

Preface

Yoro K. Fall

Like any other part of the world, Africa is not immune to the intermingling of cultures and civilizations, heritages and horizons, the endogenous and the exogenous, knowledge and imagery. The effects of new communication and information technologies, which still remain the privilege of a minority of political and intellectual elites, cannot conceal the far more profound transformations and reconfigurations that characterize its societies and cultures.

The colonial legacies have been beset by social energy and in the course of the last three decades, more than fifty states have been one of the most prominent expressions of this fact, emphasizing the expansion of space, its many representations, and the diversity of readings that it offers.

Far from limited to one continent, the African developments are also at play in the Americas, in the Antilles, and in Europe. Five centuries of forced integration in the eurocolonial world have determined the constitution of an African diaspora, which, unlike all other forms of population emigration, was achieved by means of the destructuring and destruction of families: in contrast to their fellow citizens from other countries, African Americans are completely incapable of restructuring the familial ties that link them to their origins. Their relations are therefore affective and cultural in nature. The images and visions they have of Africa place the continent in a creative tension that both influences and is influenced by the fate of African-American communities, the activities of their civil organizations, and the influence they may have on African politics vis-à-vis the United States. African international relations are as such still marked by the repercussions of transatlantic slavery.

African creativity is also expressed in urban spaces, where new social forces are calling into question the traditional societal forms

of functioning and management: women and youth, for example, who for the first time in the known history of the continent represent a new demographic majority, are beginning to mentally and culturally integrate the influences of the media, music, and the sounds from the world over, while societies are themselves facing unprecedented questions related to contemporary cultural, economic, political, and intellectual constraints.

This issue of *Diogenes* gathers together diverse authors from across Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean.¹ The nature, scope, and layered meanings of the articles herewith offer multiple looks at these new phenomena; disciplines intersect, juxtaposing or superimposing each other in order to capture the layers of thought and debate that reflect Africa's relationship to its own image in the world, the status of Africans both within and outside the continent, their humanity, dignity, and rights with respect to political institutions, authority and power, and the distortions between economic models and daily practices both old and new.

The crucial question of African languages – the ancient social choices that privileged oral over written culture, the contemporary relations that exist between creativity, identity, otherness, and individuation – highlight the sharpness of the debates and the cultural importance of African developments. It is in recognition of this debate that selections from writers, essayists, and musicians accompany the articles, and that we have requested authors to add to their texts a short synopsis in their mother tongue or in the African language of their choice. We thank them for this, for it illustrates the extent to which linguistic diversity is an advantage, a richness, and a source of cross-pollination, not merely a fixed heritage or a constraint. We place spiritual works, books, manuals, and law texts on equal terms: these things that continually uphold the peoples' right to be instructed, informed, governed, and administered in their languages by those who represent them and should serve them.

In the course of these pages, as the themes and ideas developed here allow, one remark must be made: Africa is profoundly present in the world precisely because all of the questions that overwhelm the world and the challenges that they comprise for the human capacity find their pertinence here. The extent to which

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work spaces are open in the twenty-first century to the insight of women and men, young and not so young, and to the intersection of diversity and pluralism which expresses the past as well as influences our common futures.

Translated from the French by Beatrice McGeoch

Notes

1. In 1962 Diogène published an issue (No. 37) dedicated to Africa entitled "Looks at Africa."