

The Multiple Politics of Philosophy in Africa: Emancipation, Postcolonialisms, Hermeneutics, and Governance

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The ebbing of the philosophies of emancipation and, in contrast, the triumph of ideologies hostile to independence point to how the profound changes that are today affecting African philosophy may be comprehended. Post-colonialism has caused this branch of philosophy to evolve away from the demand for intelligibility to the pursuit of aesthetic vanity; from the imperative to transform the world to dabbling in language play and the hermeneutic concerns of the quest for meaning. New elements have been added which promote asceticism in place of a self-reflective and militant consciousness; which put the non-present, the momentary, the bare process of happening (Mbele, 2010) ahead of length of time and the deep surge of history; setting the anarchic pluralities of time of diverse ethnic groups over the universal time of the world (Diouf, 1999: 25); the theology of prosperity over liberation theology; a mixture of purposes ahead of historic initiative; a preference for dissimulation over struggle. This reactionary offensive is squarely aimed at the philosophies of liberation and is undermining the edifice of conscientism and pan-Africanism, thus sanctifying the (posthumous) ideological victory of that form of Senghorism which considered resistance to colonialism as *obsolete as an old-time hunting rifle*. Since, from that point of view, the idea of independence was a myth associated with nourishing an anarchic nationalism, to talk about it was ‘to reason with your head on the ground and your feet in the air, meaning that it was not to reason at all. It was to pose a problem that was false’ (quoted by Towa, 1971: 80). The real problem, this viewpoint held, lay neither in resistance nor disconnection, and even less in the construction of a national or pan-African locus of power,¹ but in how to be opened up to the world, to become fused with the System – as auxiliary consumers – and to adhere to the Empire. It is in just such an attitude that can be found the underlying sense of the post-colonial arrogance that has been directed against the ‘nostalgia for origins, the dreams of nationalism and pan-Africanism’ (Ouologuem, 1968), the tales of emancipation and progress.

An ideological atmosphere conducive to revisionism

The methodological and conceptual framework of post-structuralism enables post-colonialism to undermine the ideological foundations of the newly independent state. At the same time, it supplies

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the theoretical tools for framing an alternative option to the socialist and democratic idea of a totality which had been advanced to overcome the impotence of a fragmented African society (Nkrumah, 1962: 76; Mbele, 2010: 35). From an epistemological point of view, post-colonialism aims at *re-writing* Africa within a new scientific context which acknowledges *epistemic pluralism*, asserts the *contingency of the social and the historical*, and takes into account the *diversity of worlds and lifestyles*, to which there is added – in place of the now deemed outdated question of the relation between subject and object – a heightened interest in *language and interpretation*. The resultant linguistic idealism constitutes a decisive argument against Marx. Henceforth, language is the basis for everything, and everything is a manner of telling. Post-colonialism deactivates the explosive link between the power of explanation and the capacity to transform the world by depriving the social sciences of all legitimacy in terms of analysis, interpretation, and prediction. Mbembe (2000: 31) clearly grasps what is at stake: in the African struggle for self-understanding, it is only emancipation which is at issue, an outlook which aligns with Foucault (1966: 353–354), who rules out self-questioning on the essence of man with the hope that this can provide a means of attaining truth. Such prohibition has the effect of delegitimizing the crucial philosophical question of the *reign of man and his liberation*. The way is thus laid open to getting rid of certain awkward questions, in particular, that of the Weapon of Theory advanced by Amílcar Cabral, and that of social redemption raised by Kwame Nkrumah. Both demanded that the imperatives of the social revolution should direct the tasks of philosophy (Nkrumah, 1962: 74–75). The *theory of theory* requires philosophy to abandon building totalizing concepts out of the experiential: philosophy must no longer be the ‘ideological commentary of a fundamentally political project’ (Hountondji, 1977: 245). The postulated *autonomy of instances* gives each instance its *peculiar coherence*.

The paradox is that, invited to be pure of all ideological stain, philosophy is also urged to post a *contaminated identity*, with the legitimation of *ethno-knowledges* – which explains the return to favour of colonialist ethnologies, ethnophilosophy, and negritude – coming at this price. In fact, the separation from life only holds when philosophical thought is invited to become *activity*, in its mission of social redemption. Today, the understanding of the social dimension constitutes an ideological task of major importance. Post-modernism, which is governing how this philosophical process plays out, is henceforth imposing its own rules on African thought: the jumbling of ‘rationalist codes’ (Maffesoli, 2002a: 38), the ‘relativization of the absolute Subject’ (ibid.: 64), the discrediting of ‘discourses of knowledge or theory’ (Lyotard 1974: 22, 287). In the place of the sovereignty of the thinking and active historical Subject, and of historical necessity itself, post-colonialism sets a form of ‘contingent, dispersed existence that is devoid of power’ (Mbembe 2000: 32). But the Foucauldian discrediting of the human utopia, of liberty and emancipation – which consequently blocks the formulation of political and ethical choices – cannot be understood outside of a conceptual framework that posits the thoughtless, the fragmentation of the subject, and the disarticulation of history, all of which effectively consecrate the impotence of man in the face of circumstance.

The inability of the African to forge his own history

It is this impotence that is theorized and ideologically adopted by post-colonialism. Where emancipatory Reason declared that ‘human beings, individually and collectively, can and must forge their own history’ (Amin, 2008: 9), Bidima (1995: 69) observes on the individual level the impotence of the person in the face of the market and the State; on the macro-political level, he maintains that with regard to international power relationships, ‘Africa does not forge its own history’ (ibid.: 72). Raised to the status of a virtue, passivity constitutes henceforth ‘the kernel of any true politics of life and [...] liberty’ (Mbembe, 2000: xvi). Herein Africa aligns with India: Ashis Nandy (1983: 104) asks whether ‘masculine protest’ and ‘martial valour’ were genuinely the daughters of

the nationalist epic. Nandy, an Indian post-colonialist, specifically sets in opposition to these, in almost Senghorian tones, the passiveness of India's traditions 'of unselfconscious Hinduism, by which most Indians, Hindus as well as non-Hindus, live' (ibid.). Already, Senghor had devitalized and softened the image of Shaka Zulu by reducing that fierce warrior to the inoffensive status of a gentle poet, who is the bearer neither of ardour of thought nor heroic energy, but of *sensuality, sympathy, and love* (Towa 1971: 86–87). Having dismissed the possibility of a victorious armed struggle against colonial domination, there remained to Senghor no other choice except that between resignation and negotiation, pressure and moral preaching, forgiveness and prayer (ibid.: 14).

Such doctrines obviate the *masculine protest* discarded by Nandy (1983: 104) because of its unacceptably high cost. That Franz Fanon should postulate revolutionary violence as the *absolute praxis* causes Mbembe (2000: xv) to exclaim in astonishment: 'You cannot kill a heavily armed enemy without risking your own life in the same act!' Indirectly, this supplementary comment tells us about the true significance of the Western monopoly over arms of mass destruction. But that he should confuse revolutionary heroism with the 'logic of suicide' (ibid.) clearly proves that Mbembe either depreciates or sets a low value upon the historical final achievements of the wars of liberation in the Third World together with the anti-Nazi crusade in Europe itself. Where these are clearly apparent, Mbembe changes tactics by morally delegitimizing the revolutionary enterprise in itself and by criminalizing it: for him it could in no way imply an 'increase in humanity' as Fanon saw it. Mbembe gets to his conclusion by reducing the right to kill the settler to a simple homicide (ibid.). With struggle delegitimized, Mbembe invites the oppressed to embrace fraternity and 'conversion'. The Christological metaphors which permeate his book *De la postcolonie* [On Post-colonialism] imply a 'politics of life' in which, once the 'properly metaphysical nature of violence' has been accepted, a 'new shaping of language, signs and objects' can take place, and where the ultimate horizon of such a work is the production of a 'place in common' or a 'universal' (ibid.: 215).

The fact that the individual's centre of gravity is incidentally displaced and that a definitive breach comes about with his family, his kin-group, his language, and his customs simply legitimizes the conversion which offers the person the possibility of 'locating himself on an absolutely different horizon' which paganism, 'in its horror' (*sic*) 'can no longer attain or regather' (ibid.: 212).

Having noted the limited horizon open to pre-neoliberal 'paganism', Mbembe lays out for the African an 'inexhaustible future', 'infinite opportunity', the 'age of eternity' (ibid.: 213: in effect, a euphemism for the era of globalization). Once a convert to the market, the individual African subject will be able to 'fully realize himself' and 'exercise his own sovereignty over himself'; and in 'this relationship with himself' he will find 'the fullness of his happiness' (ibid.: xviii).

That is how post-colonialism sanctions and sanctifies choices as despicable as the 'spectacular shifting of identity', 'entering the other's time-frame', 'hybridization', the 'redistribution of custom', the occupation of spaces where both dominant and subaltern individuals share 'at bottom, the same fantastic dreams'.² Mbembe resorts to Christological mysticism because his religious imagination is fired by the chimeras of the theology of prosperity, where the liberation of man goes hand in hand with liberation through Christ and through the market. Post-colonialism sets conversion in the place of struggle, oblivious of one glaring fact: however much conversion may 'require of the converted the active exercise of his judgement' (Mbembe, 2000: 212), it roots the subject no less *passively* in history, not to mention that once the indigenous culture has been disassembled, the destructive power of the conversion will substitute for it a chaotic amalgam of cultural elements which will sit astride each other without blending together, as Aimé Césaire observed. Out of this come cultural forms of baroque hybridity – as witnessed by the wretchedness of the syncretic religions in Africa, in Latin America, and the Caribbean – which are idealized by post-colonialism.

It is standard for post-colonialists to accuse of intolerance and racism those peoples who prefer confrontation to conversion. For Mbembe, at any rate, struggles for emancipation imply a double refusal: a refusal to ‘face up to the charge of fratricide’ (for after all, even the most cruel of oppressors is a ‘brother’!) and ‘the refusal to embrace community’ (that is, to fraternize with the enemy and to blend in with the occupier – Mbembe, 2000: xvi). This explains the criminalization of ‘insurrectionary movements’ and even of states which, ‘pretexting a struggle for freedom or sovereignty, pursue policies where “death-dealing” becomes an end in itself, unhindered by any ethical limitations, and where the political struggle is aimed not towards negotiation, but the annihilation of the adversary who is transformed for the purpose into the perfect figure of the enemy’ (ibid.). Since, from this point of view, emancipation struggles are morally and spiritually indefensible, for them must be found a ‘cultural’ alternative. For if, as Bidima observes (1995: 83), ‘every culture has its heroes of guile as well as its heroes of strength and justice’, it is time for Africa to cleanse its stables and give up the cult of ‘virile triumphalism’. Bidima thus lends a new concept to African political philosophy, that of subtle cunning (ibid.: 72). The application of *obliquity* must be the rule taken on by ‘those whose righteousness and tears count for little on the international stage’ (ibid.). It is astonishing that Bidima does not realize that, as already challenged by Du Bois,³ the use of guile is precisely the symptom of the impotence of vanquished peoples who have long since lost the taste of freedom and the habit of struggle. A people who still remembers what liberty tastes like does not try to deceive, does not flatter, does not capitulate: it confronts the oppressor.

The concept of guile goes hand in hand with that of the *kairos* which refers to ‘the decisive moment for strategic survival’ (Bidima, 1993: 241; cf. Nandy, 1983: 107), ‘the time of appropriate opportunity’ (Bidima, 1993: 116), ‘favourable spaces through which the possible might bloom in Africa’ (Bidima, 1995: 69–70). Bidima (1993: 240), who idealizes the marginalized individual, invites the oppressed person to take on a disguise, to ‘become invisible’ and to *poach* ‘on the forbidden domain’ of the Other (ibid. 116). One cannot but be astonished at the extent to which colonial imagery still obsesses post-colonials. Incapable of rising above their servile condition, these academic nomads find it impossible to understand the imperative of disconnection; the idea that Africa can entertain the ambition of constituting an autonomous focal point of power, so as later to join the concert of nations as a fully responsible adult member seems strange to them. No doubt this is the explanation for certain concepts that Bidima in particular uses. He thinks it is reasonable to conceive international relations as incorporating the categories of deviousness and opportunism (ibid.: 241), by applying to North–South relations the art of ‘*deflecting from its course and taking pot-shots at the prevailing force of international domination*’ (ibid.: 243). Bidima gives ideal sanction in fact to a certain range of neo-liberal practices where it is a matter of managing migration flows by combining the erection of class barriers and the closing of borders on the one hand with, on the other, the capitalist offer of individual success addressed with cynical indulgence (despite the official anti-immigrant discourse) to those on the margins, those with enough initiative, to the symbol manipulators of all nations who are sufficiently skilful at avoiding the traps set to counter clandestine immigration or the parasitic activities of exploitation and pure skulduggery.

But in this process, it is in particular the spirit of postmodern anarchism which predominates. This anarchism is present in the idea of tactical opportunism expounded by Fabien Éboussi-Boulaga who, to surmount the obstacle of dependency and domination without having to pass through a revolutionary engagement, imagines what tactics might be handy for creating little spaces of freedom within a domain which ‘the master of the grand strategic game’ has ‘clearly circumscribed and appropriated for himself’ (Éboussi-Boulaga, 2008: 14).⁴ Because it has dispensed with any collective engagement, such a tactical initiative implies the individual action of freely circulating atoms which are open to any type of mutation, notably that of the body. The idea of creating ‘new post-human bodies’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 269) haunts the imagination of the postmodern world.

From an emancipatory point of view, it is a matter of creating bodies capable of breaking free from race, history, nation, family life, the rigid rules governing so-called *normal* sexual life, and so on. Negri claims that the constant changing of identity is the condition for a postmodern republicanism. For him, to be republican in the contemporary age is to carry on a struggle within the sphere of globalization by opposing it on the hybrid and fluctuating terrains that it itself offers us. It is also to take a stand against moralisms of all kinds. The libertarian post-colonialists of Africa accept this postmodern ideal of self-realization across the infinite spaces of globalization. As Lipovetsky explains (1983: 153), it is the drive to consumption that ‘has nullified the value and existence of customs and traditions, it has brought about a national and effectively international culture based on the solicitation of needs and information, it has torn the individual away from the locus and even more from the stability of his daily life, from the immemorial stasis of relationships with objects, one’s body and oneself’. With the desubstantialization of the subject and ‘the emergence of free-floating atoms emptied out by the circulation of the models and because of this, continually recyclable’ (ibid.: 154), one ends up with ‘the progressive effacement of the grand social entities and identities, to be replaced, not by the homogeneity of individuals, but by an unparalleled atomized diversification’ (ibid.: 156). In this general atmosphere of obliteration of difference, of orders and hierarchies, everything loses definition.

Libertarian post-colonialism entirely aligns itself with a neo-liberal vision of the world. Noteworthy pointers to this, concerning for example flexibility and deregulation, can be found in Bidima who examines on the level of ideas the traps that those on the margins pose for functionalism, their loose relationship with time, their ‘exclusion from the logic of performativity to the advantage of non-predictability’ (Bidima, 1993: 241). The sphere of capitalist practice in focus here is that of the market which demands the involvement of persons who are fragmented, impulsive, mobile, without any central values to defend, nor stable identity to project. The way this is expressed ‘politically’ is through accommodation, compromise, negotiation, and even submission. This is the underlying sense of the metaphor of fluid identities that Nandy (1983: 104) attaches explicitly to the ascetic doctrine of strategic survival.

The true issue for Africa, however, is not to act clandestinely on the world’s stage. The goal is not to poach on the forbidden territories of globalization. It is something quite different: not to respond to the appeal of the belly that is addressed to it by the market, because the market needs parasites to cleanse and purify those of its spaces that are saturated with filth; not to dissimulate or to dilute its identity; but rather to raise up a power capable of meeting all the challenges of our time. Such a task irritated Senghor who dreamed of a composite civilization called to enshrine the assimilation association with France and Europe. For ‘it is especially important for the colonial territory to assimilate the spirit of French civilization. This is an assimilation which brings fertility to indigenous civilizations and brings them out of their stagnation’ (Senghor, 1964: 45). But such a mixture of civilizations never comes about on the basis of perfect equality, with Senghor himself recognizing the subaltern nature of a culture and continent that had the choice only between the Empire and stagnation. These crucial issues, however, are avoided by postmodern Senghorism, and Souleymane Bachir Diagne (2007⁵), who puts forward a watered-down and biased reading of Senghor, ignores them completely. In Senghor’s writings, however, the fantasy of hybridity and a blended culture masks the dream of a vast French empire and underpins an ideal of dubious validity: Euro-Africa. The blending of cultures implied ‘a common reason for living’ within the ‘French Empire’ (Senghor, 1964: 45).

Senghor saw hybridity and culture-blending as a way of fighting for the freedom of the soul and of mankind; his postmodern heirs are fighting today ‘against the servitude of belonging to only one nation, one identity, one people’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 436–437). One can thus understand why post-colonialism, which is striving to rehabilitate Senghorism, is deploying so much tenacity

towards deconstructing nations and towards preventing the emergence of a sovereign power for Africa. What a happy coincidence that, in pursuit of policies of structural adjustment, the IMF and the World Bank are realizing on the ground what philosophy had conceived: cultures being drained of their substance, states dismantled, societies atomized, nations fragmented ...

The fragmented nation and multiple temporalities

Once the ambition of constructing a powerful national or pan-African state has been sidelined, the question of how to deal with its fragments then comes to the fore. The sarcastic attitudes expressed by Mamadou Diouf, Bidima, and Appiah⁶ towards Cheik Anta Diop and Nkrumah are effectively directed against the idea of such a state. But to do that, was it really necessary to accuse African national or pan-continental projects of racism? The post-colonials should have the courage to openly assume their neo-liberal choices! In fact, any African national or pan-African project causes alarm because the bringing together of individuals in groups organized according to the criteria of modernity (trade unions, social classes, nations, states) poses an enigma for population flows. Concepts of hybridity, post-nationality, trans-nationality, post-statism, and diaspora ratify the neo-liberal logic of the dispersion of people and the constitution of micro-societies held together by the sole bond of consumerism. Bundled together with the post-ideological and the post-heroic, these doctrines seek to establish that peoples are no longer prepared to pay the price of their blood to win or defend their sovereignty, to sacrifice themselves for their nation or the state, etc. Thus, the question of the 'fragments of the nation' constitutes a major political issue.

It firstly accompanied the reform of civil society in the United States and the defence of *communal insularity* which emerged as a consequence of it. The critics of the *Great Society* refuse to sacrifice the welfare of their local community for the good of the national community; they strongly oppose *progressivist liberalism*, which is guilty in their eyes of pushing people into abandoning their individualism or what makes them particular so as to meld into some grand national (or continental) plan. In their view, the renewal of society should pass via the rehabilitation of social, community, ethnic, and neighbourhood associations. It means little to them that the celebration of these fragmentary components of the nation might have as its endpoint the tribalization of the society and the world (Maffesoli, 2002b).

The theory of the fragmented society is bolstered by projecting in contrast the nation as a space that lays itself open to class struggle. Indeed, the latter does constitute a divisive factor, but also it is a powerful force for bringing the society together. By striving to overcome the contradiction born of social inequalities, class struggle favours the social pact and provides nations with the means for building their unity. The attacks against the nation converge with the renewed questioning of the social pact that had been put in place by the national social state (Balibar). Having difficulty accommodating the clash of interests between exploiters and exploited, rich and poor, neo-liberalism encourages the expression of diversity in a way which leads in the end to confrontation and conflict between cultures (Michaels 2003, 2008: 106; Foé 2008: 168–178).

From an epistemological point of view the issue of fragmentation covers firstly that of micro-objects and coincides with that of *cross-over*, of the *contingent*, the *circumstantial*, the *various*, the *elementary*, the *fugitive*, the *transitory*.⁷ Their post-rationalist and post-nationalist vocation thereupon justifies the renunciation of the *will to knowledge*,⁸ the rejection of any 'arrogant claim to *total and objective knowledge*' (Pandey 1999: 286) and the abandonment of a *totalizing* point of view of a national history which privileges the *national* over the *community* sphere, the *secular* over the *religious* and the *sacred*, the *general* over the *particular*, 'the larger over the smaller, the *general good* over the *marginal*' (ibid.). From the post-colonialist point of view, the fragments enumerated by Pandey⁹ are thought to be of interest only to the extent that they are capable either

of *challenging the construction of history* from the perspective of the state or of laying the basis for *other histories* and to mark out 'those contested spaces across which one seeks to constitute certain specific units and to dismember others' (Pandey 1999: 286), but never if they conceal elements of rationality, universality, and democracy. This is what the African post-colonialists have derived from their Indian friends.

On the academic level, the fields of Cultural Studies along with Subaltern Studies and Post-Colonial Studies suggest a general disengagement from any project involving economic and social history. In the view of A. Mattelart and E. Neveu, 'the charge laid by postmodernism against the 'historiographical transgression of modernity' is the crowning element of the a-historical and a-topical perceptions of the present moment. Reduced to a language, a *representation*, a *narrativization* of the event's immediacy, history becomes flattened out to where micro-objects take centre stage (the Barbie doll, Madonna, McDonalds), *micro-histories* which one refuses to set within broader hierarchies and to integrate into a holistic discourse. After the fashion of other postmodern categories like the *trivial*, the *fragile*, the *slight* [...], the *small* invites leaving the *strong arguments* in the hands of the authoritarian macro-subject' (Mattelart and Neveu, 2008: 100–101).

To have done with the *historiographical transgression* is first and foremost to grasp history itself as simply *representation*, *story-telling*, *narration*, divested of all power to tell the truth. That leads to admitting the existence of 'alternative, parallel histories' (Wickramasinghe, 1999: 420). The intention of this approach is to break with the 'teleological understanding of history'. This break consists in recognizing the specific temporality of *regional histories*, about which it is said that they do not necessarily constitute stages on the way to the formation of the nation or the State (ibid.). Since history is 'one of the most important means by which we learn to identify with the nation and with its highest representative body: the State',¹⁰ *Subaltern Studies* invites seeing the link between nationalism and history as purely relative. Thus, although nationalist elites may well try to appropriate the historical struggles of the subaltern in the name of building a national State, the latter will still develop visions of the world which differ from that of the nation. This was the conclusion drawn by Ranajit Guha from peasant revolt in colonial India. Nira Wickramasinghe promotes a more radical perspective by advancing the theory of a 'history exterior to the nation'. This approach means not just disregarding the nation or the idea of the 'nation as history' (Wickramasinghe, 1999: 427). Rather, this author proposes to project the gaze upon the *people*, which owed its existence neither to the narrative of political struggle nor to resistance to an oppressor. For Wickramasinghe, it is neither in heroic tales, that is to say, in 'stories of the common imagination, collective efforts aimed at kicking out the colonialists', or in 'modern ideologies of the nation and the downward diffusion of ideas' that one should seek the *raison d'être* of communities. These latter are 'much more the work of common folk-tales, customs, idiosyncrasies, commonly shared perceptions of time' (ibid.). Wickramasinghe stresses the importance and the stakes associated with an 'autonomous conception of time in the creation of the history of a people or of a community'.

In fact the author's intention is to deliver a definitive answer to the question of whether it is possible to conceive of a people outside of national history and the issues relating to political struggle. His viewpoint is that the present of folk-tales does not necessarily coincide with 'stories of the building of States', since to the contrary it relates to the time of 'the peasant life bound to the stars, to the moon, to the blooming of flowers' (ibid.). Thus it is that, to bring about the implosion of the thoroughly hated notion of a *consciousness of nation*, the post-colonialist inserts into history the dynamite of '*peasant time*' (ibid.: 428).

Hence, in place of national history, linked to resistance, to struggles for emancipation and to the emergence of a national consciousness, there come to be substituted *different histories*, with different *temporal continuities*, having 'their own measures, their own discourses and moments

of tension and rupture, with heroes that are their own', who are 'sometimes legendary person-ages, sometimes ordinary people' (ibid.). These are 'autonomous and distinct histories of particular peoples, not obscured by the narrative of the construction or destruction of the nation' (ibid.) and even less by political struggle. Here may clearly be perceived the strategic issue arising from the *multiple and undisciplined temporalities of distinct ethnic groups* which Mamadou Diouf (1999: 25) contrasted with *world time* and modern universality.

Neither the economic function nor the social status of the peasant really interests post-colonialism. Rather it is searching for a figure to substitute for the proletarian, the symbol of resistance to class oppression and harbinger of revolutionary and socialist ideas. So, once the old bourgeoisie–proletariat, rich versus poor polarity has been annulled and the proletariat has been submerged and neutralized in the *multitude*, then the social and national totality can begin to decompose, with the breaking down to the infinitesimal of the figures embodying difference: women, the disabled, gays, lesbians, clan associations, even if it means subsuming them under the vague and inoffensive category of *subaltern*. Cultural and Postcolonial Studies suppress any violent social antagonisms by culturalizing, tribalizing, racializing, and clericalizing socio-economic and political differences. That all adds up to a weighty argument to level against Marxist economic determinism.

It is thus in the heart of the multitude that post-colonialism rediscovers the peasant as the ideal figure to represent the *fragments of the nation*. Mamadou Diouf invites reading the silences of the peasantry in poetry, in painting, in literature, in the arts, in film (ibid.: 19). When a class posture thus mutates into culture (Michaels 2009: 145), the study of its representations and what it makes its own, its *identity*, in short, its *culture*, becomes possible. The interest shown in the analysis of texts and hermeneutics derives from this mutation (Diouf, 1999: 20).

The political goals of hermeneutics and indigenous knowledges

The rejection of history and a more marked interest in hermeneutics and semiotics constitutes a significant political issue. History is reproached for formulating normalizing categories which lead ultimately to the identification of people under the headings of workers, peasants, craftsmen, women, and so on. But it is the 'potential political effects' of such a definition of identity that disturb post-colonialists (Diouf, 1999: 20). That an attack is made on the subject who is thus accorded an 'essentialized identity' should remind us of what is really disputed in the drawing out of these normalizing categories: it is the active, coherent, and rational subject of the modern social domain itself. This subject acts within a world which, though traversed by conflict, remains intelligible. The post-colonialist embraces the alternative identity, based on 'postmodern sociality' (Maffesoli, 2002a: 194), with its *affective reason*, its *fragmented, impulsive, and irrational subject*, its *Dionysiac wisdom* which lumps together a jumble of forms, emotions, affects, and values. From this point of view, philosophy and the social sciences bear the guilt of their desire for unity, intelligibility, and praxis. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak sets against this the *sympathetic* and *polysemic* literary text that is open to any possible interpretation. Herein lies the meaning of 'semiotic democracy' (Mattelart and Neveu 2008: 87) which coincides with the objectives of linguistic idealism and social constructivism.

But to reduce the social world to a construct and economic and social logics to texts or simple *discourse games* is not an innocent process, since from a political point of view that is tantamount to saying that the world may not be either known or transformed; it may simply be interpreted. Therein lies the whole interest of the *quest for meaning* which indicates a need for spirituality and an embracing of all the spiritual traditions of humanity.

Hermeneutics addresses the question of the rehabilitation of the guiding forms of human thought derived from the past, not that of the transgression of those traditions; it seeks to establish how we

might live our myths, our symbols, our systems of reference, our traditions on which the identity of a people is based and which give a sense to its existence (Bidima, 1995: 32). Hermeneutics is thus neither an act of rebellion nor a project for emancipation. In African philosophy, this doctrine prospers initially where the West has violently brought down the regimes that had emerged from the struggles for national liberation. After the assassination of Lumumba in the Congo, that process was, in parallel with political support for the rise of Mobutu's regime, to draw the intellectual elites ideologically away from the revolutionary ideas they had been tempted by. Hermeneutics fulfilled this mission thoroughly at the Catholic University of Kinshasa.

The American priest and philosopher George F. McLean, whose philosophical activism on African campuses is well-known, clearly distinguishes the political goals of hermeneutics. By way of the civil society, tradition, religion, and ethnic culture, he wishes to propose an alternative to the modern nation-state, with its rational, enlightened, and free citizens. Through hermeneutics, he wishes to bring man to being more attentive to the meaning of traditions, symbols, and beliefs. McLean (1997: 55–56) thinks that by idealizing the notion of clear and distinct ideas, the Enlightenment may well have missed underlying *existential meanings*, which are only accessible through a hermeneutic approach to tradition. Hermeneutics involves the quest for meaning and directly sends us back to our own origins and to transcendence itself (McLean, 1997: 57). Anti-Enlightenment views of this kind are well equipped to justify a return to ethnology and to attract the advocates of *indigenous knowledges*, all the more since the meaning of the tradition called up by hermeneutics 'is very vivid in pre-modern and village communities' (ibid.: 55). But ethnology contests the very project of an anthropology of emancipation, as Foucault attests, in the fundamental antagonism it creates between function, conflict, and meaning on the one hand and norm, rule, and system on the other. Indigenous knowledges pose in their case the problem of the ideological function of mythic structures in oppressed countries. Fanon shows that in such countries

the domain of the secret is a collective domain coming exclusively out of magic. By winding myself into this inextricable labyrinth where acts repeat themselves in crystalline permanence, it is the perpetuity of the 'my-world', of the 'our-world' which is thus affirmed. Believe me, zombies are more terrifying than settlers. And in that context, the problem is no longer how to align with the iron-bound world of colonialism but to think three times before urinating, spitting or going out in the night. The powers of the supernatural, of magic, are revealed as being astonishingly egoic. The powers of the settler are rendered infinitely insignificant, marked by foreignness. There is really no need to fight against them since what counts especially is the fearful affliction of the mythic structures. Everything is resolved, it may be seen, through constant facing up to the elements of the phantasmical. (Fanon, 1982: 21)

What Memmi (1985: 115) shows is that social and economic retardation, the conditions governing the colonized peoples' accession to a national consciousness, complicates the realization of a truly modern emancipation project. Emphasis needs to be placed on the pernicious effects of the grave social and historical damage done them due to the fact that the colonized person is forever locked out from the objective conditions of nationality and particularly from those of the modern citizen: he can neither vote nor govern. Such denials of citizenship naturally ensure the victory of tradition and religion. And as Memmi himself makes clear, this victory implies being permanently bound up within the prosaic cocoon of the life of the family, devotion to clan elders, the cult of ancestor worship, locked within the closed circle of the rites of a formal religion and absolute obligation to one's kin or clan group. The culture of servility implanted by these structures implies the end of conflict, the stifling of revolt against oppression, the devitalization of political struggle. The oppressed individual, thus enfeebled, can then be enrolled in the present, ruling out any imagining of broader social horizons or inventing for himself a historic future marked by freedom.

There needs to be an explanation for the philosophical polarization around the question of mythical systems (and hence of *indigenous knowledges*) since the initiation of systems of structural adjustment and the regime of governance. Imposed on the African states by the IMF and the World Bank, structural adjustment and governance contradict the post-colonial vision of peace which purported to show that since the way the world was previously ordered had ceased to be a threat, there was now constituted a vast network of opportunities and affinities.¹¹ The truth, however, is quite different: ‘The continent appears to be more and more administered from the outside, without the finger being pointed at one of the principal causes of its instability: the violence and injustice of international relationships’ (Robert, 2010: 21). Deprived once more of true citizenship, the African who is subject to the regime of structural adjustment and governance turns again to the sphere of myth, a recourse which moreover is encouraged by the imposed governance around religion. The opening of the frontiers to religious movements of the most extreme stripe is part of the set of conditions laid down by the IMF and the World Bank. Issuing from the centre of capitalism, all project themselves as ideological alternatives to communism, Islam, and Buddhism. Convergent with the most radical tendencies of neo-liberalism, the religious governance regime projects in prospect the transformation of the religious ideal into a civic ideal. Liberalism, it is said, must stop being identified with the scientific vision of the world inherited from the Enlightenment, as with any other world vision hostile to religious belief and to moral ideals founded on faith (Bridges, 1997: 178). Thus, God has come to occupy a critical place in the context of civic discourse. Bridges dreams of a *civic theology* that is able to articulate, around a single civic ideal, the love for civic justice along with love for God, where a Christian community fashioned by such a theology is able to inspire and uphold the liberal political institutions (ibid.: 178). In Africa there may be noted a proliferation of Christian sects which, under the banner of the *theology of prosperity*, project themselves as alternatives to the *theology of liberation*. This latter asserted that poverty was the consequence of the unjust mechanisms of the world economy; the theology of prosperity, which arose in North America, claims on the other hand that if there are poor people, it is because there exist those who are insufficiently blessed by divine grace.

Concluding remarks about post-colonialism and the ideology of governance

Mbele (2010: 15–40) apprehends post-colonialism as an ideological complex which is the counterpart of ‘the adjustment of sub-Saharan Africa to the globalization of neo-liberal capitalism’. The notion of governance, which has come to supplant the ideal of *good government*,¹² provides it with the ideal operating framework. African philosophy has tackled the issue of governance from the angle of corruption, obviously inspired by the high-quality analyses of those such as Lucien Ayissi (2007, 2008, 2009) and of Joseph Ndzomo Molé (2007), all of which are guided by severe moral rectitude and a marked Platonist-Kantian spirit. Their different ideological inspiration does not prevent these studies coinciding with one of the central thematic elements of Mbembe’s *De la postcolonie* which notably targets a ‘world marked by frantic licence’ and permeated by the ‘surreptitious venom of corruption’ (Mbembe, 2000: 270). There is no less doubt that the question of corruption in Africa comes to the fore within a context of structural adjustment and the imposition of neo-liberal ‘cures’ on the State, the economy, and society. The mark left by Bretton Woods should have constituted sufficient warning of what was to come. The questions of philosophy must today be brought to bear on a number of imperative issues: the very concept of ‘good management’; the world seen purely in terms of profit and loss; the dominance of the ‘deciders’; the ideological function of the moral preaching that is invading the political space, not to mention any

crucial issue linked to the spirit of self-indulgence and the mentality of consumerist celebration. The explanation for this can in fact be found in the very structure of the social forms of the capitalism of the periphery, in particular in the distortion of economies towards unproductive activities or those associated with the ‘tertiary sector’ (Amin, 1970). This distortion is manifest firstly in the unfair competition imposed on the embryonic industries of the peripheral nations by the mastodons of the capitalist Centre which prohibits any productive investment in emerging countries. Deprived of any real outlets, the under-employed capital either ends up in the most unproductive sectors of the economy, or is drawn off into the tax havens of the North, or else is diverted into partying, rustic hospitality, luxury consumption, pleasure-seeking, in short, into gross wastage.

By discrediting any ambition to render the social dimension intelligible, post-colonialism reinforces the postmodern dogma of the complex, according to which the reality of the world (nature, history, society, the economy, law, politics etc.) is opaque and inaccessible to reason (that is, to the reason of the ordinary citizen). Whence arises the idea that any understanding acquired through approximation and in small chunks is possible only via the intermediary of a specialized body of interpreters, charged with unveiling before an ignorant public the mysteries of society, the economy, and science. Governance is the regime *par excellence* of experts and decision-makers. It is under such a regime that sudden discovery has been made of the state of incompetence, inefficiency, and administrative chaos of the systems of state which up until that time had been assuring our prosperity, our security, and our general happiness. Therefore, in the name of efficiency and good management, it became a matter of installing throughout Africa a regime of ‘organic governance’ (following the socio-economic theory of Tom R. Burns), a cover term for ‘government by private interests’ whose mission is to constrain individuals to personally assume the costs for services, whether for health, education, or culture. Such appeals to personal responsibility require individuals to take themselves in hand, since a society of risk implies the recovery of costs. Africa is being henceforth directed to administer its state services, its hospitals, its schools, its universities as though they were businesses, opening the way to a ‘means-test democracy’ and to a ‘class dictatorship’ through which private interests seek actively to fracture popular sovereignty and hold parliamentary democracy in check. Mbele accuses post-colonialisms of rationalizing inequalities: the same thing could be said about governance itself. When, taking a postmodern stance, post-colonialists belabour the State, idealize the ‘fragments of the nation’ of which the civil society is made up, and demand an increase in the capacitation of these latter, they are converging in fact with the ethos of neo-liberalism which prescribes the strengthening of the capacities of associations and corporations. This is the sort of horizon that post-colonialism and governance is proposing for Africa. It falls to the political responsibility of African philosophy urgently to address this issue and to find a solution to it. Already appeals are multiplying in favour of a return to the spirit of Bandung and to a renewed form of ‘liberation warfare’ (cf. Amin, 2009; Vari-Lavoisier, 2010: 20).

Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Notes

1. C. R. Mbele draws indignant attention to how post-colonialists are preventively criminalizing the very idea of an African form of power by projecting it as ‘the margins of a *hubris* pregnant with historical revanchism’. He declares: ‘With Bassidiki Coulibali as with J.-G. Bidima (for whom a linear vision of African history gives formal shape to “the epistemological base and the heuristic processes emerging within a symbolic space in which the Black is obsessed with the idea of vengeance”), it is tantamount to an appeal to execution: put the rope around the Africans’ necks before they grow powerful and take their revenge!’ (2010: 25). But there could well be a great misunderstanding around this issue of historic revenge. The liberation movements speak of revenge over their own history of domination and slavery.

- China, which has taken revenge over its own history by *disconnecting itself from imperialism* today represents a major factor for stability and progress in Asia and throughout the world.
2. See his chapter 4 entitled: 'Le fouet de Dieu' [The Scourge of God].
 3. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Les Âmes noires* [The Souls of the Blacks], quoted by Mbele (2010: 22).
 4. See Mbele's critique (2010: 21).
 5. See in particular the conclusion.
 6. See Diouf (1999: 5–10), Bidima (1995: 78–83), Appiah (1992: 16–17).
 7. Cf. Éboussi-Boulaga (1977), Bidima (1995: 124).
 8. Maffesoli (2002a: 36); see also Lyotard (1974).
 9. Covering, for example, the personal diary of a weaver, the collected poems of an anonymous author, myths, women's songs, family genealogies, local historical traditions, and so on.
 10. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'History as Critique and Critique(s) of History', quoted by Wickramasinghe (1999: 421).
 11. See Mbele's critique in this regard (2010: 30).
 12. On the distinction between governance and good government, see Foé (2003: 5–8), Robert (2010: 21).

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