nowhere is this more evident than in the African attitudes to the educational systems and values of the West that exist in the European world and are transplanted directly onto African soil.

Education as Cultural Violence in Africa

The Western epistemological export, translated into educational systems and curricula, takes the form of science as ideology and hegemony. Under it, education in Africa and/or for Africans is like a pilgrimage to the Kilimanjaro of Western intellectual ideals, but also the tortuous route to Calvary for alternative ways of life (cf. p’Bitek 1989; Ngugi wa Thiongo 1986; Mazrui 1986, 2001; Mamdani 1990, 1993; Copans 1990; Rwomire 1992; van Rinsum 2001). The value of education in Africa is best understood in comparison with the soft currencies of the continent. Just as even the most stable of these currencies are pegged and used to taking nosedives in relation to the hard currencies of the West over the years, so has the value of education on the continent. And just as African presidents prefer to beg and bank in foreign currencies—ignoring even banknotes

that bear their own faces and stamp of omnipotence, so is their preference for the Western intellectual and expert over locally produced expertise. Sometimes with justifying rhetoric on the need to be competitive internationally, the practice since independence has been to model education in Africa after educational institutions in the West, with each country drawing from the institutions of the immediate past coloniser, and/or from the USA (Crossman and Devisch 1999:20–23; Mazrui 2001:39–45). The elite have, ‘often in unabashed imitateness’ and with little attempt at domestication, sought to reproduce, even without the finances to sustain, the Oxfords, Cambridges, Harvards, Stanfords and Sorbonnes of England, the USA and France (cf. Mazrui 2001:39–8). Some, like the late Presidents Banda of Malawi, and Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d’Ivoire, have sometimes carried this craving to ridiculous proportions, seeking to be identified exclusively by euophilia in education and consumption. Education in Africa has been and mostly remains a journey fuelled by an exogenously induced and internalised sense of inadequacy in Africans, and endowed with the mission of devaluation or annihilation of African creativity, agency and value systems. Such ‘cultural estrangement’ has served to reinforce in the Africans self-devaluation and self-hatred and a profound sense of inferiority that in turn compels them to ‘lighten their darkness’ both physically and metaphysically for Western gratification (Fanon 1967:169). Nyang has captured this predicament as ‘a pathological case of xenophilia’, whereby Africans are brought to value things Western ‘not for their efficacy but simply because of their foreignness’ (Nyang 1994:434), and persuaded to consume to death their creativity and dignity, their very own humanity (cf. Soyinka 1994).

This process of culturally uprooting Africans, has been achieved often through literally uprooting children of the well-off from their communities and nurturing them in boarding schools, ‘almost like potted plants in green houses’ (Mamdani 1990:3). ‘*The European Other* haunts the *African Self* from a young age in a post-colonial school’ (Mazrui 2001:41). Okot p’Bitek captures this reality eloquently through Lawino, protagonist in his *Song of Lawino*, who laments the fate of young men who have lost their manhood in classrooms where ‘their testicles were smashed with large books!’ Even her husband, rendered blind by the libraries of white men, has lost his dignity and authority by behaving ‘like a dog of the white man’, lying by the door to ‘keep guard while waiting for left-overs’ from the master’s table. Her husband has lost his ‘fire’ and bull-like prowess, and has succumbed to living on borrowed food, wearing borrowed clothes, and using his ideas, actions and behaviour ‘to please somebody else’. He may

have read extensively and deeply and can challenge the white men in his knowledge of their books and their ancestors of the intellect, but to Lawino, this has come at a great price: '...the reading has killed my man, in the ways of his people. He has become a stump. He abuses all things Acoli, he says the ways of black people are black' (p'Bitek 1989:91-96).

Examples abound of African countries where a foreign visitor in the heart of the 'African jungle' suddenly finds him/herself surrounded by a group of Latin speaking lads and lasses, who are ready to challenge his/her 'Westernness' with classical knowledge of Aristotle, Caesar, Plato, Shakespeare and other symbols of Western intellectual and cultural traditions. These mini-Etons (Sorbonnes, Oxfords, Cambridges, Harvards, Stanfords) in the bush are set up by europhiles eager to stay competitive internationally or simply to demonstrate excellence in the knowledge systems of the West, by measuring up. They spend a sizable portion of the enfeebled national budgets on tutors imported from the West and paid European rates, to instruct the children of the well-off on how to excel in what is often irrelevant locally. In the long run, neither the children of the lowly and poor, who in effect cannot afford the same chance to excel in this type of xenophilia, nor the children of the well-off schooled in such appetites, are in a position to contribute towards solving Africa's pressing problems in a way meaningful to the bulk of the population. The latter, having spent all their time learning to do what they do not need, and the former, having been relegated to pose as custodians of dying traditions which the elite shun, and which at best, are thought of only as a means of 'base' entertainment by the urban-centred elite and their foreign guests and tourists. If and when there is any attempt at domestication, this is hardly pushed beyond the point where students are force-fed by state-appointed pro-establishment professors and administrators doctored versions of culture and history celebrating the heroic feats of so-called *founding fathers* and/or the dominant groupings of their 'nation-states'.

From independence to date, 'African universities have been successful in Africanising their personnel but not their curricula or pedagogical structures to any real extent' (Crossman and Devisch 1999:11). The assumption has been that because one *is* or *appears* African, one is necessarily going to be critical of Western intellectual traditions and rituals in one's teaching and research, and would offer a menu more sensitive to local realities than what is served in Western academic institutions. But this is far from being the case, as even the hundreds of universities created after independence have stayed 'triumphantly universalistic and uncompromisingly foreign' to local cultures, populations and predicaments

(cf. Mamdani 1993:11–15). There has been little effort at domestication or ‘an epistemological shift’ informed by the ‘awareness that the site—or community-specific knowledges tie in with the grammatical and lexical structures of a given language, local cosmologies and worldviews’ that ‘must be allowed to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the universalistic stance and some of the essentialist fixities of modern science’ (Devisch 2002:7). The reality is a double alienation, first by ill-adapted academic traditions internalised through an education of extraversion, and second by repressive state structures.

A good case in point of excellence at irrelevance in education is provided by the late Kamuzu Banda’s Malawi. In a BBC television documentary broadcast 9.30 pm, Tuesday, September 8, 1987, Malawi was singled out as an example of a country which had established a school that resembled Eton of England. The school, named Kamuzu Academy, was situated in the Kasungu District in the Central Region of Malawi, President Banda’s home area. This school, nicknamed by some critics ‘Eton of the Bush’, was built in 1981, and imported all its education equipment from the UK and South Africa. When the school was short of chemicals or other equipment, those concerned had to drive for at least five hundred miles to acquire new ones. The school had cost no less than 15 million British pounds to build, and needed not less than 1 million pounds a year to run. The students, whose table manners would put many a working class Briton to shame, were made to believe that no one is truly educated unless s/he knows something about the ancient world, which should not be mistaken to mean the ancestral world of the African (pregnant with primitive savagery and to be treated with disdain), but the world of Julius Caesar, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and other founding fathers of Western intellectual traditions.

If ancestors are supposed to lay the path for posterity, inviting Africans to forget their ancestors was an invitation for them to be born again and socialised afresh, in the image of the West, using Western-type academic institutions and rituals of ancestral worship. This renewal, in tune with Western values and institutions is achieved, by the West

promoting beliefs and values congenial to [its dominance]; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself (Eagleton 1991:5-6, original emphasis).

Only through such strategies of legitimating could the West 'wipe the blackboard clean' by turning its African students into slaves of Western definitions (cf. van Rinsum 2001). As Eagleton argues, since nobody is ever 'wholly mystified' or 'a complete dupe', an ideology can only succeed if those it characterises as inferior actually learn to be inferior. 'It is not enough for a woman or colonial subject to be defined as a lower form of life. They must be actively *taught* this definition, and some of them prove to be brilliant graduates in this process' (Eagleton 1991:xv, original emphasis).

All teachers in Kamuzu Academy were white, recruited directly from Britain, and, of course, paid British rates at a time when few local teachers could make ends meet with their own salaries in soft local currencies. As Mazrui noted of the entire continent a year before the BBC documentary was broadcast, commitment and the sense of vocation were dwindling among teachers in Africa, who were 'often underpaid and in some countries they were not paid at all for months on end', and who were sometimes forced 'to look for moonlighting opportunities to give them an additional livelihood' (Mazrui 1986:204). Meanwhile, in Malawi, imported teachers on three-year contracts lived in European-style bungalows with salaries in hard currencies. Little has changed for good, much for worse. Almost everywhere, the consultancy syndrome has triumphed over traditional academic values such as excellence in teaching, research and publication. University professors who have failed to migrate, are forced to postpone academic excellence to a later date. 'They would rather not be wasting their time publishing and perishing', and even the most inspiring of them 'are working under conditions that stymie their creativity and fail to challenge their students' (Onyejekwe 1993:3).

English was and still is the main language of instruction at the Kamuzu Academy. Not only was Chichewa, the national language, not taught, students were forbidden to speak it in the Academy. Writing about Kenya, Ngugi wa Thiong'o shows just how widespread this practice was. The postcolonial instructors who inherited condescending English attitudes to local languages, continued 'to ban African languages in schools and to elevate English as the medium of instruction from primary to secondary stages', and did not hesitate to mete out corporal punishment to and extort fines from students 'caught speaking their mother tongues' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1997:620). Invited to address the OAU at Addis Ababa, Ali Mazrui insisted on doing so in Kishwahili, but there was neither translator nor switch button envisaged for one of Africa's most widely spoken languages. 'You needed to see how the Heads of States were bewildered, but I had passed my message across' (Mazrui 1986 BBC *The Africans*

series). This practice gave English and other Western languages status by associating them with civilisation and enlightenment, and made African languages inferior in the eyes of the African students born into these languages. Unlike Somalia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya and Botswana, many an African country has yet to demonstrate in principle and practice that literacy, even at primary school level, does not necessarily mean knowing how to read and write a Western language. Only a few African countries have bothered to adopt policies that encourage education in African languages, and even this limited number have tended to confine the importance of local languages to primary and secondary school education, thereby accentuating the remoteness and irrelevance of universities to the bulk of the population. With perhaps the exception of Tanzania, there is hardly a single sub-Saharan African university that 'offers a full diploma programme with an African language as principal medium of instruction' (cf. Crossman and Devisch 1999:7).

At Kamuzu Academy, where the neo-Etonians were trained to recite Shakespeare and glorify the classic philosophers of the West, the library that housed the classics was deliberately designed in the image of the Library of Congress in the USA. There was Western influence everywhere; an influence so successful that in a debate about whether or not Western influence corrupts, sixty-seven students 'felt' that it did not, while only fifty-five students 'felt' it did. Perhaps by the time they had imbibed an awful lot of Latin, Classical Music, Western History, Literature and Etiquette, and consumed enough McDonaldised entertainment television, not as many as one of them would 'feel' any longer that Western influence corrupts. As the presenter of the BBC documentary observed, the students knew more about Europe than they did of Malawi, so much so that once in a while, the teachers had to carry out field trips with the students 'partly to bring their own country home to them'. Parents, he went on, sacrificed too much for their children to acquire values and an education, which were alien to their cultures of origin. This, of course, is hardly news to other Africans who have drunk from the well of 'Modern Education' in similarly Western-styled institutions modelled on the colonial educational system with 'its heavy literary and non-technical emphasis' (cf. Mazrui 1986:233).

There are basically two ways of journeying to the West. One can undertake the journey physically or one can do so psychologically with facilitation from education and the media. Either way, one still succeeds in imbibing Western influences. Western-style training at Kamuzu Academy-type institutions is not just to compensate for the real West

where these students have not been yet. It is seen as preparing them for Europe and North America, where they ultimately have or yearn to go to make use of the skills they have acquired. Thus, if at the Kamuzu Academy they were being taught all about Sunday barbecues, swimming pools, table etiquette, the classics, suits, ties, horse riding and straw hats (or how to be the complete gentleman or lady *à l'anglaise*), this was to purge them of that presumed backwardness that has qualified Africa to be termed 'the Dark Continent' par excellence, and Africans as people desperately in need of salvation from a *mission civilisatrice* (cf. Magubane 2004; Schipper 1990a&b). It is hard to imagine African students who have gone through all these stages of Westernisation, returning home to bear the misery and poverty of un- or under-employment with a stiff upper lip. Brain drain has been an inevitable consequence. As Mamdani observes, in its craving for centres of learning and research of international standing, Africa has produced researchers and educators with 'little capacity to work in surrounding communities but who could move to any institution in any industrialised country, and serve any privileged community around the globe with comparative ease'. The failure by the educational system in Africa to contextualise standards and excellence to the needs and conditions of Africans has resulted in an intelligentsia with little stamina for the very process of development whose vanguard they claim to be (Mamdani 1993:15). A McDonaldised educational system is too standardised, uniformised and detached to be in tune with the predicaments of ordinary and marginal Africans thirsty and hungry for recognition, representation and upliftment.

The quest for Western academic symbols of credentialism—sometimes termed *diplomania* (cf. Robinson 1981:176–192)—and respect for qualifications obtained abroad have characterised postcolonial Africa. Africans are still very much dependent on ill-adapted curricula, sources and types of knowledge that alienate and enslave, all in the name of modernity. Sometimes it does not matter whether or not school libraries are empty, since a full library may well be of little real relevance to the pressing problems and specificities of the continent, in terms of perspectives and contents. Education for Africans has, in the main, tended to be an exercise in self-evacuation and the devaluation of all that took pre-colonial generations, wisdom, cultural creativity and sweat to edify. The fact that Africans have placed and continue to place a very high premium on getting educated in the West has only compounded the problem.

In South Africa for example, despite numerous local universities and a relatively long history of university education, a doctorate from Britain is still valued higher than anything obtained locally. Like other Africans, South Africans instinctively ask one another or others: 'Where did you do your degree?', and depending on the university you name, you could be treated as a superior, an equal or an inferior by a fellow academic. If the doctorate holder is credited with the capacity to devalue those without PhDs ('Pull him Down' syndrome), PhD holders who graduate from Western universities are considered to be less 'Phenomenally Dumb' than those from local universities whose ignorance, purportedly, 'Piles higher and Deeper'. These amusing but telling puns tell the story. Some Africans would rather graduate from Oxford, Harvard or Sorbonne for example, even if this means changing their specialisations to accommodate the limited academic menu offered in these heavyweight Western universities. Africans continue to flood Europe and North America to research aspects of their own countries which normally are best studied back home in Africa, mostly for the prestige and status that studying abroad brings. Parents continue to send their children to the West for education, with the conviction that a degree even from a commercialised and second-rate Western university is worth a lot more opportunities than one from a purportedly top university in Africa.

Epistemological Consequences of Irrelevant Education

The extraverted nature of African education in general has favoured the Western knowledge industry tremendously. It has allowed Western intellectual traditions and practitioners to write themselves into the past, present and future of Africa as civilisers, saviours, initiators, mentors, arbiters (Fonlon 1967; Chinweizu 1987; Mudimbe 1988; Schipper 1990a & b; Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1977; J. and J. Comaroff 1997a; Crossman and Devisch 1999; Mbembe 2000a:7-40; 2001:1-23; Magubane 2004). Europe and North America have for decades dominated the rest of the world with its academic products. Focusing on the social sciences, Frederick Gareau, an American sociologist of knowledge, has noted that the West has been consistently more advanced and expansionist than the underdeveloped and dependent regions of the world. In the late 1980s, he remarked that American social science, in its 'unrelenting one-way traffic', was able to penetrate countries with cultures as different from its own as those of France, Canada, India, Japan and the Republic of Korea (Gareau 1987: 599). The African continent should be included in his list. This penetration has given American social science a 'privileged position' with 'a very

favourable export balance of communications' or 'talking without listening'. Not only is there little importation, American social scientists ensure that 'incoming messages are in accord with American socio-cultural norms'. This, Gareau observed, 'betrays an ethnocentric, inward-looking fixation', with little preference for anything foreign: 'if foreign, a preference for the Anglo-Saxon world; little concern for Continental Europe, and indifference or hostility towards the Second and the Third Worlds' (Gareau 1987:598–9).

Focusing on the discipline of International Relations, and writing ten years later, Kim Richard Nossal makes exactly the same observations. Nossal notes that text books in this area 'portray the world to their readers from a uniquely *American* point of view: they are reviewed by Americans; the sources they cite are American; the examples are American; the theory is American; the experience is American; the focus is American; and in ... [some cases], the voice is also explicitly American' (Nossal 1998:12). This makes it extremely difficult for thinking critical of American assumptions or (mis)representations of the rest of the world finding suffrage in mainstream American academic circles or in other circles for that matter, given America's impressive academic export record. In this connection, perspectives sympathetic with the predicaments of Africa have suffered a great rejection rate by university curricula, reviewers for publishers, and academic peers who stick to their conceptual and methodological spots however compelling arguments to the contrary have been.

Understood in terms of the centre-periphery perspective, the favourable 'export balance' for American social science is explained by the spread of American political, economic and cultural values after World War II. Following the war, America, as a superpower, exported its cultural values, through educational aid and the social sciences. "In this way, the US exported its social science sects abroad both by training social scientists in the homeland and by sending experts abroad. The expense incurred was often borne by the United States government or by private foundations" (Gareau 1987:602). In this way, America has been able, over the years, to use its doctrine of Free Flow of Information as a 'highly effective ideological club' to promote its political, economic and cultural values by whipping 'alternative forms of social organization' into a ridiculous defensiveness (Schiller 1977). In Africa, it has managed to dwarf the cultural legacies of former colonialists from Europe, including in higher education where American nomenclature and *manière de faire* have gained prominence (cf. Mazrui 1986:247–8). The advent of the internet and its purported equalising potential for the developing world,

does not seem to be achieving much in redefining unequal flows of information and cultural products between the West (epitomised by America) and Africa, the internet's significant impact notwithstanding (cf. Nyamnjoh 1999; Olorunnisola 2000; van Binsbergen 2004).

Such dependence, in Africa, is compounded by the fact that the production of social scientific knowledge requires huge funds for university infrastructure from lecture halls to libraries, computers, laboratory equipment and research facilities, which not even the best scholars and institutions on the continent can afford easily. In terms of infrastructure and finance, well-endowed institutions like the University of Botswana and the historically white universities of South Africa are rare exceptions (cf. Zeleza and Olukoshi 2004). What this means in practice is that most of the time African scholars are forced to consume not books and research output of their own production or choice, but what their affluent and better placed counterparts in North America and Europe choose to share with them at the peripheries. Cooperation takes the form of Western universities calling the tune for the African pipers they have paid. Collaborative research has often worked in the interest of the Western partners, who, armed with assumed theoretical sophistication and economic resources, have usually reduced their African collaborators to data collectors and research assistants. And this concerns even the field of African studies, where Western Africanists appear as gatekeepers and Africans as gatecrashers (cf. Mkandawire 1997; Berger 1997; Zeleza 1997; Prah 1998). Because the leading journals and publishers are based in the West and controlled by Western academics, African debates and perspectives find it very difficult getting fair and adequate representation. When manuscripts by Africans are not simply dismissed for being 'uninformed by current debates and related literature', they may be turned down for challenging conventional wisdom and traditional assumptions about their continent (cf. Cabral et al. 1998; Mkandawire 1997). The few African academics who succeed in penetrating such gate-keeping mechanisms have often done so by making serious sacrifices in terms of the perspectives, methodologies and contextual relevance of their publications and scholarship (cf. Prah 1998:27–31). Unlike Steve Biko under Apartheid South Africa, they have had to conform rather than perish from daring to 'write what ... [they] like' (cf. Malusi and Mphumlwana 1996).

Migrating to the West often does not help, and could indeed exacerbate the problem. It has been observed that the most prominent voices in African studies today are 'diasporic intellectuals' whose 'inspiration comes perhaps more from nicely subtle readings of fashionable European theorists... than

it does from...current local knowledge of the cultural politics of everyday life in the postcolonial hinterlands' (Werbner 1996:6). Little wonder that the study of Africa continues to be dominated by perspectives that privilege analogy over the historical processes that should qualify Africa as a unit of analysis in its own right (Mamdani 1996: 12-13). As has been observed, there is hardly ever a discourse on Africa for Africa's sake, and the West has often used Africa as a pretext for its own subjectivities, its self-imagination and its perversions. And no amount of new knowledge seems challenging enough to bury for good the ghost of simplistic assumptions about Africa (Mbembe 2000a:10-21, 2001:3-9; Comaroff 1997b:236-322; Schipper 1990a&b; Magubane 2004). In this sense, a Western epistemological export that marries science and ideology in subtle ways for hegemonic purposes has dominated social science in and on Africa, and coloured perceptions of Africa even by Africans. This dominant epistemological export has not always been sensitive to new perspectives that question conventional wisdom and myopic assumptions. It has stayed largely faithful to a type of social science induced and informed more by fantasies, prejudices, stereotypes, assumptions, ideologies or biases about Africa and Africans (cf. Nyamnjoh 2001). Given its remarkable ability to reproduce and market itself globally, this epistemological export has emptied academia of the power and impact of competing systems of knowledge by Africans (cf. Mudimbe 1988:x-xi). Mudimbe notes that 'Even in the most explicitly 'Afrocentric' descriptions, models of analysis explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer' to 'categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order', as if 'African *Weltanschauungen* and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality' or 'epistemological locus' (Mudimbe 1988:x). Although research on and in Africa has shaped the disciplines and our convictions of a supposedly universal truth (cf. Bates et al. 1993:xiii-xiv), the quest for such universality has meant the marginalisation of African alternatives. What obtains has been nothing short of an epistemological imperialism that has facilitated both a Western intellectual hegemony and the silencing of Africans even in the study of Africa (cf. Copans 1990:305-395; Zeleza 1997; Obenga 2001).

Under the dominant epistemological import from the West, most accounts of African cultures and experiences have been generated from the insensitive position of power and quest for convergence and homogeneity. Explicit or implicit in these accounts is the assumption that African societies should reproduce Western ideals and institutions regardless

of feasibility or contextual differences. Few researchers of Africa, even in African universities, have questioned enough the theories, concepts and basic assumptions informed by the dominant epistemological import. The tendency has been to conform to a world conceived in the image of the West without the rest (Chinweizu 1987; Mafeje 1998:26-29). Often missing have been perspectives of the silent majorities deprived of the opportunity to tell their own stories their own ways or even to enrich defective accounts by others of their own life experiences. Correcting this entails paying more attention to the popular epistemologies from which ordinary people draw on a daily basis, and the ways they situate themselves in relationship to others within these epistemologies (cf. Nyamnjoh 2001). It also means encouraging 'a meaningful dialogue' between these epistemologies and 'modern science', both in its old and new forms (cf. Devisch 2002).

Providing for Popular Epistemologies in the Study of Africa

The Western epistemological import has survived in the continent more because it suits the purposes of the agents of Westernisation than because of its relevance to understanding African situations. Those who run educational programmes along the Western models they have adopted are seldom tolerant of challenge, stimulation, provocation and competing perspectives at any level. They protect their intellectual spots jealously, and are ready to deflate all 'saboteurs' and 'subversives'. They want their programmes to go on without disturbance, and would only select as lecturers or accept and sponsor only those research questions and findings that confirm their basic assumptions on scholarship and the African condition. But African universities, academics and researchers have the responsibility to challenge such unfounded assumptions based on vested interests and hidden agendas.

This is an easy task by no means, especially since scholars in Africa rely on these very agents of cultural devaluation of Africa to fund and disseminate their research. Few in positions of power and control would accept research that is critical of them, especially in a context where relations of unequal exchange with the outside world have already diminished that power and control considerably. They are more likely, therefore, to sponsor only such research that would produce results that justify their position and/or help them in their defence when challenged. To paraphrase Susan George, it matters little how many 'mistakes' mainstream researchers or theorists make or how insensitive to the predicaments of ordinary people they are, for 'protected and nurtured by those whose political objectives they support, package and condone, they

have a licence to go on making them, whatever the consequences.' Through the university institutions they create and fund, the powerful are able to perpetuate their ideologies by ensuring that only people with the 'correct' ideas are recruited and/or retained to work there (George 1992:109 and 168-171). Neo-liberals and their institutions of legitimation for example, know only too well that in order to penetrate people's heads and acquire their hearts, hands and destinies, they have to make their ideas part of the daily life of people and society, by packaging, conveying and propagating these ideas through books, magazines, journals, conferences, symposia, professional associations, student organisations, university chairs, mass media and by other means (George 1997).

Yet domestication as a dialogical epistemological shift can only begin to take shape if research by Africans critical of conventional wisdom in academia is greeted with recognition rather than censorship, caricature or derision (cf. Obenga 2001:49-66). Only by creating space for African scholarship based on Africa as a unit of analysis on its own right could scholars begin to correct prevalent situations whereby much is known of what African states, societies and economies '*are not*' (thanks to dogmatic and normative assumptions of mainstream scholarship) but very little of what '*they actually are*' (Mbembe 2000a:21; 2001:9). Accepting the research agendas of African scholars may be not just 'a matter of ecumenism or goodwill', but also the beginnings of a conversation that could enrich scholarship in the West and elsewhere (cf. Appadurai 1999:235-237). Only the forging of this mutuality, partnership or interdependence would help re-energize African scholars and allow for a building of a genuinely international and democratic community of researchers. In this regard, Arjun Appadurai sees a future of profound internationalisation that invites academics across the globe to a conversation about research wherein 'the very elements of the ethic could be subjects of debate, and to which scholars from other societies and traditions of inquiry could bring their own ideas about what counts as new knowledge and about what communities of judgement and accountability they might judge to be central in the pursuit of such knowledge' (Appadurai 1999:237).

Global conversations and cooperation among universities and scholars are a good starting point in a long journey of equalisation and recognition for marginalised epistemologies and dimensions of scientific inquiry. But any global restructuring of power relations in scholarship can only begin to be meaningful to ordinary Africans through educational institutions and curricula that are in tune with their predicaments. In this connection, academics and researchers from and on Africa cannot afford to be blind

to the plight of African scholarship whatever the pressures they may face, and regardless of their own levels of misery and need for sustenance. Nearly three decades ago Fonlon (1978) made a plea for the African university as a place for genuine intellectuals dedicated to the common weal. Thus, for African universities and researchers to contribute towards a genuine, multifaceted liberation of the continent and its peoples, they ought to start not by joining the bandwagon as has been their history, but with a careful rethinking of African concerns and priorities, and coming up with educational policies sympathetic to the needs of ordinary Africans (cf. Copans 1990, 1993; Zeleza and Olukoshi 2004). Mamdani (1993: 19) refers to rooting African universities in African soil, and Mafeje calls for a move away from 'received theory or contrived universalism', to an 'intimate knowledge of the dynamics of African culture[s] in a contemporary setting' (Mafeje 1988: 8). There is need for an insightful scrutiny of current curricula—their origin, form, content, assumptions and practicability; and then to decide whether to accept, reject or modify accordingly. The future of higher education in Africa can only be hopeful through a meticulous and creative process of cultural restitution and indigenisation even as African scholars continue to cooperate and converse with intellectual bedfellows in the West and elsewhere. All initiatives in this regard must be encouraged, and Peter Crossman's and René Devisch's *Endogenisation and African Universities* survey—premised on the assumption that only through greater adaptation to local and national socio-cultural contexts might African universities overcome some of the functional difficulties they currently face and make themselves more relevant to the needs of the countries and peoples they serve (Crossman and Devisch 1999)—could serve as a good starting point for those with research interest in this area. This is especially important, given that the relative advance in the indigenisation of the teaching of history and geography in Africa, is yet to inspire similar efforts towards making curricula for other social sciences more contextually relevant (cf. Crossman and Devisch 1999). If Africa is to be party in a global conversation of universities and scholars, it is only appropriate that it does so on its own terms, with the interests and concerns of ordinary Africans as guiding principle.

Bibliography

- Appadurai, A., '1999', 'Globalization and the Research Imagination', *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 51, No.160, pp. 229–238.
- Bates, R., Mudimbe, V.Y., and O'Barr, J., 1993, *Africa and the Disciplines*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Berger, I., 1997, 'Contested Boundaries: African Studies Approaching the Millennium Presidential Address to the 1996 African Studies Association Annual Meeting', *African Studies Review*, Vol.40, No. 2, pp. 1–14.
- Cabral, A., Njinya-Mujinya, L., and Habomugisha, P., 1998, 'Published or Rejected? African Intellectuals' Scripts and Foreign Journals, Publishers and Editors', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 83–94.
- Chinweizu, 1987, *The West and the Rest of Us: White Predators Black Slavers and the African Elite*, Lagos, Preo Press.
- Comaroff, J. and J., 1997a, 'Ethnography of Africa: The Usefulness of the Useless' in R.R. Grinker and C.B. Steiner, eds., *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 689–703.
- Comaroff, J. and J. 1997b, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Volume Two), Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- Copans, J., 1990, *La Longue Marche de la Modernité Africaine: Savoirs, Intellectuels, Démocratie*, Paris, Karthala.
- Copans, J., 1993, 'Intellectuels Visibles, Intellectuels Invisibles', *Politique Africaine*, No.51, Octobre 1993, pp. 7-25.
- Crossman, P. and Devisch, R., 1999, *Endogenisation and African Universities: Initiatives and Issues in the Quest for Plurality in the Human Sciences*, Leuven, The Netherlands, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Devisch, R., 2002, *Endogenous Knowledge Practices, Cultures and Sciences: Some Anthropological Perspectives*, unpublished paper.
- Eagleton, T., 1991, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London, Verso.
- Fanon, F., 1967, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books.
- Fonlon, B., 1967, 'Idea of Culture (II)' in *ABBIA: Cameroon Cultural Review*, No.16, March, pp. 5–24.
- Fonlon, B., 1978, *The Genuine Intellectual*, Yaounde: Buma Kor.
- Gareau, F.H., 1987, 'Expansion and Increasing Diversification of the Universe of Social Science' in: *International Social Science Journal*, No. 114, pp. 595-606.
- George, S., 1992, *The Debt Boomerang: How Third World Debt Harms Us All*, London, Pluto Press.
- George, S., 1997, 'Winning the War of Ideas Dissent', <http://www.tni.org/george/articles/dissent.htm>.
- Hawking, S.W., 1990, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, London, Guild Publishing.
- Mafeje, A., 1988, 'Culture and Development in Africa: The Missing Link', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No.1, pp. 7–8.

- Mafeje, A., 1998, 'Anthropology and Independent Africans: Suicide or End of an Era?', *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1-43.
- Magubane, Z., 2004, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Malusi, and Mpumlwana, T., eds., 1996, *Steve Biko: I Write What I Like*, Randburg, Raven Press.
- Mamdani, M., 1990, *The Intelligentsia, the State and Social Movements: Some Reflections on Experiences in Africa*, Kampala, Centre for Basic Research.
- Mamdani, M., 1993, 'University Crisis and Reform: A Reflection on the African Experience', *Review of African Political Economy*, No.58, pp.7-19.
- Mamdani, M., 1996, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, London, James Currey.
- Mazrui, A., 1986, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, London: BBC Publications.
- Mazrui, A., 1994, 'Development in a Multi-Cultural Context: Trends and Tensions', in I. Serageldin and J. Taboroff, eds., *Culture and Development in Africa*, Washington D.C., The World Bank, pp. 127-136.
- Mazrui, A., 2001, 'The African Renaissance: A Triple Legacy of Skills, Values and Gender' in: S.C. Saxena, ed., *Africa Beyond 2000*, Delhi, Kalunga Publications, pp.29-59.
- Mbembe, A., 1997 'The "thing" and its double in Cameroonian cartoons', in K. Barber, ed., *Readings in African popular culture*, Oxford, James Currey.
- Mbembe, A., 2000a, *De la Postcolonie: Essai sur l'Imagination Politique dans l'Afrique Contemporaine*. Paris, Karthala.
- Mbembe, A., 2000b, 'African Modes of Self-Writing' in: *Identity Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 1-35.
- Mbembe, A., 2001, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mkandawire, T., 1997, 'The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence. The Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola Distinguished Lecture Presented to the 1996 African Studies Association Annual Meeting', *African Studies Review*, Vol.40, No. 2, pp. 15-36.
- Moore, H.L., and Sanders, T., eds., 2001, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, London, Routledge.
- Mudimbe, V.Y., 1988, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, London, James Currey.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London, James Currey.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1997, 'Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary' in: R.R. Grinker and C.B. Steiner, eds., *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 613-622.
- Nossal, K.R., 1998, 'Tales that Textbooks Tell: Ethnocentricity and Diversity in International Introductions to International Relations', <http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/~polisci/faulty/nossal/tales.htm>.

- Nyamnjoh, F.B., 1999, 'Africa and the Information Superhighway: The Need for Mitigated Euphoria', *Ecquid Novi*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 31–49.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B., 2001, 'Delusions of Development and the Enrichment of Witchcraft Discourses in Cameroon' in H. Moore and T. Sanders, eds., *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, London, Routledge, pp. 28–49.
- Nyamnjoh, F.B., 2002, 'A child is one person's only in the womb': Domestication, Agency and Subjectivity in the Cameroonian Grassfields' in R. Werbner, ed., *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa*, London, Zed, pp. 111–138.
- Nyang, S.S., 1994, 'The Cultural Consequences of Development in Africa' in: I. Serageldin and J. Taboroff, eds., *Culture and Development in Africa*, Washington D.C., The World Bank, pp. 429–446.
- Obenga, T., 2001, *Le Sens de la Lutte Contre l'Africanisme Eurocentriste*, Paris, Khepera and L'Harmattan.
- Okri, B., 1991, *The Famished Road*, London, Vintage Book.
- Olorunnisola, A.A., 2000, 'African Media, Information Providers and Emigrants as Collaborative Nodes in Virtual Social Networks', *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 46–71.
- Onyejekwe, O.O., 1993, 'Some Disturbing Trends in Tertiary Education in Africa' in I. De Villiers, ed., *Southern African Conference on the Restructuring of Education*, Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, pp. 1–7.
- P'Bitek, O., 1989 [1966], *Song of Lawino*, Nairobi, East African Educational Publishers.
- Prah, K., 1998, 'African Scholars and Africanist Scholarship', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 3 and 4, pp. 25–31.
- Robinson, P., 1981, *Perspectives on the Sociology of Education: An Introduction*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rwomire, A., 1992, 'Education and Development: African Perspectives', *Prospects*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, pp. 227–239.
- Schiller, H., 1977, 'The Free Flow of Information—For Whom?' in G. Gerbner, ed., *Mass Media Policies in Changing Cultures*, London, John Wiley and Sons, pp. 105–15.
- Schipper, W.J.J., 1990a, 'The White Man Is Nobody's Friend: European Characters in African Fiction', in: Schipper, W.J.J., Idema, W.L., and Leyten, H.M., *White and Black: Imagination and Cultural Confrontation (Bulletin 320)*, Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute – Amsterdam, pp. 31–53.
- Schipper, W.J.J., 1990b, 'Homo Caudatus: Imagination and Power in the Field of Literature', in: Schipper, W.J.J., Idema, W.L., and Leyten, H.M., *White and Black: Imagination and Cultural Confrontation (Bulletin 320)*, Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute – Amsterdam, pp. 11–30.
- Sokal, A., and Bricmont, J., 1998, *Intellectual Impostures*, London, Profile Books
- Soyinka, W., 1994, 'Culture, Memory and Development', in I. Serageldin and J. Taboroff, eds., *Culture and Development in Africa*, Washington D.C., The World Bank, pp. 201–218.

- Van Binsbergen, W., 2004, 'Can ICT Belong in Africa, or is ICT Owned by the North Atlantic Region?', in W. van Binsbergen and R. van Dijk eds., *Situating Globality: African Agency in the Appropriation of Global Culture*, Leiden, Brill, pp. 107–146.
- Van Rinsum, 2001, *Slaves of Definition: In Quest of the Unbeliever and the Ignoramus*, Maastricht, Shaker Publishing BV.
- Werbner, R., 1996, 'Introduction: Multiple Identities, Plural Arenas' in: R. Werbner and T. Ranger, eds., *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, London, Zed Books Ltd, pp. 1–27.
- Zezeza, P.T., 1997, *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises*, Dakar, CODESRIA Books.
- Zezeza, P.T. and Olukoshi, A., eds., 2004, *African Universities in the Twenty-First Century*, Dakar, CODESRIA Books.



Africa Development, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, 2004, pp. 185–190

© Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, 2004
(ISSN 0850-3907)

Book Review

Amartya K. Sen, 2000, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, Paperback, 366 + xvi pages).

Lansana Keita

Department of Philosophy, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, USA.

Given that the problem of development is generally seen as one concerned with alleviating poverty and increasing wealth, it is generally viewed as falling within the research purview of economists. The intellectual and ideological debate over the years have been between those who embrace neoliberal economics on the one hand and those who embrace some version of Marxian political economy on the other. From the latter paradigm has developed the well known ‘dependency school’ which examines more holistically the problem of development as it relates to industrialized and non-industrialized nations in the world. Neoliberal economics as it applies to economic development has traditionally limited itself to what is referred to as neoclassical economics growth and development theory. The main questions have been how to accommodate substitutions for labour and capital within the context of Cobb-Douglas production functions and Harrod-Domar growth models. The solution to the problem of development in this context was one of merely increasing gross domestic product and per capita income. And this has been the perennial prescriptive programme of highly influential agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank. Sociological considerations were hardly ever considered and issues such as income inequalities, justice, rights and so on were just not factored into prescriptive models for growth and development.

Amartya Sen has proposed to modify this narrow paradigm in his text *Development as Freedom*. Sen has written extensively not only on theoretical economics but also on the relationship between ethics and economics. In this regard he has developed a more comprehensive vision of what economic decision making actually entails. Sen begins by making the important point that we live in a world of contrasts and paradoxes. As Sen puts it: ‘We live in a world of unprecedented opulence, of a kind

that would have been hard even to imagine a century or two ago....And yet we also live in a world with remarkable deprivation, destitution and oppression (Sen:xi). This condition is something welfare economists, who recognize that efficiency and equity need not be at logical odds, are concerned to grapple with. And Sen has done much research in this area. But he goes on to argue for bringing 'individual agency and social arrangements' into the picture for the ultimate purpose of convincing us that we must 'see individual freedom as a social commitment' (Sen: xii). Thus Sen wants to argue that the 'expansion of freedom is viewed, in this approach, both as the primary end and principal means of development' (Sen:xii). Sen is thus convinced that the path to economic development is optimally achieved under conditions of freedom.

Of course, neoliberal economists speak of market freedoms meaning by this that the entrepreneur with capital should be free as much as possible to invest and reap maximal profits without much restriction. But this is not what Sen has in mind. For Sen, what leads to development are the freedoms of the individual both economic and political to exercise other freedoms that in turn produce other kinds of freedom which are all causally and empirically linked to each other. In short, Sen believes that what allows freedom to develop instrumentally is 'the removal of substantial unfreedoms' as being '*constitutive* of development' (Sen:xii). But the dynamic of removing unfreedoms requires the 'instrumental effectiveness of freedoms of particular kinds to promote freedoms of other kinds' (Sen:xii). And the instrumental freedoms Sen has in mind are 'economic opportunities, political freedoms, social facilities, transparency guarantees, and protective security' (Sen:xii).

Sen's programme is to examine social institutions such as the state, the market, the legal system, political parties, the media, public interest groups, public discussion groups 'in terms of their contribution to enhancing and guaranteeing the substantive freedoms of individuals, seen as active agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of dispensed benefits' (Sen: xiii).

Throughout his text and in twelve chapters Sen sets out to establish the basic point that development is best aided and does not really take place unless certain instrumental freedoms are set in place. He also points out that in societies where there are established freedoms phenomena such as famines are less likely to occur. Sen offers the examples of China and India. The claim is made that China lost thirty million people in its 'Great Leap Forward' in 1958–1961 while 'India has not had a famine since independence' (Sen:187). Two points are made in this regard. First,

increased opportunities—hence potential choices—constitute an important item in Sen’s stock of freedoms. As he puts it: ‘protection against starvation, epidemics, and severe and sudden deprivation is itself an enhancement of the opportunity to live securely and well’ (Sen:188). In the second instance ‘the process of preventing famines and other crises is significantly helped by the use of instrumental freedoms, such as the opportunity of open discussion, public scrutiny, electoral politics, and uncensored media’ (Sen:188).

Another crucial aspect of ‘development as freedom’ for Sen is the increased agency and opportunities for a better life that accrue to women and society as a whole as societal freedoms increase. According to Sen the increased agency of women is a causal element in the improving of certain criteria that theorists of development sometimes employ in their ‘quality of life’ discourse. Direct developmental benefits accrue in the areas of child survival and planned fertility rates which, Sen argues, are important for development.

Having made the case for the necessity of freedoms in the form of individual and group agency for the development enterprise Sen then turns to the important question of how to implement the mechanisms that would guarantee those needed freedoms. His answer turns necessarily to the issue of rights. Sen argues quite correctly that rights must first be legitimated (he argues that we are not naturally born with them) but then questions necessarily arise as to their actual significances. Are rights to be implemented according to ‘perfect obligations’ or should they be seen merely as ‘imperfect obligations’? The first he labels *the legitimacy critique*, the latter he calls *coherence critique* (Sen:228). The considerations here may both entail legal and institutional content unlike the view that regards rights as being contingent mainly on particular social ethics. The critique here is that human rights are not as universal as some theorists would claim. Sen refers to this approach as *cultural critique*. The instantiation of the question here is whether one can legitimately support parochial values that contravene supposedly universal values involving human rights. Thus are there Western, Asian, and African values pertaining to freedoms that could be militated against in the development discussion? Sen argues that the evidence does not support the claim: there are no set of Asian values (reference here is to Singapore prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew’s thesis that there are distinct Western and East Asian concepts of government and rights) that are totally at odds with such from the West. Sen argues that there are precolonial Asian scholars who argued in favour of individual freedoms and human agencies. Sen refers to the writings of

Confucius, often appealed to by those who seek justification for state authoritarianism, with the following: 'Confucius is not averse to practical caution and tact, but does not forgo the recommendation to oppose bad government...Confucius's ideas were altogether more complex and sophisticated than the maxims that are frequently championed in his name' (Sen:235). Sen also makes the same argument with reference to the precolonial Indian writers Ashoka and Kautilya (Sen:235-238). And the same applies to Africa with the precolonial writings specifically of Ahmed Baba the precolonial Timbukto jurist and scholar. The truth is that those who argue most for restrictions on the freedoms of others usually seek to increase and enhance their own individual and group freedoms at the expense of others.

Sen emphasizes his thesis on the intrinsic value of freedom for development in the chapter titled 'The Importance of Democracy' by unpacking its intrinsic meaning of affording individual agencies the mechanisms whereby they could profit from the 'process aspect' of freedom which in turn would yield its 'opportunity aspects' (Sen:291). He further compounds his position by appeal to the well known 'Arrow Impossibility Theorem' in the chapter 'Social Choice and Individual Behaviour' which demonstrates the difficulty of forging a single will out of a multiplicity of individual wills. The solution to the natural anarchy of society is to increase the amounts of freedom especially for tasks involving development and social transformations.

The originality of Sen's approach is that he has extended the idea of development to include the subjective role of its intended beneficiaries which too often are given short shrift by those who argue for market freedoms and the rule of law as they seek to create the optimal conditions for the implementation of their neo-liberal theories. Exhortations are constantly made to African governments to 'practice democracy' and 'free up markets' so that Africa's economies can grow and develop but full and subjective agencies of the citizens of those targeted countries are never fully encouraged. For example, the government of some country may negotiate with the World Bank to build a dam to rationalize that nation's water supply, but the individuals affected by dam construction are rarely consulted and asked for their individual opinions. Even when they are, the compensations offered for the disruption of livelihoods are never adequate. This takes place in a context where African governments are quietly encouraged by their Western patrons to abrogate maximal freedoms for themselves while denying a modicum of such to their citizens. Lost in all this is the notion that economic growth and development are not just

issues of the increase in gross domestic product but also increases in freedoms themselves. Such freedoms would include various forms of freedom of expression including the press and the right to speak openly about the performance of the servants of the people, the government and its elected officials. It is in this regard that one must take a cue from Sen and view freedom as an economic good in itself.

Thus democracy and the freedoms it brings constitute intrinsic elements of the process of development. But how actually viable is Sen's thesis? It was pointed out above that there is no basic mutual exclusivity between development and freedoms but it should be borne in mind that those who argue most for free markets and globalization restrict their concept of freedom just to the freedom for private international capital to invest anywhere without unnecessary hindrances such as taxes and governmental regulations. The point here is that 'free markets' do not imply the free agency of workers to bargain fairly for the same rights and comparable wages enjoyed by workers in the countries regarded as developed.

Sen admits that he has 'never counseled any government, preferring to place my suggestions and critiques—for what they are worth—in the public domain' (Sen:xiv). In this regard the following paradox should be noted: the post-colonial governments of Africa all claim to desire development but claim that externally imposed economic forces militate maximally against the required conditions for economic growth and development. But if one extends Sen's definition of development to include freedom as a necessary condition for development then it becomes apparent that postcolonial governments themselves hinder development. The postcolonial restrictive tariffs and restrictions placed on intra-continental trade, travel, and business activity in terms of work permits, worker mobility, access to banks, and so on, make development extremely difficult to achieve. Ironically, during colonial times intra-regional and intra-continental trade and travel were, for the most part, much more efficient.

The implementation of freedom as a crucial aspect of development must therefore require debate and civil society participation. Sen is correct in pointing out the role that investment in human capital would play in this regard (Sen:143-45, 292-97). Investment in human capital is recommended by economists because of its decisive role in economic growth and accumulation of capital. But for Sen development is not only about economic growth in the quantitative sense but also about the increase in human capabilities. As Sen put it: 'At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be said that the literature on human capital tends to concentrate on the agency of human beings in augmenting production possibilities. The

perspective of human capability focuses, on the other hand, on the ability—the substantive freedom—of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have. The two perspectives cannot but be related, since both are concerned with the role of human beings, and in particular with the actual abilities they achieve and acquire' (Sen:293). No doubt, freedom as an intrinsic aspect of development would require an expanded version of human capital investment to include not only the acquiring of new skills that would boost productivity and growth but also new intellectual skills that would enhance the individual's quality of life and subjective agency.

Sen's text is useful for the following reasons: it extends the theoretical discussions of development economics beyond the narrowness and unrealisms of neoclassical economics to include issues normally dealt within political philosophy. In this regard development for Sen is not just restricted to issues of increasing output so as to boost GDP numbers, it now becomes an issue of increasing human freedoms, agencies, and opportunities. Such considerations become, in Sen's model, necessary conditions for genuine development. In short, instead of economic development theory and practice putatively concerned with material well-being according to the principles of utilitarianism Sen's paradigm includes the considerations crucial for genuine individual liberties and freedoms as debated within the theoretical confines of libertarianism and liberalism. It is the proper mix of these three considerations that create the basis for optimal human well-being anywhere in the world.