DIOGENES

From Eurocentrism to a Polycentric Vision of the World: Advocacy for a Paradigm Shift

Adama Samassékou
CIPSH[1]

Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity to address a fundamental concern I have had for several years – the need to challenge the Eurocentric approach characteristic of our field.

When two cultures or even two people from different cultures meet, their meeting is not only characterized by their degree of (mis)understanding, but also coloured by their preconceived ideas about each other. The same is true for the humanities when they are addressed from a European viewpoint on the one hand or an African or Asian perspective on the other.

My paper will cover the fundamental basis of the humanities as they are practised, and will advocate a paradigm shift: from Eurocentrism to a polycentric vision of the world. It will comprise three main parts. Firstly, I will try to define Eurocentrism, identifying its main manifestations as I see them; secondly, I will address the current crisis, which is not just financial and economic in nature, but also a societal crisis. Finally, I will consider the issue of the cultural and linguistic diversity which should form the basis of the polycentrism to come.

About Eurocentrism

Up to the present, the humanities have adopted an approach which privileges Europe at the heart of the scientific debate, to the detriment of the other continents and thus of the other cultures of the world, which are relegated to the periphery of the dynamics of intellectual reflection and output.

According to Gérard Leclerc (2000: 15–19),

> European culture has used several intellectual strategies to articulate mentally what it believed to be European superiority, and the Westernization of the world, that is to say the hegemony of Europe over other civilizations. […] Such an approach lines up all human groups up along a temporal line which is also a scale of progress, with Man moving slowly from Savagery to Barbarism, and then to a civilized state. As all societies are doomed to progress along this line, some will be seen as more "advanced" than others: some are leading the race, others form a pack, and others still are lagging at the back.

Corresponding author:
Adama Samassékou, CIPSH, Bamako BP E 214, Mali
Email: asamass@gmail.com

Europe is naturally located at the top of Civilization (it is the Civilization par excellence), other "civilizations" (Islam, India, China) are "latecomers", and lagging behind, there are savage or "primitive" societies which are not entitled to the name "civilization", and must be content with the status of "culture". [---] The other great civilizations differ only in some points of details from the past state of the European civilization, and are expected to assimilate the major characteristics of the latter. They are condemned to perish, in terms of their cultural specificities (particular religious) and to adapt, in terms of technology. The entry into the modern world – which amounts to that to civilization – entails cultural standardization and the appropriation of science and technique.

An analysis of relations between Africa and Europe provides some of the best illustrations of such Eurocentrism. As shown by the Cultural Charter for Africa adopted in 1976 by the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, meeting in their Thirteenth Ordinary Session in Port Louis (Mauritius) which recalled "that under colonial domination, the African countries found themselves in the same political, economic, social and cultural situation; that cultural domination led to the depersonalization of part of the African peoples, falsified their history, systematically disparaged and combated African values, and tried to replace, progressively and officially, their languages by that of the colonizer; that colonization has encouraged the formation of an elite which is too often alienated from its culture and susceptible to assimilation and that a serious gap has been opened between the said elite and the African popular masses".

Generally speaking, in the field of humanities and social science, Eurocentrism has given rise to an "ethnologizing" approach which has forged, among other things, terms like "tribes" and "clans" to describe the social organization of non-European peoples who were thus observed from a dominant position and from an ideological rather than a scientific perspective.

But Eurocentrism also has manifestations in other domains. Thus, if we analyse the specific case of Africa in economic terms, according to Edem Kodio, former Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (1986: 15–16), Africa is "dedicated to the inessential which produces what it does not consume and consumes what it does not produce".

This assessment can be extended to all the former European colonies worldwide, where the subordinated territories served as suppliers of raw materials for the European metropoles and as consumers of manufactured goods from these countries. Furthermore, all physical transport infrastructure installed by the colonial system linked inland regions to the coast and ocean, and rarely created internal networks within territories. Similarly, telecommunications connected the hinterland to the major coastal cities, so that all inter-territorial communications had to go through them.

With respect to administrative and socio-political organization, most countries which experienced European colonization have simply reproduced the initially imposed European model, ignoring the tremendous legacy handed down from the great empires and kingdoms which, over several centuries, had established stable and ordered administrative structures within a framework of "law" well before this was the case in Europe. Indeed, the history of Africa, the continent that was the birthplace of humanity and civilization though which is presently so sorely tried, provides clear evidence of how, over the centuries, values were conveyed and a great tradition of consensus bequeathed to humanity. This heritage is clearly apparent in the following excerpt from the Charter of Kurukanfuga *(Manden Kalikan)*:

People of the past would say:

"Man as an individual
made of bones and flesh,
of marrow and nerves,
of skin covered with hair

eats food and beverages;
but his 'soul', his spirit

lives on three things:
to see what he wants to see,
to say what he wants to say,

and to do what he wants to do.
If any of these things
were to fail in the soul,
the soul will suffer,
and surely whither."

Consequently, children of *Sanènè and Kòntròn* declare:

"Now each person's life is his own,
everyone is free in his acts,
within the 'proscription'
the laws of his homeland."

This is the Oath of Mandé
to address the ears of the whole world. (*La Charte* 2003)

This Oath is called the "Charter of Kurukanfuga", from the name of the West African plain where a conference was held in the 13th century which established what could be called the African Declaration of Human Rights, well before 1948! This Charter was a genuine instrument of both social and administrative regulation, establishing not only the scope and limits of relationships between individuals, but also defining what pertained to the public sphere in contrast to what belonged to the private sphere. It stands therefore as one of the earliest forms of social contract in the Hobbesian sense.

Handed down from generation to generation, this Charter has for eight centuries promoted respect for fundamental human rights, peace, tolerance, love and justice, and for equality both among our African peoples and all peoples of the world. The Charter thus gave substance to the ideal of freedom, together with an invitation to all, despite differences in status, to join in a compact of social cohesion and of respect for common and private property as well as for nature and the wise stewardship of her resources, in a word, respect for human beings and their natural and social environment. Yet even before this time, there existed a form of social commitment that continues to this day as "jatigiya" in Mali, and "teranga" in Senegal, the legendary African hospitality, as well as through "sanankuya", the use of humour as a social safety valve.

To return to the consequences of Eurocentrism, however, in the field of education this has led to the exclusion from the educational systems of their nations of the languages spoken by most of the peoples subjected to European colonization. As a result, Africa remains the only continent where, in the vast majority of countries, a child attending school is obliged to access knowledge, especially that basic knowledge which structures intellect and personality, in a language different from the one spoken at home.

It is therefore highly pertinent to recall that no people nor country in the world has ever achieved a significant level of development without the use of its own languages and its cultures. As leading contemporary Burkinabe historian and thinker Joseph Ki-Zerbo would say, with his special sense of humour, "European languages imported into Africa may be bridges toward the globalized world, nonetheless it is difficult to leave one's home to go and live under or on a bridge". Only the

language of which a learner has strongest command, being generally his mother tongue, can enable him to understand who he is, assert his identity, develop his self-confidence and actively take part in his own, and ultimately his country's, development. It is effectively impossible to become a responsible actor in one's own society, mastering its specific socio-economic transformational process, when the stakes of this transformation are formulated in an unfamiliar language and culture and when any solution has to be pursued under those same conditions.

As development cannot be achieved without respect for language, culture, arts, beliefs and ways of thinking, in other words all those specificities which create the harmony and constitute the beauty of a world that is diverse, multi-faceted, different, but united, our conviction is therefore that there can be no cultural diversity without linguistic diversity. Consequently, all states should be encouraged vigorously to foster the introduction of mother tongues as an essential medium of instruction in educational systems, in Africa in particular and the countries of the South in general.

As regards religion, Eurocentrism has tended to assert the Judeo-Christian faith as being the only valid belief system while virtually negating other world religions. Finally, in the intellectual sphere, most of the elites of the formerly colonized territories have been and continue to be trained in leading European schools and universities, whose teaching modules unfortunately leave little place for alternative modes of thought in the African, Asian, or Latin American traditions.

In calling attention here to the various expressions of Eurocentrism, we have deliberately focused on the case of Africa, with which we are more familiar, but certainly the same phenomenon can be found in all continents wherever the colonial model was established. It should be pointed out that the term "Eurocentrism" is being used here to signify an intrinsically negative concept, that referring to relations of domination of other peoples and cultures by Europe, an ideology and system of exclusion and negation. It does not refer to the peoples of Europe as such, who may live and practise values similar to those described for the other cultures. There is also no intention of setting up, as an alternative to Euro-centrism, a narrow-minded Afro-centrism! The issue is rather to highlight the fundamentals of what constitutes a culture as opposed to a project born of a vision of domination.

About the current crisis

The financial crisis which the world has recently experienced and which has led to a severe economic downturn may well prove more entrenched than initially thought. It is the outcome of the European-centred model, based on a culture of "gain", of "having" rather than of "being". This European culture of "gain" is not only endogenously expressed within its originating society but also exogenously in its relations with the other civilizations. This led some thinkers from both countries of the North (Galtung 1971) and the South (Amin 1976), to account for this latter through theories such as structural imperialism (Galtung) and dependency theory (Amin). I would argue that these two conceptual approaches revolve around [the] one and the same observation: an inequitable conduct of world affairs.

The various fields of expression of Eurocentrism mentioned in the last section help to better understand the causes of the current financial and economic crisis and open up anew the debate on Eurocentrism itself, on financial capitalism, economic liberalism, and the globalization of markets. Recent decades have been marked by the general conviction that economic development, within the structures of the capitalist system, is the first imperative for modern societies. As a result, the North has experienced an exponential growth of industry, science, and technology but has not been able to prevent the world from plunging into financial and economic crisis.

According to the Bank of France (*Documents et Débats* 2009: 12), "the breadth of dissemination of this crisis means that we are probably facing a crisis of 'system'. This crisis has taken on three dimensions: it is a financial crisis, a crisis of the real economy and a crisis of the system. This last dimension justifies the 'return of politics' to the analysis of possible alternatives and the treatment of the crisis." Of these three dimensions identified by the Bank of France, I would claim that "the crisis of the system" is the most relevant.

Around fifteen years ago, Viviane Forrester published a book entitled *The Economic Horror* (1996) which showed that the liberal economy, born of the European industrial society, operated at the cost of excluding the mass of the world's population, who are increasingly impoverished and marginalized because of the new values this new industrial society conveyed. This circumstance has contributed to the exclusion of two-thirds of human beings from the benefits of social and economic prosperity.

This contrast is most striking between the various regions of the world, but it is also manifest within those regions themselves. This latter aspect is often overlooked, but it is the non-privileged people within any country who suffer more than anyone else from the consequences of globalization, which reinforces the divisions between those who are educated and those who can neither read nor write, between those who hold information and those who are deprived of it, between those who know and those who do not, between those who govern and those who are governed ... World society is thus divided between the "globalizers" and the "globalized". According to the 2003 UNDP Global Report on Human Development, "income inequality in the world gives rise to shameful gaps and ambiguous trends". It is recognized that income is more and more unequally shared among the inhabitants of the planet. "The richest 5% of the world's people receive 114 times the income of the poorest 5%. The richest 1% receive as much as the poorest 57%. And the 25 million richest Americans have as much income as almost 2 billion of the world's poorest people" (UNDP 2003: 38; see Milanovic 2002).

Among the recent publications referring to the current crisis, there is the enlightening contribution of Henri Sztulman who, focusing on the place of psychoanalysis in today's world and the reasons for its current rejection, refers to "the ruthless standardization of life in community", the "standardization of the great world metropolises. [...] This standardization is a source of desubjectivization, and even depersonalization." He claims that this levelling out of lifestyles goes hand and hand with "the apparent and announced triumph of the unbridled free market economy." He continues:

> The current mode of globalization leads to interchangeable, anonymous and solitary subjects, the dissolution of traditional forms of organization of society produces a marked weakening (of the family, the village, the intergenerational transmission of learning and knowledge). It is therefore no wonder that postmodern man, deprived of his bearings, lacks structure and a robust and sustainable inner organization; without points of identification there can be no lasting construction of identity" (Sztulman 2008: 26–29).

Sztulman also notes that liberalism was initially about freedom of expression and thought. However, "The twentieth century saw the thrust of liberalism moving from Europe to the United States, from the political to the economic, from human rights to the market forces". The new dominant economic thought "has triumphed unchecked, with its relentless dehumanization, commoditization, standardization, anonymization [...] this dual economic revolution (with its blanket commercialization of all goods, including education, health, culture and its drive for capital gains rather than production of new wealth) is not without consequences for the economy of the collective and individual psyche [...] Thus after [the] behaviourist man comes economic man, formatted by rules not natural but

secreted by the economic environment" (Sztulman 2008: 75–77). Eurocentrism and globalization therefore propel us towards the uniformization of the world cultures and a dominant ideology.

Financial capitalism in crisis, with its train of bank failures, billions of dollars vanished into thin air, floundering global growth and helpless governments, requires a reconsideration of where those societies that have a culture of "gain" stand compared to those whose culture is one of "being", to echo the words of Professor Ki-Zerbo. This reconsideration is more urgent than ever. Thus, the humanities and the social sciences today have a crucial role to play in helping to inform this debate. More than ever their input is needed to identify perspectives for reworking the balance between the world's cultures and civilizations.

African societies, for example, have always put "being" at the heart of their development. Indeed, some non-European societies are characterized by a cosmic vision which considers "being", that is, what we *are* rather than what we *own*, to be key to the whole process whereby we establish our relationship with the world. This vision is characterized by the search for non-conflictual, harmonious interaction between people, seeking a consensus with others and with the environment in the broadest sense. From this viewpoint, in Africa the culture of "being" is based on what we have called *humanitude,* our constant acceptance of others, our relationship as human beings to our fellow humans, implying a willing and selfless solidarity, a spontaneous reaching out to embrace the Other … the "humanitude" which binds man to fellow man, to use Aimé Césaire's fine expression. It is this concept of humanitude that I use to translate the meaning of the African concepts of *maaya*, *neddaaku*, *boroterey*, *nite*, *ubuntu*, all so unlike the culture of "gain" which leads to relationships built on conflict, greed and domination.

In his remarkable work *Ubuntu* or "*man as a remedy for man*", Professor Ki-Zerbo argues that "[w]hat is essential therefore for the exercise we are invited to undertake is to place today at the top of the agenda, and for the resolution of planetary social struggles, the concept, issue, cause and paradigm of *ubuntu* as an axial and specific antidote to the commercialization of all man and of all men, wrought by the partisan neo-liberalism of market society" (Ki-Zerbo 2007: 114). Analysing the paradigm of *ubuntu*, he continues: "Ubuntu can be the most efficient tool for this essential task, but more importantly, it must be the ultimate aim and sense of peace. This is not to lapse into an anthropological culturalism, but in the face of the juggernaut of the dominant ideology, it is urgent to defuse the conflicts that are fuelled by the structural violence of the status quo" *(ibid.)*. The current crisis of financial capitalism (and capitalism in general) should lead to a questioning of the "values" it advocates, in other words those of "gain" and this should open up the perspective of a polycentrism based on the values of "being".

Thus, the current global crisis is salutary, because it is bringing to the fore the core values of "being", which revolve around societal moral and cultural values, among others, self-knowledge, the acceptance of the Other, solidarity, sharing, moderation, humility, consensus, respect for the Other and elders, which are the very foundation of the space of understanding and kinship generally representative of African societies. All these concepts are crystallized in specific terms which are reflected in each of their languages. The African continent is rich in its linguistic diversity, and it is in this linguistic diversity that its fundamental societal values are to be found.

In the face of the present crisis, which is clearly more than just a financial and economic one, but also a crisis of society, a crisis of meaning, it becomes imperative to find an alternative or alternatives to stem the process of commoditization and dehumanization which breed violence in all its forms. Hence this appeal to the humanities and the social sciences, calling for their re-establishment on a different footing and their necessary contribution to the quest for meaning in our contemporary societies, so as to open up the perspective of defining a new balance between the world's cultures and civilizations.

Cultural and linguistic diversity – a basis for a new polycentrism

In its seminal 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO defined culture as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features which characterize a society or a social group. Thus defined, culture remains at the heart of the whole debate about identity, social cohesion, and development of a knowledge and skills-based economy. For this reason culture is a part of mankind's common heritage that must be preserved.

In the same Declaration, the international community strongly reaffirmed the importance of cultural diversity and its preservation. Respect for cultural diversity is the *sine qua non* condition of a rich and authentic cultural life which can fully meet the aspirations of all.

The issue of cultural and linguistic diversity as a political and philosophical choice firmly rooted in the African vision of the world is well summed up by the Malian writer and ethnologist Amadou Hampâté Bâ when he declares:

> The beauty of a carpet lies in the variety of its colours. If it is only white, it is but a white sheet, if it is all black, it is mourning garb. The entire Universe is our homeland. Each of us is a page in Nature's ledger. Each people must bring the note of its own genius to the vast human community in its quest for a new equilibrium, and so enrich the whole. We must open to others while remaining true to ourselves.

For his part, British linguist David Crystal (2000: 37) writes:

> Diversity has a central place in the theories of evolution, because it allows species to survive in different environments. Standardization is dangerous for the long-term survival of species. The strongest ecosystems are those which are the most diversified. If the multiplicity of cultures is a prerequisite for a successful human development, then the preservation of linguistic diversity is essential because the oral and written languages are the main mode of transmission of cultures.

Hence, in the current context of globalization, researchers in the humanities would do well to join their voices with those of the globalization-sceptics and explore ways and means to design a different world, one where all peoples have access to world trade, by establishing true bridges between cultures and languages and by ensuring a better control of the process.

We must insistently ensure that globalization is not a threat to global cultural diversity, the real wealth of peoples. This will be possible only if all cultures, despite their differences and their distance from each another, are able to express themselves and are given a role in the construction of a global society of exchanges. We must save the world from globalized conflicts (World Wars), from long drawn-out ideological conflicts (Cold War), and from catastrophic incidents like 9/11 by making globalization a marriage of cultures rather than a crucible for the dominant ideology. We must avoid genocides, exclusion, pandemics and the like by making Information and Communications Technology (ICT) a bridge which brings peoples together rather than a wedge which drives ever-deeper divisions between them. To do this, it is essential to fully guarantee for every people the right to survival, through the expression of their culture and the preservation of their language. Indeed, language is the most fundamental element of identity. Amadou Hampâté Bâ affirmed that of all the elements which characterise a human being, language is the most relevant.

Language, as the basis of cultural identity – both individual and collective – is also the key channel for acquiring and developing knowledge. Language is the primary receptacle of and medium for expressing the cosmic vision of human societies. That is why it is so important to preserve humanity from the impending disaster of this wealth of knowledge housed in the world's

languages being lost, and to define the prospects for ensuring that this intangible world heritage, the treasure of humanity, can be safeguarded and developed.

From this point of view, there is indeed no denying that the creative genius of a people is best expressed through its language. And yet, in the 21st century, the era of ICT, where information can be shared within and between societies with an efficiency never before experienced, an estimated 774 million illiterate adults in the World (Unesco Institute for Statistics 2010) may well leave no trace behind them of their knowledge and know-how, because they have no access to writing or the tools which would enable them not only to foster and add to that knowledge, but also and above all to provide for its transmission to future generations.

This is the 21st century, when the tremendous potential of ICT enables young people to develop their genius and their creativity – and yet approximately 75 million of the world's school-age children do not have this opportunity (Unesco Institute for Statistics 2010). Worse still, in many countries, especially in the vast majority of those in Africa, the school – which is the main space where knowledge is constructed and acquired – remains estranged from the social and cultural environment, cut off from it both because of the language of instruction that is adopted and the subject matter that is taught, neither of which pay heed to the culture or history of the community, the country, or indeed the continent. How many people throughout the world, both young and less young, continue to face language barriers preventing them from developing their creative genius, from constructing new knowledge, sharing it with others, and accessing the vast stores of global knowledge?

Surely, the importance of language goes without saying. Language conveys cultural values and local knowledge. Language is the basis of identity and the medium for transmitting cultural values. It is the custodian of a society's experience and its cultural and natural expression. I would go so far as to say that language is part of our biological make-up. Furthermore, to speak a language is to embrace a culture and promoting the use of languages is to give cultures the chance to express themselves. This is why in today's globalized world it is important to promote multilingualism through the advancement of all the world's languages.

Increasingly, in a world where perceptions tend to be standardized, we need to fight to preserve more linguistic – and hence cultural – diversity. This despite globalization, and in part by making judicious use of Information and Communication Technology. The Eurocentric approach, whose matrix is the standardization of the world's cultures, cannot be allowed to prevail at the expense of the languages and cultures of other regions. A promotion of the model of Eurocentrism which works towards the uniformization of the world's languages and cultures amounts to breaking with the roots of all cultures, for language is the most fundamental component of identity, the bedrock of culture and the matrix of creativity.

Referring to this vital issue, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, in his book À *quand l'Afrique?* asserts:

> The language issue is fundamental because it affects the identity of peoples. And identity is necessary for development and for democracy. Languages also concern culture, the nations' problems, the capacity to imagine and creativity. When we repeat ideas in a language which is not originally our own, there is a mechanical and mimetic expression of self, albeit with some exceptions. (But do we govern for exceptions?) We are only mimicking. Whereas when we express ourselves in our own language, our imagination is set free. (Ki-Zerbo 2003: 81–82)

And Raymond Renard, in *An Ethics for the Francophonie: Issues of Language Policy* (2006), stresses the importance of preserving linguistic diversity:

> There is a reason, as fundamental as the basis of identity, for wishing to preserve linguistic diversity: it is through their own language that individuals see the world and interpret its meaning in their own way, and it is this that gives them access to the universal. All languages participate in the interpretation of the universal, because every culture produces meanings of universal value. And as it has been well demonstrated by Alain Touraine (1999: 173-174) or Stephen Wurm (1999: 28), no language, no culture can claim to represent the universal by itself but, as each brings its contribution, it is through the dialogue between languages and cultures that we move closer to the universal.

Therefore, it is important to build a world of culture, to foster a coming together of the various cultures, so as to offset the excesses of market globalization. And Africa could contribute to this true meeting of cultures in the world by sharing its cosmic vision, which I shall call the African Frame of Reference, the foundation, and the basis by which African societies live together. This common outlook has made them spaces of understanding and kinship, constantly irrigated and nurtured by practices which build and develop within them strong social bonds: for example, the "sanankuya", the network of specific relationships between brothers/sisters-in-law, grandchildren/ grandparents, the role of mediation assigned to persons with a special status in society (diviners, dignitaries and religious leaders, and so on).

The global frame of reference from which our identity originates is shared by every member of our various cultural and linguistic communities, and the terms of this frame of reference are almost identical in each cultural and linguistic community. For convenience of demonstration, let us take, for example, the Mandingo community of Mali and analyse what we are told in the Bamanan language:

Mɔgɔtigiya ka fisa fɛn tigiya ye
The richness of human relationships is more precious than that found in material goods
Maa, n'i ɲinana i jujɔn kɔ, i labanko b'i kɔnɔgwan
If you forget your roots, you will be puzzled about your future.
Maa, i bɛ na maa de bolo, i bɛ taa maa de bolo
It is in the hands of men that you come to the world, it is these same hands which will carry you in your final resting place.
An taalan ye ɲɔgɔn ye
We are destined to walk together.
An ye ɲɔgɔn safunɛ ye, an ye ɲɔgɔn gese ni fale ye
We are soap for each other; we are the weft and warp of the same cloth.
Fɛn saba bɛ yen, fanga, wari, dɔnniya, n'i y'a sɔrɔ, n'i m'a minɛ ni hakili ye, a bɛ tiɲɛ i bolo
There are three things in the world, power, money and knowledge: if you get them, keep them wisely; if not, they will lead to your downfall.
Hakili ye fanga ye
Strength is Spirit.
Jɛkafɔ ani jɛkakɛ ! jɛkafɔ ye daamu ye
Consultation and cooperation! Consultation is all.
ɲɔgɔnboɲa, ɲɔgɔndɛmɛ ani kotoɲɔgɔntala de y'an ka maaya sinsinnan ye
Our maaya, our humanitude, is based on mutual respect, solidarity and the spirit of mutual concession, compromise and dynamic consensus.
Boɲa bɛ Mali, karama bɛ Mali, dit la chanson
"Mali is a country of respect and deference", says the song.

An education embedded in these cardinal values has enabled us Malians, over the centuries, to forge our behaviour and gain the reputation as a land of dialogue and meetings. The frame of

reference is the vision of an African taking-root and blossoming, echoing the systolic and diastolic rhythms of the heart, a symbol of life and vitality. We would maintain that such a frame of reference, which is potentially present in many other societies, other cultures, other civilizations, other "centres", could form one of the foundations of the "culture of being" and thereby contribute, within the context of the current crisis, to the emergence of a new global social project. Globalization should be seen as a factor of enrichment, a means of strengthening intercultural relations, whereas it tends more to be a factor leading to the destruction of diversity and cultural pluralism. Globalization today is a globalization of "gain" while it should be a globalization of "being" and "gain", leading to a genuine – and, importantly, endogenous – economic and social development.

Thus, the Eurocentric approach does not seem to promote true endogenous development in the southern countries in general and in Africa in particular, in large part because of the ambiguity of the loaded concept of "development" itself, with all its connotations, as it is used and misused within the global context. A context that is characterized by relations of domination originating largely in the turbulent history of European colonialism, which, together with its subsequent, if somewhat attenuated neo-colonialist avatar, has imposed the Eurocentric approach of its "centre" or "centres" upon a progressively marginalized "periphery" or "peripheries". There is thus a need to provide conceptual clarification of the term to bring it more in line with the reality designated and be more mindful of the dynamics at play.

Development, in my view, is the *process of the progressive mastery of the environment* in the broadest sense: physical, cultural, socio-economic, political, intellectual, religious, spiritual. From this point of view, development can be seen as achievement in the social, economic, political fields. Its multi-faceted nature then becomes obvious. It refers back to the concept of *maaya/ubuntu*, *humanitude*: humanness, the fulcrum of the new paradigm. Hence, it can be said that every country in the world is "developing", each entity is in a permanent and continuous process of controlling its own realities. The differences between countries reside mainly in the nature of these realities, the scale and degree of the control exercised over them, as well as the means deployed. Indeed, while the so-called "developing countries", "least developed countries", and other "emerging countries" struggle for the realization of fundamental human rights for the greatest number of people (the rights to food, education, health, housing and a healthy environment, work, safety, and citizen participation), the so-called "developed", "industrialized" countries struggle to control their "Chernobyls" and the other negative effects of an unbridled and indiscriminate exploitation of the environment and the natural resources of humanity.

If "development" is understood in this sense, then it has long been our conviction that there can be no true development without the development of the world's human resources; likewise, there is no human resource development without quality education and training. And there is no quality education or training without the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity. Therefore, promoting linguistic diversity amounts to developing the fundamentals of world culture, to fostering other cultures, other civilizations, other "centres" besides Europe, to enabling the full expression of the rich diversity of our societies, which can be the only worthwhile goal within the context of globalization. As to the African frame of reference, rooted in the concept of *maaya/ubuntu*, it can provide the world with an alternative which could lead to a new global societal project, one capable of rebalancing and reconciling the cultures of "gain" and "being" and replacing the destructive mercantile logic of competition by a logic of solidarity and complementarity, one that is thus able to restore the harmony of human beings and all creatures and strengthen peace in the world.

We know that cultural and linguistic diversity is to the human society what biodiversity is for nature: the ferment and linchpin of our humanness. If we really want to end the ongoing process of dehumanization, if we are to safeguard and consolidate throughout the world the societal and

civilizational values of solidarity, sharing, consensus, and moderation, then we must make the choice to preserve what is essential: linguistic diversity, that great wealth of peoples which allows us to provide life-giving water for our parched relationships, and ensure the human communication our world so badly needs.

Conclusion

It is therefore time for the humanities and social sciences to remobilize and embrace the values of all human societies. These values are embedded in language, the pre-eminent vehicle of culture and thought. And as Amin Maalouf (1998: 189) reminds us, to proclaim "the right of every person to preserve his identity and language and use it freely" should go without saying.

The humanities, especially the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and history, can help us bring to the fore the cultural fundamentals of our societies. Linguists and socio-linguists now more than ever need to make sure that the endangered languages of the world can be safeguarded and preserved. Better still, it is a matter of some urgency to promote multilingual scientific societies so that specialists in the humanities and social sciences can use their own languages in their scientific work, presaging the hoped-for multilingual and multicultural societies of the future.

As for historians, they have the pressing duty to revisit falsified universal history, while ensuring it is not "marked by ethnocentrism and utopianism" (Leclerc 2000). From this point of view, it is significant that the debate on Eurocentrism has resurfaced because of recent attempts to deny the evils of colonialism and to negate African history. In this respect, the strong protests of eminent historians, women and men of science and culture, Africans and non-Africans, who have joined with the historian Professor Adame Ba Konaré (2008), to reinstate the historical truth, is a welcome development.

Similarly, anthropologists should reconsider their role in keeping with the convictions stated by René Devisch (2008a: 10-11):

> It is anthropology which has been struggling for 25 years to decolonize the Humanities, after having, just like the colonizers, built up contradictions between city and village, tradition and modernity. Anthropology is the science closest to people's daily life. [...] The anthropologist of tomorrow must provide an intercultural border zone and inter-memory space between the societies of yesterday and the here and now, here and there, North and South. Such an anthropologist is an intercultural and intergenerational ambassador, necessarily questioning the overly Eurocentric modes of his discipline and his own viewpoint.

In another article, Devisch (2008b: 58) takes a very clear stand:

> [A] radical postcolonial anthropology is now seeking to deconstruct the Eurocentric polarity of North and South or centre and periphery. It recognizes just how much, in the light of the growing number of "peripheries" or "subordinates", the presumption of a civilizational domination from the "North"/from "the West"/from the "centre" is giving way to a tapestry of horizons and a plurality and partial nodularity of civilizational trajectories.

What is needed today is a true paradigm shift, a reconstruction of the humanities and the social sciences which must effect the radical epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical divorce from past thinking necessary for the emergence of disciplines that reflect a polycentric worldview which can thus contribute to strengthening the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, and hence, to furthering peace in the world.

Note

1. This paper is a slightly altered version of a talk delivered at the World Social Science Forum in Bergen.

References

Amin, S (1976) *L'Impérialisme et le développement inégal*. Paris: Minuit.

Banque de France (2009) "La Crise financière", *Documents et Débats*, 2: www.banque-france.fr/fr/publications/telechar/doc_debat/numero_2/integral.pdf.

La Charte du Mandé et autres traditions du Mali (2003) translated by Youssouf Tata Cissé and Jean-Louis Sagot-Duvauroux. Paris: Albin Michel.

Crystal, D (2000) "La Diversité linguistique: un atout pour l'humanité", *Courrier International*, 486: 36–37.

Devisch, R (2008a) "Qu'est-ce qu'un anthropologue?"*, Bulletin du codesria*, 1–2 : 5–11; www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/CODESRIA_BULLETINCB_1_2_2008_French.pdf.

Devisch, R (2008b) "L'espace-bordure partageable", *Bulletin du codesria,* 1–2: 53–63; www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/CODESRIA_BULLETINCB_1_2_2008_French.pdf.

Forrester, V (1996) *L'Horreur économique*. Paris: Fayard.

Galtung, J (1971) "A Structural Theory of Imperialism", *Journal of Peace Research* 8(2): 81–117.

Ki-Zerbo, J (2003) *À Quand l'Afrique*. Paris: Éditions de l'Aube.

Ki-Zerbo, J (2007) *Repères pour l'Afrique.* Dakar: Panafrika.

Kodjo, E (1986) *Et demain l'Afrique*. Paris: Stock.

Leclerc, G (2000) *La mondialisation culturelle.* Paris: puf.

Maalouf, A (1998) *Les identités meurtrières.* Paris: Grasset.

Milanovic, B (2002) "True World Income Distribution, 1988 and 1993: First Calculation Based on Household Surveys Alone", *Economic Journal* 112(476): 51–92.

Renard, R (2006) *Une éthique pour la francophonie: questions de politique linguistique*. Paris/Mons: Didier Érudition/cipa.

Sztulman, H (2008) *Psychanalyse et Humanisme: Manifeste contre les impostures de la pensée dominante.* Toulouse: Ombres Blanches.

Touraine A (1996) Faux et vrais problèmes, in M. Wieviork et al. (dir.), *Une société fragmentée? Le multiculturalisme en débat*. Paris: La Découverte, quoted by Raymond Renard.

UNDP (2003) *Human Development Report*. New York/Oxford: Oxford up; http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr03_complete.pdf.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010) "Literacy", http://www.uis.unesco.org/Literacy/Pages/default.aspx.

Wurm S (1999), *Languages in Danger, The Live and Death of the World's Languages, Multiethnica*. Paris: La Découverte, quoted by Raymond Renard.