

The Ten Thinkers who want to Complete the Emancipation of the African Continent

Portraits of the Most Prolific Intellectuals in the Revival of "Decolonised" African Plural Thinking

At the initiative of Felwine Sarr and Achille Mbembe, the first edition of series of 'thought Workshops' will be held in Dakar on Friday 28 October 2016. This is expected to be a historical event with the Senegalese writer and Cameroonian historian inviting many African intellectuals to participate in reviving African plural thinking that is free, inter-alia, from post-colonialism, a "mental decolonisation ven-ture". Portraits:

Kwame Anthony Appiah

His work may sound less African and yet it was one of the most important and meaningful on revival of the continent's critical thinking. Deeply rooted in Western philosophical traditions, Kwame Anthony Appiah's reflexion is however inspired by the story of his own family and his dual cultural heritage, Ghanaian and British, which he already wrote about back in 1992 in: *In My Father's House* (Oxford University Press).



Cosmopolitanism is not just a theoretical issue, it's about ethics and practice for someone like him who grew up in Ghana before he moved to England to pursue higher education; he later settled in USA where he taught in the most prestigious universities. As reflected in his narrative in *Vers un nouveau cosmopolitisme* (Odile Jacob ed, 2008), Appiah always did the best he possibly could to obey his

father's *vade-mecum*: "Remember that you are citizens of the world so work at making it a better place than you found it".

Being a citizen of the world is a privilege of being able to be fully both here and elsewhere, to inherit whole humanity and contribute to enriching it from wherever we are. It is reconciling peculiar and universal, different and common. It is refusing identity assignments. "Ethnic and racial identities are very likely to become an obsession, anything and end of everything in the lives of those who identify with them. [...] And by negating the identities shared with people of different race or ethnicity, they divert them from the possibility of identifying with others. [...] We should not let our racial identities be subject to new tyrannies", he wrote in *Color Conscious* (Princeton University Press, 1996) and invites us to experiment with our fractured identities.

Thus, as Anthony Mangeon, a Professor of Francophone Literatures at Strasbourg University together with Appiah, born in 1954 pointed out along with V. Y. Mudimbe, in the journal, *Generations*, "African practice of philosophy as they jointly experimented it by combining historical study, conceptual analysis and anthropological approach can not only provide an interdisciplinary model, but more importantly, it can enlighten central issues for Western philosophy".

Ali Benmakhlouf

In his last essay *La Conversation comme manière de vivre* (Albin Michel ed.), Ali Benmakhlouf invoked Montaigne, Lewis Carroll, Flaubert, Jack Goody, or James Agee Al-Tawhidi or Al-Farabi, Barthes or Leibniz in demonstrating once again that the world library is open to all. He used those multiple references while studying from different perspectives anything enriching conversation, where self-relation and relations to others play out, "where the link holding us on to each other through spoken words" is established.



A place for exchange, confrontation and reconciliation, conversation is also a space for transmission of heritage as shown by "controverse de Bagdad" during which Muslim thinkers questioned the Greek legacy and probed the

link between philosophy and Islam in medieval times. This is an issue that keeps coming up in the reflection of this philosopher who was born in Fès in 1959, and whose maternal grandmother was of Senegalese descent. He teaches at the Paris-Est-Créteil University and claims to be "100 per cent African and 100 per cent European". With one leg in France, and the other in Morocco, Ali Benmakhlouf is interested in many issues including identity issues, law, arts, medical ethics, politics and logics. He authored notably *Pourquoi lire les philosophes arabes* (Albin Michel ed. 2015), a remarkable essay which reminds us how medieval Arab and slamic thinking shaped the European intellectual landscape.

Jean-Godefroy Bidima



Jean-Godefroy Bidima is an extremely discreet man. You will not come across him on a TV show; you will more likely find him in the semi-darkness of a library where he often goes. A specialist of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, this former Programme Manager of the Paris International College of Philosophy is a full Professor at Tulane University in Nouvelle-Orléans, where he holds the chair of Yvonne-Arnoult.

Bioethics, legal anthropology, medical ethics, aesthetics, economics... his far-reaching reflection covers many fields. An extremely prolific thinker, this Cameroonian philosopher, aged 58 is keen on reading our world through his imagination and the asymmetric and power relationship structuring it. Through research, he was able to build a solid work that captures African and overall realities through the untold; he deconstructs pretences and probes both interstices and fringes.

In one of his latest articles published in the collective work that he jointly directed with Victorien Lavou Zoungbo and titled "Réalités et représentations de la violence en post colonies" (Perpignan University Press, 2015), he reviews the violence imposed by the "managerial spirit" characterising instrumental reason and which "often sacrifices ends rule to material fetishism". Subsequently: "The purpose of the famous "development concept" was for endlessly calculating rationality to wage war against "whatever is of no use". Whatever is deemed useless to the market is therefore sacrificed: the subject is stripped of his cultural references, stripped naked and his desires are manipulated and instrumentalised in order for him to consume more and more even when he cannot afford it causing frustration down the road. Thus, production economy migrates to become consumer economy.

Jean-Godefroy Bidima authored *L'Art négro-africain* (PUF ed., "Que sais-je?", 1997) and *La Philosophie négro-africaine* (PUF ed., "Que sais-je?", 1995); he created the "cross-over" concept, a concept largely publicised by more famous thinkers like his compatriot, Achille Mbembe who joined him in asking "what plurals make up a given history". Cross-over is not just a key-idea, it is an attitude in the real world in which there is a desire to discover the multiple and diverse, to perceive potentials and the yet-to-be-expressed, to untangle complexity and the untold such that the possible could blossom, and room could be made for emancipating utopia.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne



Like Ali Benmakhoulouf who wrote "Pour-quoi lire les philosophes arabes", Souleymane Bachir Diagne is one of the most eminent African thinkers of Islam and its Enlightenment. His work titled *Comment philosopher en islam* (Jimsaan ed., 2014) recalls that this religion has produced a "tradition of free-thinking" and that the debate for an open and philosophical

Islam has always existed. It is even more than ever "vital for Islamic thinking to emphasise critical mind and pluralism". A view he bravely advocates in his cross interviews with Philippe Capelle-Dumont and published, in September by éditions Le Cerf, under the title: *Philosopher en islam et en christianisme*.

Born in 1955 in Saint-Louis, a Professor at the Columbia University of New York, educated at the Ecole normale supérieure located at Ulm Street, a specialist on Boole algebra and logics, Souleymane Bachir Diagne is very much interested in the translation challenge. Following the Ghanaian, Kwasi Wiredu's

work, the Senegalese national stated in an interview published in the journal, *Generations*, that "going from one language to another allows you to see in what ways the philosophical problems said to be universal are closely related to the different languages in which they are formulated". This is one way of putting into perspective the universal claim of some philosophical statements by putting them in their cultural context.

This notwithstanding, it is out of the question for Souleymane Bachir Diagne to renounce the universal dimension, as he believes like Jean-Godefroy Bidima does, that the distinction made by Merleau-Ponty in his *Eloge de la philosophie entre un universalisme de surplomb* and a lateral universalism, the "horizon available going forward from post-coloniality", one we have to build through expressing our diversities if we want to make a common world.

Nadia Yala Kisukidi



Looking at colonial India, Rajeev Bhargava, a political scientist noted in an article published in 2013 in the journal, *Socio*, that "adding to the economic and political injustice implied by colonisation is cultural injustice. One of the forms in which it is manifested is epistemic injustice: it occurs when the concepts and categories through which people

understand themselves and their universe are replaced or affected by the colonisers' concepts and categories". This also applies to Africa, and based on Rajeev Bhargava's reflection, Nadia Yala Kisukidi calls for an end to one of these epistemic injustices, that is non-recognition of the existence of philosophical thinking in African territories induced by Western philosophers themselves (Hegel, among others, excludes Blacks from History in the making), but also by colonial agents, and topping the list are the first anthropologists who decreed there was no Reason in Sub-Saharan Africa, but "primitive mentality" (Henri Levy-Bruhl).

This cumbersome colonial heritage still weighs heavily on the teaching of philosophy in France where, compared to USA, African philosophy is not recognised by the academia. It is therefore impossible for the French youth to learn that while Descartes was publishing his *Discours de la méthode*, an Ethiopian named Zera Yacob was at the same time drafting *Hatata*, an essay on rationalist philosophy.

Nadia Yala Kisukidi is French; her father is Congolese and her mother partly French and partly Italian. She is intent on "decolonising philosophy" and updating "a reason subjected by its own darkness, divide line building and summary exclusions". She also plans to demonstrate, in a book to be published soon, that African philosophers such as Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Engelbert Mveng, Jean-Marc Ela have helped renew religious thinking by making it a place for emancipation. The Paris-8 University students will discover, as from this academic year, that as a former vice-president of the International

College of Philosophy from 2014 to September, 2016, and a specialist on Bergson, she will be delivering at, 38 years of age, a seminar on African philosophy. This is a first experiment for a French university.

Achille Mbembe



He is probably one of the most brilliant men of his generation. A guest lecturer across the world, Professor of history at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, and also at Duke, Achille Mbembe at 61 years of age thinks Africa and *its transformation*. The author of *Sortir de la grande nuit* (La Découverte, 2010) keeps repeating that: Europe has lost its international leadership and that

in this economic and political reconfiguration; it is in Africa that the future of mankind is being charted out.

But, with growing identity tensions and with everyone fiercely turning against each other and democracies willing to question their very foundations for the sake of fighting terrorism (*Politiques de l'inimité*, La Découverte, 2016), building a tolerant, open and Creole Africa should be treated as an urgent matter. That is a "world Africa" where everyone, no matter their religion, colour, gender or sexual orientation should be able to achieve self-fulfilment. A specialist on post-colonial theory without claiming to be one (*De la postcolonie*, Karthala, 2000), this advocate of *afropolitanism*, heir to Frantz Fanon, takes a sharp and uncompromising look at our world, which, as he recalled in *Critique de la raison nègre* (La Découverte, 2013), is built on racism and black body reification.

Léonora Miano



Léonora Miano is an uncompromising person who fears no confrontation. This radicality is however a salutary one. It offers a mirror and forces us to take a lucid look at ourselves. The image mirrored is barely glorious and confronts us with the darkest side of our history. It forces us to become aware of our limitations and biases. You as Whites, have you ever thought of your whiteness? And you as Blacks, why do you see yourselves as such? Why would you endorse this colonial designation?

Through a psychology-oriented explanation of race invention, Léonora Miano turns around habitual perspectives and argues that slavers have wished to "whiten themselves away" from the "darkness" they spread across the world by deporting across the Atlantic men and women who until then had never thought of themselves as Africans or Blacks. Inferring from this, "*Blackness seems to materialise the internal darkness of someone who mutilates his/her own humanity by negating others*" (*L'Impératif transgressif*, L'Arche Editeur, 2016).

Born in Douala in 1973 and settled in France since the early 1990s, Léonora Miano, in her novels, theatre and theoretical writings, is interested in the place of afro-descendants in Western societies (*Tels des astres éteints*), areas of Atlantic memory in Africa (*La Saison de l'ombre*, prix Fémina 2013), sexuality and gender issues (*Crépuscule du tourment*, 2016). She has thus contributed to disseminating the "*afropeanity*" concept, as she looks back "*without pathos nor resentment*" into our common past characterised by exploitation and reification, alienation and resiliency, in order to more closely capture our present and chart out the emancipatory way forward.

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni



The decolonisation of Africa is a myth and freedom of the continent, an illusion. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni says it time and time again: African nations' accession to independence did not end power relations. An evidence of this is the constant imposition of economic sanctions and military interventions on the continent under the guise of protecting human rights,

democracy or fighting terrorism. Relations between the West and Africa are still being described as a coloniality relationship. Thus, the Zimbabwean historian and director of Archie Mafeje Institute of the University of South Africa (UNISA), argued in *Coloniality and Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonization* (CODESRIA, 2013) that "*postcolonial*" and "*neo-colonial*" both mix and mingle in our contemporary world and that it is high time we begin to think in terms of "*decoloniality*", as Walter D. Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfoguel or Anibal Quijano did in Latin America.

Favouring an interdisciplinary approach, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls for the decentralisation of our gaze, pulling out of the academic spaces shaped by an European world engaged in an imperial conquest project and exploring fringes and borderlines instead. Violence is not only physical or psychological, it is also epistemic. There is therefore need to develop new concepts and intellectual referents; a condition for building a humanity founded on equity, social justice and "*ethical co-existence*", ending social class and biased race relations.

Kako Nubukpo



The CFA Franc is an impediment to performance and social progress. Kako Nubukpo has passionately taken up this battle. Already back in 2007, with his book titled *Politique monétaire et servitude volontaire: la gestion du franc CFA par la BCEAO* (Karthala ed.), he was critical of this single currency which maintains former French colonies

in a system of colonial dependency. It is the conviction of this Togolese macro-economist, a former minister of forecasting and

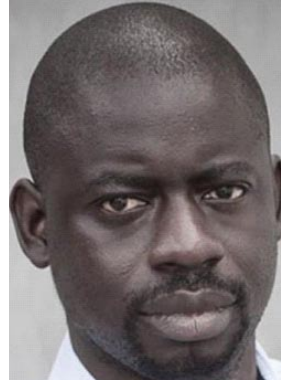
public policy evaluation who worked for several international institutions (BCEAO, Cirad, WAEMU, OIF) that African States should withdraw their membership of the CFA Franc and devise their own monetary policy if they were to "to complete their political independence and strengthen the bases for structural transformation of their economies".

Along with Martial Ze Belinga, Bruno Tinel and Demba Moussa Dembele, he has recently published, through éditions La Dispute, a book titled *Sortir l'Afrique de la servitude monétaire. A qui profite le franc CFA ?* A full scale attack on what appears to be the mainstay of neo-colonial domination which is said to be also relayed through Francophony. Such is not the case of Kako Nubuko who, at 48 years of age, has become director of economic and digital Francophony within the international francophone organisation.

Felwine Sarr

French media discovered him with his *Afrotopia* essay published in spring, but for about ten years now the Senegalese, Felwine Sarr, has been putting together a particular and extremely rich original work in form and substance. A Professor at Gaston-Berger University where he heads the Saint-Louis economics research laboratory (LARES), the organiser of Thought Workshops is primarily a writer and poet-philosopher. His works include: *Dahij* (Gallimard 2009) and *Méditations africaines* (Mémoire d'encrier 2012), two unclassifiable and

extremely rich books built from aphorisms and personal reflections through which he delivers both intimate and universalist thought, inciting us to look back into what constitutes the foundations of our humanity and how we would want to build it.



A martial arts practitioner who fully adheres to Juvénal's saying: " a healthy mind is a healthy body"; he is a Muslim who served mass in his childhood. He is also interested in Zen Buddhism. A sereer, in an environment mostly populated by the Wolof ethnic group, Felwine Sarr, now 44, is aware more than anyone else that identities are manifold and that cultures can be mutually enriching.

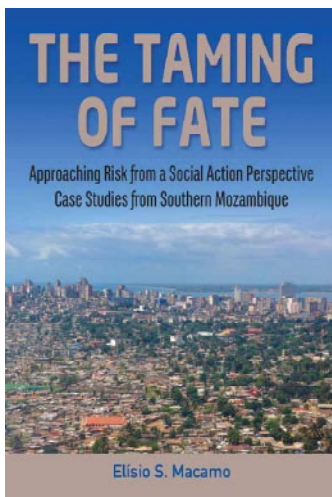
This is why he invited the continent's thinkers to commit to epistemic separation by dropping Western concepts believed to be less adapted to the realities of the continent and tapping into African concepts such as *jom* ("dignity"), *teranga* ("hospitality"), *ngor* ("sense of honour")... in order to uncover their potential beneficial contributions. This everyday philosopher encourages all of us collectively or individually to find our own path to fulfilment by forsaking predictable pathways and stereotypes.

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THE TAMING OF FATE

Approaching Risk from a Social Action Perspective Case Studies from Southern Mozambique

Elísio S. Macamo



This book is about how extreme situations appearing to have a destructive potential can actually be used to produce meaningful individual and social lives. It is about the "taming of fate". This notion means and accounts for the ability of individuals and communities to rebuild their lives against all odds. The book is based on case-studies that draw from theoretical insights derived from the sociology of disasters. It addresses some limitations of the sociology of risk, chief among which is the rejection of the relevance of the notion of risk to the study of technologically non-advanced societies. The book argues that this rejection has deprived the study of the human condition of an important analytical asset. The book claims that risk is a property of social action which can best be understood through the analytical scrutiny of its role in the historical constitution of social relations.