Philosophical Sketches on African Becomings

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When the "object" gazed at is called Africa and when the gazing subject is Africa, the observer cannot help but conclude that any gaze that is related to Africa is an intersection of gazes calling forth several questions: *Who* is looking at Africa? What is Africa looking at? *Who* looks at the one who is looking at Africa? Two problems emerge from this: the identification of the subject, and the discrimination among objects and themes produced by the limited scope of these gazes. If the gaze at (or of) Africa is an intersection of perspectives, these perspectives will only find stability if they are related to the African history that is in the making. This is a plural history, for geographic diversity, and the multiplicity of acting figures and sociopolitical organizations give African history a "changeable and diverse" character. Any evaluation of the relationship of Africans to their history must be an attempt, a sketch that makes no pretense of providing a unique and certain interpretation of the African lived experience (*Erlebnis*) by implementing the kind of controlling philosophy of history that fixes the beginning, the length, and the order of a people's history. It is more a question of restating, with the uncertainty that characterizes any evaluation of a specific history, the problem of the relationship of African history to its becomings. How, by which conditions and through which actors does this plural history speak its moments of creation today? At its heart, how does it articulate the conflicting overlap of the gravity of existing institutions and the audacity of creation? The exploration of these questions first centers around the often discussed theme of African identity (self). The stakes at this level involve the detachment of the conditions of a dynamic re-appropriation from this notion of identity – at the very moment when

globalization is conjugating itself by turns in the imperative, the indicative, and the conditional. Next, the examination will focus on relationships to otherness (the other). How can intersubjective relations be declined differently?

How does intersubjectivity inscribe itself in the institution, its third-party mediator? In other words, in which modes will political institutions favor and/or hinder creativity? Finally, how, in a world that has lost faith in any founding and explanatory "great Narrative," can projection (transcendence) of time and action bear witness to an African modernity in the making? How is the possible conjugated – in real situations in Africa – beginning with the self, then passing through the other and the symbolic mediator also known as the institution to the point of the subject's self-projection in history?

Identity: The Crossing of the Self

The new legitimating powers use a heavily consecrated dualism for the analysis of intercultural relations. Today we add the local/global (or local/universal) breakdown to the North/South, Center/Periphery distinctions. Examinations of their many ties often privilege either the assimilating dynamic of the global, whose extension, far from being one-dimensional, proves that the world is a "vast village," or the resistance of the *local*, which affirms its stability and its specificity. Today the revaluation of the local has bearing on the interpretive reprise of the notion of an African identity which now more than ever is becoming an actuality.

In this case, the problem of identity should be considered on the scale of an entire people. It concerns less the seeking of the individual identity of a subject within a group than the quest of a people for their self. This quest could be considered the answer developed by a people in response to its moments of rupture and its wounds. To speak the truth, this quest is not, contrary to what one might believe, the consequence of a crisis at the heart of a people, but the actual moment of the crisis during which a people reformulates its expectations and utopias in sadness, generosity, and uncertainty – all the while creating new reference points. This

moment is essential, for "a system is judged at the moment of response that it gives to its own rupture."[1]

The rehabilitation of the African identity translated this movement of rupture in one of two ways according to whether one was an African living in Africa or an African living outside of Africa. For the first, the stakes of identity had European colonization as a target, while for the second, the accent was put on slavery. But these two groups united in conceiving of this relationship to the self (identity) as the manner in which a people relate to their own background. The first moment of this fundamental relationship would be that of the "putting down roots"[2] during which one searches for secure shelter in the face of the disturbance caused by contact with the other. Putting down roots constitutes a paradoxical liberation moment: one does not liberate oneself – from colonization and slavery – as much as one attaches oneself to a native soil, to a community. The testimonial of liberating identity founded itself, in this case, upon biological (race) and agricultural (culture) metaphors. The affirmation of "roots" was the great umbrella that was meant to protect: it was necessary to define oneself a priori by means of communal ties that were independent of individual choice. In this, these ties were never clearly illuminated except by the very ambiguous notion of a "black race." One of the stakes of the search for identity thus became over the years far more cultural than political (in order to revalidate a negated and disparaged culture). In this context, the culture has an agricultural aspect. It is replanted, the roots are examined, the young shoots are watered, the cores are separated from the shells of all cultural practices – the beginnings of négritude could be understood in this sense. The discourse of putting down roots next adopted a genealogical and cathartic dimension. An identity cannot understand itself unless it is linked to an origin (genesis), and is only legible "in relation to ..." This "beginning from ..." is a principle (in the Latin sense of beginning) that reduces the social actor's identity to her allegiance to an ethnic culture. By the same token, ethnic culture is essentialized by being considered a heredity which the Africans cannot escape. In this case belonging is transmitted like a genetic patrimony. The subject is seen only as "a link in the chain of filiation"[3] and its narrow identity is referred to as "the sacred intolerance of the root."[4] This genealogy is built by

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expelling foreign elements. In Africa it was a question of affirming local history by expunging the imported elements. This elimination determined identity by differentiating it from forced cultural practices.[5] Among the Africans of the diaspora, a double movement was observed. First there was a realization of the situation of the oppressed – experienced differently according to whether one lives in northern Europe or the Antilles – which occasionally went as far as violence. Next, these Africans of the diaspora were living in a situation of cultural minority in the heart of much larger groups. The question of identity therefore became vital by organizing itself around the theme of "cultural contact."[6] So it was that themes of marginalization and integration appeared. The notion of African identity has met with a strong opposition in the diaspora. There are "universalist" studies that are wary of any extremist "particularization," then there is the cultural "assimilation machine" that has occasionally promised social ascent – but whose glass-ceiling maintains only the phantasm of a possibility open to all and tends to mask the permanence of a collective decrease. The more firmly set these oppositions became, the more another sector was clinging to a return to itself that was becoming understandable and beneficial within the framework of the diaspora. So, the danger lay in an eventual closing in upon itself.

Towards Another Philosophy of History

Now, the critical understanding of a history sees it as an autoprojection, a tension towards the future. The overvaluing of the past must not flatten the present: rather it should be at its service by presenting the past as a "not-yet-finished" actualization whose virtualities will confer its historical dimension upon the present. In this case, the past becomes a demand – not only a reservoir, the present, a process – not a state. The elements of the past that had been smothered by practices formerly instituted are now demanding to be allowed to hatch. In one stroke the search for identity by means of recourse to tradition ceases to envision the past as a resting place that would ratify the reconciliation between a people crushed by suffering and itself, and becomes a critical intersection

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of gazes. A past which is no longer taken as depository of certainties and nostalgia of our presence in the world becomes the uncertain place toward which the critic directs himself; the critic must also be interested in the elements which, by their inopportuneness, have resisted the crushing nature of their present.

Through criticism, a new philosophy of history might emerge from this problematic of identity. The relationship to the past can adopt a point of view, be it *monumental, antiquarian,* or *critical.*[7] Until the present, the relationship of the tenets of "African identity" to the African past was made in a monumental fashion. Without first examining them, one reattached and identified with emblematic figures from the African past,[8] thus edifying a triumphant history in which only great monuments and great kingdoms counted. This is a selective vision of history[9] that plays on the analogy of situations: one only takes from Africa that which has triumphed and expressed greatness. The monumental scenario of the past considers the African memoirs as a theater production in which all that is shown are the heroes. This monumental reading – which establishes an analogy and a set of links between the greatness of the past and a present waiting to be validated – forgets to put an emphasis on the peculiarities, the botched occasions, and all of the moments when tradition did not keep its promises. The apologists of such "putting down of identity roots" – at least in the recent past – have not taken into account the fact that historical experience (*Erfahrung*) is enriched not only with monuments, continuities, pretty totalities, and flashiness but also with debris, incoherences, checks, and above all with the imperceptible. The old-fashioned reading of history – which is to be found in the work of certain Africans – answers, despite itself, the need that a people express to revere its tradition, and to preserve it by attaching it to a city, a lineage, or a soil. What is dangerous in this approach lies in the fact that belonging becomes a justification. The reasoning held – above all among certain Africans of the diaspora – is the following: "It's African, it belongs to our original cultural heritage therefore it is good!" This uncritical reclamation of the past, directed against "historical amnesia," represents a risk for historical life, for it becomes a great mummy. "The antiquarian sense of a man, a city, or a nation has always a very limited field ... There is no measure: equal

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importance is given to everything."[10] The *critical reading* of African identity wants to understand the past and the search for self as tears and gaps in whose interiors the not-yet finds its execution. An autoreflexive reading of African history cannot do without treating these historical anchor points in relation to each other; "every past is worthy of being judged" (Nietzsche). For the critical and proleptic appropriation of African identity, the critique of the relationship to the self opens a certain number of lines of thought. *a*) Without denying belonging, identities are only historical possibilities, "dispositions to ...," circumstances rather than eternal essences. All aspects will be at work in the creation of a perspective. *b*) Granting privilege to the critical memory, which sees a history not yet finished within each trace of history, fertilizes a history under reconstruction. *c*) We must, in our attachment to Africa, be attentive to the "the *excremental* dimension of African social praxis. It is a question of going toward the 'immeasurable' margin in order to see how social knowledge ... rejects its remainders and to what extent these remnants ... which are unable to be appropriated or assumed could assure African society of its own transition."[11] *d*) In African history, identity is more a horizon than a residence, because what is important is not solely in the origin, nor even in the goal, but in the in-between, in the *crossing* during which one interbreeds the unknown and the possible foreshadows of otherness.

A Critical Reprise of Identity: Palabre

In order to rethink African identity it is necessary to read the African past in a criss-crossing manner. It is urgently necessary to compare it often against other cultural practices in order to see which among them, taken separately from limitations resulting from history and geography, express the human the most simply. Palabre[12] – this politic of the word, this bitter discussion, which by means of discourse suspends the violence contained in a conflict – is an example of an African practice which, today, expresses the not-yet and by this very fact remains very actual. How is this traditional practice of conflict resolution useful today? And how does it enable the return to an "African identity" in a critical rather than

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an old-fashioned manner? Before answering this question let us make clear that palabre differs according to the socio-political organization of the society concerned. A patrilinear society at the heart of a centralized state like that of the Yoruba or the Buganda differs in terms of its foundations from the palabre of a lineage-based society like the Beti of Cameroon, the Lobis of Burkina, or the Bwa of Mali. Aside from this plurality, palabre has some constant traits.

- The reaching of a provisional consensus after a discussion
- The use of ordeals for inquiries (less and less common)
- Continuous use of deliberation
- The important role of mediators, above all in session, of a palabre
- Peace – and not the truth – is the supreme value
- The atonement of the losing parties

How can this practice, conceived in the framework of tribal societies and so different from the organization of state-societies in which we live, still have a future?

The first concept of interest in palabre is the theme of "publicity." To make public what affects the common future is one of the first tasks of palabre. The putting into narrative form a conflict and its "publication" (in the sense of rendering public) constitute one of the great challenges of modern democracy. The notion of publicity is inseparable from peace. This demand for "publicity" connects with Kant's famous thoughts in *Perpetual Peace*. For Kant "each jurisdictional pretension must be able to be made public … we will then have a transcendental formula of public law"; the law: "All actions relating to the rights of other men are unjust if their maxim is not consistent with publicity."[13] The notion of publicity will be revived in our time by thoughts such as those of philosopher Jürgen Habermas concerning deliberative democracy.[14] Publicity will therefore be a transversal concept that an African can find equally well in her culture and in actual debates on deliberative democracy.

The second idea is that of proceedings. The palabre highlights proceedings. Each palabre is made up of mini-palabres, confabulations, and deliberations that articulate themselves by fitting inside each other. The concept of proceedings is important and actual in

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the thoughts of political philosophy today: John Rawls used it when he established a distinction between procedural justice and substantial justice,[15] while Paul Ricœur criticizes it in the name of a teleological conception of justice.[16] As it is employed by palabre, the idea of proceeding serves to reaffirm a necessity; that every political evaluation be subjected to the mediation of the symbolic. This concept, like that of publicity, is not an epiphenomenon for the African immersed in modernity. His culture already offers him analogous instruments which, on contact with the necessary historical transformations, will permit him to make a better evaluation of the problems posed.

The third concept that is interesting here is the relationship to justice and ethics. The problem is located on the plane of rampant penalization. In modern democracies the relationship to justice tends to privilege the penal aspect. "The penal system [is becoming] the arm in the war of all against all."[17] The great challenge is to conceive of a relationship to justice that will not be a "vast penalization of collective life." How can the inquisitorial matrix in which all relationships are interpreted according to the binary code of aggressor and victim be detached from the law in modern democracies?[18] The most extreme relationship of the subject to the law is based, where the Occident is concerned, on the "survey-punish" pairing (Michel Foucault). Palabre, in its spirit, will propose a relationship to the law in which the penal aspect does not eclipse the entire judicial sphere. In palabre, it is a question of "survey-punish-redeem."[19] What is essential is not the punishment, but the reinforcement of a bond that has been strained. One could well be inspired by the model of the palabre as an alternative to a very penal vision of social relations.

Finally, palabre insists upon the notion of consensus. This last engages the actual thoughts on the ethics of deliberative democracy in Occidental political philosophy. Habermas and Rawls[20] use it in their discussion on justice and Ricœur uses the term "conflicting-consensus." The question that democracies are asking is: What place does consensus have in the heart of democratic pluralism? Palabre is relevant to this question and could nourish thought surrounding it, for palabre brings the misunderstandings concerning the founding symbols of a given society onto the stage. It permits

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the articulation of a conflictual consensus that indicates that the discussion is adjourned and the conflict suspended.

The critical reconsideration of African identity involves an inventory of the moments of sudden appearance in the African past and of their intersection with the history that is in the process of being made. In essence, no practice can be evaluated unless it is related to its other, otherness.

Otherness: Community and Intersubjectivity

If the other is the mediator between me and myself, the relation to the self leads necessarily to intersubjectivity and otherness. Otherness will be studied here in so far as it constitutes first the place where the linguistic exchange is put to the test, second the framework of intercommunication between cultures and between sexes, and finally the moment of confrontation.

How does African history refuse otherness on the triple levels of linguistic representation, management of the relationship between cultures and sexes, and conceptualization of conflict? Two theoretical stakes frame this interrogation: communication and ethics.

African Languages and Otherness

Representation of and in language is always the question at the base of conversation. In Africa, the colonial adventure that separated "languages" from "dialects"[21] provoked a reaction on the part of concerned Africans wanting to show that their languages were equally apt at expressing scientific and philosophical abstraction. Such is the case for Alexis Kagame[22] in Rwanda and Pathé Diagne in Senegal.[23] For the former, the *Kinyarwanda* declined Being as Aristotle had done in Greek, while the latter translated a Platonic dialogue into Wolof. Another series of thoughts on language attempted to reconnect African languages to a founding language-substance that would have been ancient Egyptian. The language of the glorious pharaohs – who were undoubtedly slavers and autocrats – would be the glorious source that would

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restore the family fortunes by ties of filiation, for example, of Wolof, Peul, or Hausa. Other orientations, of a pedagogical order, tried to spread African languages throughout the entire educational system, in order to save Africans from the handicap that they sometimes had in thinking over their problems in a foreign language.[24] These treatments of African languages have been criticized[25] on one hand for founding the diversity of the languages on the One (ancient Egyptian) – an avatar of monotheism – and on the other, for forgetting the codes of power carried by each language.

The critique of language must first break free from reducing language to the language used by African philosophers. They – above all the francophones – are more interested in African languages than they are in the inclusive aspect of language. As far as language is concerned, the veritable stakes of African modernity lie in the relationship of language to the possible.[26] The language used matters little, the significance is found in how the language is linked to the powers, representations, and the mythical references that are its foundation. The simple use of African languages does not make the critical examination of their symbolic codes and founding images irrelevant. How are the mechanisms of statement adjusted when an African uses a language? How are incomprehensibility, difference, and indetermination of meaning conjugated in the African's relationship to language? How does the symbolic exchange with a place work? What is the existing link between the institution of speech and the speech of institutions? Under which modalities does the African invest in language as a mirror of the self, the other, and institutions? How can the narrativizing of a discourse obscure all of the ritual statements that govern it? To what extent will the realization of scenarios and narratives be transformed at the heart of a society into the realization of order? These questions seek to bring the inevitable link created between a language and the marking of the subject into relief.

Communication between Cultures

In order for a language to be able to show an outer world to the subject, it is necessary for it to find its point of autoreflexivity, "its

own point of underdevelopment, its own *patois*, its own third world."[27] Deleuze, in this sense, recommends a "deterritorialization" of language. This concept permits us to broach the difficult subject of intercultural communication in philosophy. Let us leave the problem of translation[28] aside in order to place emphasis upon that of the founding norms. It is a question of knowing whether it is possible for philosophy, by means of some transcendental investigation, to identify and justify universal transcultural norms on the basis of which different ethnic practices and sociocultural diversities may objectively be evaluated. Many answers have been given in the framework of this debate. That of the South African philosopher Willie Van der Merwe demands comment.[29] Taking his inspiration from the Wittgensteinian notions of "forms of life" and of "tricks of language," and above all from the Lyotardian critique of "Great Narratives" (see *The Postmodern Condition*), he answers that such a transcendental foundation would be impossible in the plural society of South Africa, but that intercultural dialogue is possible through philosophy. This fairly vague answer might be completed by the reconsideration of a link woven between desire and discourse. What unites these different beings is not only their attachment to life, but above all their relationship to ethics and to "image-wishes" (E. Bloch).

In this sense Ricœur distinguishes ethics from morals[30] although both pertain to mores. Ethics coming from Greece – the Aristotelian heritage – is characterized by its teleological vision. Ethics go back to what is esteemed good "and would be rooted in desire, in wishes." It is an optative of the genre: "Oh! If I had only been able to live like this or like that! ... Ethics concerns me, but it also implicates the other."[31] Morals seek to accomplish these "optatives" by means of norms which are characterized by their pretension to universality and their restrictive character. If ethics places itself on the teleological level, then morals are of the deontological order. Ethics envision what is good, morals what is obligatory.[32] The passage from the optative to the imperative, from positive desire (ethics) to negative forbidding (morals) complicates intercultural communication, for in the name of what should one obey these cultural imperatives? Morals will occasionally act as a brake on intercultural dialog, for their imperatives – despite their pre-

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tension to universality – do not have indisputable foundations. *A contrario*, ethics – which is "more fundamental than morals"[33] – could be the base of intercultural dialogue in that it expresses only a wish, an optative, that sets desire, not duty, in motion. Ernst Bloch, writing in this spirit, underlines the undeniable importance of "image-wishes"[34] and dreams in all historical progressions. For Bloch, he who "wishes" and dreams "never remain[s] rooted to the spot, but "move[s] almost at will away from the place or the state in which [he] find [himself]."[35] Desire, image-wishes, and dreams unite far more than imperatives. The reconsideration of the optative (what does a people wish for?) is one of the means of intercultural intersection and one of the stages of dialog. So the problematic of language quits the narrow stance of simple conservation of African languages in order to engage in the ethics of relationships between humans.

The Relationships between Men and Women

The other can take the figure of the foreigner, the child, and the woman.[36] The relationship of the man to the woman has been posed for some time in Africa in political terms. It is a question of criticizing the structure of patriarchal power that has confined the speech of women in Africa to the level of the domestic economy.[37] Two orientations stand out among critiques of male power among African philosophers: *a*) Ndeye A. Thiam of Senegal[38] who poses with vigor the problem of the management of the African woman's body, *b*) Pauline Eboh of Nigeria who recommends a movement (womanism) of emancipation of the African, free of the occidental prejudices of feminists.[39] Their criticisms are directed at genealogy and morals. On the genealogical level, the patriarchy has imposed its law. This law is philosophically justified by the monopolizing of the act of thought by men. Problematizing this patriarchal law then becomes a question of hunting it down in its referent. At the level of morals, a macho moral has been built based on competition, greed, and hierarchy. The woman's body, reduced to the role of procreation (and occasionally mutilation), brought with it the femininity/fertility identification. The alternative was therefore to

show how, by means of the wiles of her body, her thoughts, and her action, the woman parodied the imposed codes so as to replace the "law of the father" with a "law of the mother" which would liberate feminine phrasing. As an example, the dynamic presence of women in African economic progress is often cited (the "Nanas Benz" in Togo and the "Bayam Sellam" in Cameroon).

The vitality of women is to be encouraged and to be examined. First, this discourse involves a globalization: in most African societies, women exercised undivided power over men. Among the Makhuwa of Mozambique women "controlled access to sex, descent, the production and division of food."[40] Men had no rights over land ownership or progeniture. "This domination is legitimated by the mythical image of women. In so far [...] as she imparts life, [...] in giving up all rights to her, one gains life."[41] So the idea of equality as it is posed consists of falling into line with the – reified – moral and sociopolitical structures that men already possess. One demands access to scholarly education (overbearing!), equal representation in political parties (subtle!), and positions with decision-making power in the economic structure (alienated!). As the feminist theologian Sölle put it: "We don't want our slice of the pie, we want to make another."[42] In terms of the particular situation of women, it is a question of targeting the use and abuse of power, of all power and not simply the replacement of one power (the law of the Father) with another (the law of the Mother). Finally, the discourse of some African feminists often forgets to mention the domination and repression that women exercised over other women in African traditions. Among the Mosi of Burkina, the newlywed woman, *pugpaala,* is, before the birth of her first child and during the first year of her marriage, in the service of her mother-in-law; "she lives *ma rogo î,* 'in the mother's hut'; in the place of the latter, she draws the water, grinds the grain, cooks the dough and the sauce."[43] The "Nanas-Benz" and the "Bayam Sellam," often used as proof of the vitality of African women – and consequentially their skill at wielding power – are poor examples, for it is this economic model – governed by the law of profit and the aggressiveness of competition – that must be unmade and refused. The women's difficult and praiseworthy struggle must be

extended by the invention of a "new symbolic contract" (Julia Kristeva) and the production of new intellectual paradigms.

For example, the theme of *appearance* so often used to discredit women (she is but superficiality and appearance, said Schopenhauer[44]) must be transformed into a philosophical paradigm. Occidental philosophy, which was already wary of women, is horrified – with the exception of thinkers of Nietzsche's caliber and certain phenomenologists – by appearance. In place of defending themselves by insisting on the "corrupted depth" of the patriarchal system, women might (and this in only a suggestion!) use "parade." "How? Parade is fleeting; one accepts that costume and ornament will have an effect, one tries several accessories, one turns, one turns back (autoreflexivity), one moves toward the mirror (mediation), and one comes back to oneself. To make up a doubting side that puts into question the doubtful seriousness of the well ordered sensibilities. To parade is an act that is always attempting ... it is concerned with the other and the refusal of solipsism. At its crux this strutting implicates the gaze of the other. One puts on makeup and dresses oneself in order to be seen by the other. Parade indicates that "I" is nothing without "you." To parade around is to let yourself be betrayed and dispossessed of your me in the hope that in return an other whose name you don't even know will call you "something and see 'someone' in you."[45] Apart from being a humiliating experience, "parade" becomes a crucible in which the great philosophical problems of autoreflexivity and mediation are thought out. To put the struggle of women in terms of binary oppositions (male element/female element) is a great setback in terms of the invention of a new philosophy from the "remnants" abominated not long ago.

The Idea of Conflict

Otherness is also felt in conflict. It opens a tear in a continuum and it is at its interior that a society discovers what it covers, exposes its contradictions to daylight, renders its actors visible, and tests its images and founding norms. Conflict condenses dissent, disagreement, law, and the normativity of rules into one constellation. From

elsewhere: "conflict, whether in a euphamized or exacerbated form is one of the royal means of access to the normativity of rules."[46] In its eruption, conflict already gives an indication of its potential to suspend. All conflict calls morals into question; by raising claims to the acknowledgment of divergent aspirations, conflict exposes the normativity of a rule, whichever it may be. Africa has experienced a contradictory movement linked to the notion of conflict. It is a continent in which the genocide in Rwanda has just given proof of the existence of the unspeakable at its heart. On the same continent, conflict is dressing its wounds with reconciliation in South Africa. In both conflict and reconciliation a normative problem arises: in the case of harm done or suffered how can it be rectified? Is pardon a sufficient redress? Is the public narration of harm done necessary for reconciliation? In choosing not to have a tribunal, but a *committee* (committee of truth and reconciliation), South Africa again raises a moral question with obvious judicial stakes. In reparations involving penal material, must one put aside the punishment aspect in order to privilege only the public narrativization? How is reparation possible without punishment? Can one pardon unconditionally? Is the request for pardon the only preliminary to pardon, or must one pardon exactly there where it is impossible to pardon? The impossibility of pardon seems almost to be the *condition* necessary for pardon. South Africa seems to be giving the world such a lesson by means of this forum. Of course, not everything went smoothly. The commission met with resistance and bunglings that were, practically speaking, growing pains.

Mediation: The Institution as a "Third"

The relationship of the self to the other is mediated in public space by a third: the institutions. Their plurality demands that their critic be grounded on a well-defined playing field. Politics, with its ambition to manage and to erect lawful states in Africa, is a fairly good example. We will not concern ourselves with the unassailable nature of power by means of the relationships between strength and power, violence and power, obedience and power, nor even the performativity of this power, but instead we will

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look at the dissociation between politics and meaning in Africa at the beginning of the 1990s.

The seizure of African politics by certain Africanist and African political analysts is, such as it is articulated today, methodologically dualist. On one side stands political power, violent and bad, and on the other an immaculate civil society. African political powers are denounced for their use of violence. The notion of political false-hood (not in the sense intended by Hannah Arendt) was used to strip naked the efficiency of power that in its former setting had hidden the obscenity that constituted it. The legitimation proceed-ings – used especially by Max Weber – which had been brought into being in order to render the domination bearable, are denounced. So power becomes a horrible beast which every African politician must speak badly of, if he wants to get some credibility in Africa. Swiftly confounding the realms of power and authority, the welfare state – which Africa inherited under the model of the nation-state – and the state itself, African political literature has focused its hopes upon the phenomenon of "sovereign national conferences."[47]

These were great forums of public debate broadcast via audio-visual media. The task of the conferences was to develop new modalities for the advent of a democratic order in Africa. The first act was to suspend the existing state constitutions, then to authorize the putting into accusation of former political regimes. In this way they beat out corruption, assassinations, and political cronyism.

Following the "national conferences" a new democratic era was greeted in Africa. The conferences are considered the representa-tion the "inaugural moments" (as if political speech didn't exist in Africa before these conferences!). What was to be forgotten and what will be the object of our critique is the separation of politics from meaning.

The liberation of speech more or less produced "chit chat" and the discussions of meaning, of collective living, and of the notion of community were squelched by quarrels over voting procedure, future constitutions, the status of the new leaders, and the fate of their predecessors. In this cacophony, public opinion became an anonymous "one." From the moment at which politics was disasso-ciated from meaning, and above all the moment at which political debate turned around nothing more than elections (chambers and

chancelleries), it became a slide towards a subtle depoliticization. The evasion of this question of meaning gave a very consensual form to a debate that wished to be pluralistic and democratic. It was missing the "political pathos" whose role would have been to analyze its mechanisms of mobilization and its principal political passions. National conferences were concerned with the effectiveness of power and not its affectivity. Political analysts of the "National Conferences" did not feel concerned with passions during these conferences. How did political passions, collective sentiments, and emotions put themselves into place? Which affective dispositives were motivated in the implosion of such and such a regime in Africa? Why were the dictatorial regimes (Presidents Kerekou of Benin and Ratsiraka of Madagascar) swept out a few years earlier brought back to power by the very people who dismissed them? The Manichean analysis of African politics cannot answer this question. What is sure is that the "post-colonial state" occasionally plays the role of "scapegoat," a role occupied not long before by the colonist in African political rhetoric. The critique of the Africanist and politicker's site of discourse suggests a *non-Manichean* approach which will take into account the *complexity* of the political phenomena and which will reactivate the alliance between administration and meaning at the heart of the traditional political systems. Politics is most often seen in terms of the management of men and power. An old habit which comes from the Machiavellian concept of politics, in which politics is seen as a mechanism. In certain African political experiences, power was not reduced to a mechanism; it also addressed the question of meaning. Among the ancient Yoruba in Nigeria, the law and the management of power were based upon the *Omoluabi*, which was the code of good conduct. The *Omoluabi* was the frame of reference from which one could speak of politics. Isn't the actualization of a practice such as that likely to offer a chance for the liaison between politics and meaning?

Projection: To Transcend

The history of a people is punctuated with tribulations, some of which are factors of stability and others of which push a people

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ahead of itself. This movement of escaping the self, of projection from the self and exodus, takes the form of *transcendence*. Transcendence can be understood as a vertical relationship that over-values the ahistoric to the detriment of immanence, eternity to the detriment of temporality. Transcendence is also a call, a movement of a people or a subject that goes beyond itself. The relationship in this case follows the horizontal axis and privileges immanence and temporality. These two forms of relationship to transcendence are not isolated in Africa, they often overlap each other, always producing something new. African Messianisms – like *Kimbanguism* at its start – cross these two visions of transcendence. Kimbangu (the Congolian Prophet) wished to have a different relationship to transcendence by breaking from the Protestant Church, but the relationship itself sought to liberate the colonized Congo in *immanence*. It is necessary then to transcend the colonial situation. When one poses the question of transcendence in Africa today, one cannot forget to emphasize that this formulation was provided by the language of Christianity and Islam. To put it differently, the problematic of transcendence lies in the anthropological field of the struggle between *oral reasoning* which applies to the (for the most part) non-written and politically scattered cultures and a *graphic reasoning* (according to J. Goody's expression) that imposes its categories, its definitions, its order, and its truths thanks to the functional solidarity of the state, writing, administration, and orthodoxy. The problem of transcendence can also arise in a secular manner, in such a case the problematic of meaning which individuals catch glimpses of is located in the optics of hope (*spes*). What are the images of a people's hope at any given moment in their history?

Transcendence leads back not only to organized religion, but also to the general problem of belief. The generality of belief prompts us to place an emphasis upon two poles of transcendence in Africa: *Christian theologies* – more specifically those of inculturation – and *utopia*, which as a means of transcendence has immanence as its horizon.

Christian theologies in Africa have adopted the famous theme of the inculturation of the Gospel that sometimes signifies "the conversion of African cultures to Christ,"[48] and sometimes signi-

fies the mutual transformation of Christianity and African cultures. On the anthropological level, this movement reappropriates the African lived experience (*Erlebnis*) by means of the incorporation of African arts in the liturgical domain. At the level of its academic attachments, inculturation would be one variation of a "contextual theology" which is wary of deductive universalizations or in which the theological principles conceived of under particular historical circumstances tend to universalize themselves by becoming the unique and emblematic norm of all religious practice. These contextual theologies re-emphasize the importance of the foundation: a concrete theology that reflects the experience of a particular Christian community. What is questionable is the "universal" nature of the Northern theological discourse. The political links to inculturation are similar to those of Latin-American liberation theologies. Three figures emerge from the theological thematic: the Exodus, Moses, and the "suffering servitor." The Exodus permits these theologians to develop a terminology of oppression (the Egyptians subdued the Hebrews as the Occident subdued Africa). Moses, a symbol of the revolt against pharaonic power, guides these theologians in their revolt against political oppression in Africa. The figure of the "suffering servitor" which comes from the prophet Isaiah and becomes the image of Jesus suffering establishes an identification – for the German theologian D. Bonhoeffer – between the suffering African people and Jesus.

These theologies of liberation held an advantage for theological missionaries in Africa; they put the history of man at the center of their concern in place of salvation. This theology would be closer to the Jewish conception of the redemption than that of the Christian conception. G. Scholem assures us that Judaism "has always maintained a concept of redemption as an event which takes place publicly, on the stage of history and within the community. It is an occurrence which takes place in the visible world ... In contrast Christianity conceives of redemption as an event in the spiritual and unseen realm, an event which is reflected in the soul."[49] Even if this valorization of the visible and of history is praiseworthy, theologies of liberation and inculturation still lack a utopian dimension. This lack is explained by the fact that the theologies of inculturation remain "monothematic." "A monothematic theology

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envisions a central thesis and sees all of the problems and tasks from the perspective of this principal thesis: liberation theologies see God, history, the tasks of the Church ... as a function of God's liberating actions for Israel."[50]

A really critical theology must privilege the *processes, the transits* and not the *anchorings* in God or in a secularized theology of history. The theological trend that could act as a critical propaedeutics of the idea of critical history in Africa is the famous *theology of process*. This theology conceives of the events that make up reality as events that succeed each other instead of existing as discrete entities. This theological orientation privileges meetings and relationships, for its world is made up of possibilities and processes rather than entities which exist in themselves and for which relationships are secondary. It results in a dynamic and interactive vision of God, the human being, and the world. If one takes the *theology of processes* to its end, one could consider God not as a Being but as a knot of relationships, a process, an unfinished work that enriches itself with new determinations that are themselves historical. The process is the figure of hope, for it is the antithesis of totalitarian closure. It is in its interest to consider religion, for "the best thing about religion is that it engenders heretics."[51]

Perhaps one must opt to "transcend without transcendence."[52] This movement is not an aspiration toward the (Most) "High" but a step toward the self. The important thing in Africa is to reactivate utopia in the "not-yet-being" (*Noch nicht Sein*) whose existence haunts every presence. The conjugation of African history must include ideas of the "accomplished" and "not-accomplished." What has been (or not been) accomplished in the past, what is not being accomplished in the present, and how would an "authentic future"[53] be declined? The problem of transcendence situates us in an immanence which is told in terms of *not-yet*. It is urgently necessary that we tell of certain experiences that are taking place and through which one can see a foreshadowing of utopia. Utopia demands transformation. It calls attention to the intervention of the subjective factor in the as-of-yet-undecided order of existing conditions so that they can liberate their potentialities. On the plane of African experience, which existent latencies demand to be realized?

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Self-Management

Utopia often has, at its core, the idea of autonomy, which often includes the concept of self-management. What are foreshadowings of self-management in Africa today? The associative experiences of women are to be seriously considered here. Let us isolate the money sharing clubs, the "tontines" as an example of self-managed associations. Each "tontine" (*Njanji*: a name given to these associations in Littoral, a province of Cameroon) is autonomous (it makes its own laws and codes) and the lending of money on word of honor is the norm. Underneath the ordinary hoarding and mutual aid, the Njanji tontine poses significant problems: keeping one's word, relying upon the conscience of each creditor and the invention of codes, laws, and procedures at the heart of a community. Making its own laws and codes in an increasingly interdependent world seems to be one of Africa's goals in the twenty-first century.

Pedagogy

The second utopian latency is situated at the level of philosophical pedagogy. The South African philosopher G.A. Rauche[54] suggests a sort of pedagogy of philosophical intersections. He departs from the notion of *actuality (Gegenwart)* – which will later be resumed in the work of the Swiss-German philosopher Eberhard Grisebach – in order to examine the diverse philosophical tendencies in South Africa. He makes distinctions between the Calvinist course, "holism," liberal philosophy, Indian philosophy, and Bantu philosophy. The question is: which canon of interpretation should the professor of philosophy use when facing such diverse dispositions. To do this, Rauche postulates the "cross fertilization"[55] method so that each philosophical strain, by an intersection in which its identity is enriched, produces another.

Such utopian foreshadowing is found in other spheres of activity in Africa, for which examples abound.

* * *

The examination of African history through identity, otherness, institutions and utopian projections reveals that finitude, that which remains unaccomplished, and crises are historical chances. The firmly entrenched tradition of handling African problems with dualisms (tradition vs. modernity, patriarch vs. matriarch, whites vs. blacks, universality vs. particularity, the past vs. the present) has forgotten about *critical autoreflection*. The critical return to a given history rejects dualisms and irreducible oppositions in favor of privileging *translations, chiasmus,* the intersections and crises that are established when the same (*le même*) meets the *other.* These intersections and traversals (the same that becomes the other) often produce the *Novum.* In this way the Apartheid in South Africa, for example, gives birth to the new juridical and ethical experience in which tolerance, pluralism, and pardon prevail. "One is from a place, one creates ties based upon this place, but in order for those over there and those here understand their significance, it is necessary that they be … denied, exceeded, transgressed."[56] The transgression and denial of one's place of origin constitutes an irony that transforms itself into hope, for in this movement of transgression something is always being born.

Translated from the French by Beatrice McGeoch

ARTICLE SYNOPSIS IN BETI

Matsig obálbas ya mintsogan myam. Afrika ake hé ?
Bihe kat a ntilan watoo hili naa: é dzam ase man Afrika ayi tsog, ayi bo, nge ki ayi kòbò, abele naa afudigi a nlo woe naa:dzom ziñ ésiki dzam tòbò kolé byem bise bine ndon. Ndoñ ya ndon te ndzo byayean tele osu éyòñ ese byayi naa byayem dzéé éngabò, dzé y'abo ai dzé éngábo. Man menyi mmò bihe kòbò.

Di osu. Mfa ya nyeman ya dzom bine. Ndzeñan metilan máán ongabi bod bemam bebè: Fog)Etoa étibili ya bingabi ai mintañan, Bè)Adzo angábò a nkuan belò. Ndoa fòò mintañan mingákad bya náá bya beleki tin tò sòg. Bòn be Afrika bandzikig yebe ntsogan te, ndò bengátari naa balede akyaè afé bivindi bya bibele fe ntsogan. Mfa Wom, bon be Afrika bayean kig dzia abog daban naa babebe a mvus bayean ke he osu.

Di bèè. Mfa ya awásá ya mod ose abele ai bod bevòg. E dzom éne mfañ okañ hi éne naa: awássá ase ane *ntindan* ai *ntyan.* Dzeé y'atindi be fam ai bininga y'a Afrika? Dzé ki y'atyi bò? Dzeé ndzò y'atindi bod abog ya mòni, anyós ai timi bidzié ya à nnam atúd?

Di lála. Awassá ya mebele ai mod mbog ane dzam tòbò mbòs he nge dzom ziñ y'atindi bya metiñ meziñ. Nda bod nge ki ngòmena, nge á ki meken meziñ mmò mave bya tebega metin mete. Nsili ontoa naa: ye tebega menda me bod, nge ki é nyi ngomena y'aso ai bya mvoé ai mebugeban melu ma?

Di nyina. Mod ase abebe osú, amú mod asiki tsid y'afan. Dzé ndzo y'ali ndi bòn be Afrika osu? Ye bezamba? Ye zuñga, ye dzom éfë? Mfa wom, ntol ébug one naa: ényiñ bòn be Afrika bebele naa bebege dzom ése ai dzam ase sòg ai tin, bebele fe na beyem naá dzom ése éne ndon ndo fe dzom y'alindi mod osu éné mod mbog sikig bezamba nge ki mengañ meziñ. E dzom y'awoé kabad éne nye á mby'é, é dzom y'annyi mod, mod émen abele dzò á mmò ane nted belogo.

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Notes

1. Paul Ricœur, *Ethique et responsabilié* (Neuchâtel, 1994), p. 12.
2. "Root identity" is a term used by Édouard Glissant, in *Poétique de la relation* (Paris, 1990), p. 156-58.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. It is this intention that is the basis of movements such as "African authenticity" (Zaire).
6. See F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organisation of Culture Difference* (Bergen, Oslo, 1969).
7. Nietzsche made the distinction between monumental, antiquarian, and critical visions of history, in *Untimely Meditations II, On Utility and the Inconvenience of History for Life, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, translated by Adrian Collins (New York, 1964).
8. Haïlé Sélassié (le Négus), Tchaka (Zoulou), and Samory (Guinée) were called together without a preliminary evaluation of their relationship to the weakest members of their societies.
9. Nietzsche regrets this manner of viewing history: "forgetting entire periods of history … despising them … leaving them to disperse like a flood."
10. Nietzsche, p. 26.
11. Jean-Godefroy Bidima, *L'Art négro-africain* (Paris, 1997), p. 107. The African relationship to identity must not limit itself to official history. It is also necessary to evaluate among the African traditions which ones were the basis of excluded cultures.
12. What we are interested in here are "agonistic palabres" – that are concerned with the resolution of conflicts – not "irenic" palabres (which are held outside any conflict). The word "palabre" is untranslatable into English, but it could have the meaning of moot, or palaver … an unended discussion.

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13. E. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, translated by L. W. Beck (New York, 1957), p. 13.
14. J. Habermas, *La Paix perpétuelle, Le bicentenaire d'une idée kantienne* (Paris, 1996).
15. J. Habermas and J. Rawls, *Débat sur justice politique* (Paris, 1997), p. 122.
16. Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris, 1990), p. 265.
17. A. Garapon and D. Salas, *La République pénalisée* (Paris, 1996), p. 9.
18. Ibid., p.14.
19. "But this penal vision of society is making progress today in Africa, as a result, among other factors, of Islamic and Christian religions and their particular idea of blame. Missionary Christianity presented God as an auditor-legislator-bailiff." Cf. J.-G. Bidima *La Palabre, une juridiction de la parole* (Paris, 1997), p. 32. The loser of the trial in palabre was never completely annihilated, even in punishing him one was bound to maintain his honor (see the example of the Pkellé in Liberia and the Beti in Cameroun, p. 21).
20. J. Rawls, *Justice et démocratie* (Paris, 1993).
21. One must note that the French Revolution was also very aggressive with regard to languages, such as Breton, for example, which were simply relegated to the ranks of *patois* (provincial dialect). See M. De Certeau and D. Julia, *Une politique de la langue* (Paris, 1975).
22. Alexis Kagame, *La Philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'Etre* (Bruxelles, 1956).
23. Pathé Diagne, *L'Europhilosophie face à la pensée du négro-africain* (Dakar, 1981).
24. See M. Hebga, "L'Homme vit aussi de fierté," *Presence africaine* 99-100 (1976). The relationship of the oppressed to the language of those dominant is always an issue. The example of the Czechoslovakian- and German-speaking Jews at the time of Kafka is enlightening. What was important, and what Kafka underlined to this end, was less the preservation of the language than its relationship to the notion of "impossibility." How does a language express possibility and impossibility? There is the real question. On this see Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis, 1986).
25. See J.-G. Bidima, *La Philosophie négro-africaine* (Paris, 1995), and "La Philosophie en Afrique" in *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, Vol. IV (Paris, 1998).
26. See J.-G. Bidima, *Théorie critique et modernité négro-africaine. De l'Ecole de Francfort à la "Docta spes africana"* (Paris, 1993).
27. Deleuze and Guattari, p. 18.
28. This one insists the most often, beginning with Quine's thesis on "indetermination of racial translation," on the intranslatability of one philosophical language into another. Is intranslatability the curse of Babel or the very condition of interpretation in which the incomprehensability, aporia, and irreducibility of the meaning of texts will themselves to be the lungs of all hermeneutics?
29. W. Van Der Merwe, "Facing the challenge of diversity – a reflection on the role of philosophy in South Africa today," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 4, 13 (1994): 190-98.
30. P. Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris, 1990), p. 200ff.
31. P. Ricœur, *Ethique et responsabilité*, p. 15.
32. P. Ricœur, *Soi même comme un autre*, p. 200. It is clear that Ricœur restricts the moral to its Kantian usage and plays Aristotle (teleology) against Kant (deontology).
33. Ibid., p. 37.

34. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, translated by N. Plaice, S. Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambrige, MA, 1986), p. 24.
35. Ibid., p. 37.
36. See R. Drai, *Le Pouvoir et la parole* (Paris, 1981), p. 153-56.
37. This point of view of feminist Africans must be moderated by the fact that African society is plural. Certain women – the *Mafo* – among the Bamilékés of the Western Cameroon were not limited to domestic economies: they participated in the management of the political sphere alonside the "Fo" (kings).
38. Ndeye A. Thiam, *Paroles de négresses* (Paris, 1978).
39. P. Eboh, "The Woman Question: African and Western Perspectives" in N. Docekal, Wimmer, *Postkoloniales philosophieren: Afrika* (Vienna, 1992).
40. P. Macaire, *L'Héritage Makhuwa au Mozambique* (Paris, 1996), p. 100.
41. J.-G. Bidima, *La Palabre, une juridiction de la parole*, p. 49.
42. See "Théologie féministe," in *Encyclopédie du protestantisme* (Paris, 1995), p. 1555.
43. M.E. Gruenais, "Aînés, aînées, çadets, cadettes," in *Age, pouvoir et société en Afrique noire* (Paris, 1985), p. 235. You can still see today in the African social fabric the arrogance and exploitation exercised by women of power and female graduates with respect to their "women-domestics." There also, one must question the relationship of women to each other in the work structure in Africa.
44. A. Schopenhauer, *Essai sur les femmes* (Paris, 1987), p. 22.
45. J.-G. Bidima, *La Philosophie négro-africaine*, p. 113.
46. M. Hunyadi, *La vertu du conflit* (Paris, 1995), p. 65.
47. These national conferences were held in the Congo, Zaire, Tchad, Benin, Gabon, and Togo. Several political regimes fell as a result of these conferences (Bénin, Congo, Madagascar …).
48. J.E. Penoukou, *Eglise d'Afrique* (Paris, 1984); J.M. Ela, *Ma foi d'African* (Paris, 1984).
49. G. Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, translated by Michael A. Meyer (New York, 1971), p. I.
50. *Dictionnaire de théologie protestante* (Paris, 1996), p. 1542.
51. E. Bloch, *L'athéisme dans le christianisme* (Paris, 1978), p. 15.
52. Ibid., p. 299.
53. E. Bloch, *Experimentum mundi* (Paris, 1981); "authentic future" is a term of Bloch's.
54. Rauche was a professor at the Université de Durban-Westville and at Fort Hare; his principal works are: *The Philosophy of Actuality* (Alice, 1963); *The Abdication of Philosophy: the Abdication of Man* (La Haye, 1974); *The Dynamic of Philosophical Argument* (Durban-Westville 1983).
55. G. Rauche, *Selected Philosophical Papers* (Fort Hare, 1992), p. 461.
56. M. Maffesoli, *Du Nomadisme* (Paris, 1997), p. 73.
57. This bibliography was initially published in the following work: "La philosophie en Afrique," in *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, vol. 4, *Le Discours philosophique*, © PUF 1998. This version was revised and augmented by the author at the request of the editorial staff.