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## **Intelligibility criticism of Human Sciences in Africa**

By Isaie Nzeyimana, University of Rwanda, College of Arts and Social Sciences,

Email: [nzeyimanai@yahoo.fr](mailto:nzeyimanai@yahoo.fr)

### **Abstract**

Africa, as to be everything, is positive in itself. Such is a first good postulate to think of Africa. Contrary to this first intuition, the speech on Africa is negativistic. The individual is always in contradiction with the universal; identities are badly assumed; only the immediate has some value; Afro pessimism of a continent which is in poor shape; a continent which is always in search of a model. The only criticism that seems to be valid is that Africa built more men and people, fewer things. But this is not totally valid, because while we can import things and technologies, we cannot import the people, the African ". The future of the human sciences in Africa will be to release the speech of the social sciences of the contexts which produced them and to return to Africa at its beginnings, in its paramount efforts of multiple adaptations to life. As a preliminary, it is appropriate to leave the argument of not expressed wisdoms and represent its multiple experiments into operational terms, hence the release of Africa from external models.

### **Introduction**

There is a spiritual unity between people and knowledge. Indeed, in its objectivity and subjectivity every science is knowledge that people have of themselves and the world. But instinctively, we realize that the Human Sciences in Africa are built from the outside for the outside with an indifference towards the future of Africa. Yet, it is this future of Africa that should make the intelligibility of these same human sciences. To the overrun and reaction against the readings from the outside, the intellectuals, founding fathers of the independent Africa whose common theme is "the African soul" deserve our admiration and Africa in its great beginning is thematized in several ways. The beginning is a source of energy, dynamism and own future by yourself. In this way, the founding fathers formulated a good postulate of what the future of Africa itself should be; they showed great proof of humility by accepting to prove the evidence: humanity to the African man. However, there is reason to wonder whether, after the works of the first African anthropologists, historiographers and literary men, concepts of human sciences in Africa are still operational to

enable Africa to have a self-thinking ownership, self-auto projection by itself, a still desired and conscious future. This concern can only suggest other reflections on conceptions, barely ideological that need to be surpassed for a science that enables man to be self-master.

### **1. Freeing the discourse of the human sciences from their source contexts**

The human sciences in Africa have their origin from the celebrity of the Slave Trade and Colonization, constantly legitimized by negativity speeches. They are produced by the project duty of domination or civilization of the people that are by far their own civilization.

Negative Africa, is it not a contradiction? We have no metaphysical intuition of something negative that would have been a first beginning of something. The only metaphysical experience that we have about the negative is that it is placed for denying what was holding in itself.

We can rather think about the anteriority of a positive Africa at its beginning. There, we no longer need any other mediation nor any other help. Because the beginning must not be mediatized by nothing and must have no foundation, it is the foundation itself. The beginning concept is absolute. BOA Thiémélé, in his article entitled *Convergence de vue entre Cheik Anta Diop et Nietzsche à propos des origines*, states it in rich terms of meaning: the beginning is the first appearance, the starting point of a process or reason for being; it can be spatial and yet transcends space; it is the first part of a thing that has scope or duration. The beginning saves the process of inertia and death; this is what makes a being; it is what brings forth from nothingness or non-being; it is alpha and omega; it conditions the totality of becoming and justifies the future<sup>13</sup>.

What is then the beginning of Africa capable of founding its progress? The positive beginning, it is the being and thinking of the being. Then, we must project this: the first beginning of Africa is the inhabited Africa.

### **2. Thinking of Africa in its beginning**

The theme of Africa's cradle of mankind appeared in the discourse of the human sciences after negation moments. Hence, this theme is the sign of a positive return and as well as an African Renaissance. It is a return to the intimate depths of life to overcome and surpass what would dissolve this same Africa. A retrospective look quickly reminds that Africa is the melting pot of knowledge and autarkic realms. Do traditions not tell us that Thales, Pythagoras, Archimedes,

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<sup>13</sup> BOA THIEMELE, « Convergence de vue entre Cheik Anta Diop et Nietzsche à propos des origines » in *Annales philosophiques de l'UCAO*, N° 1, Abidjan, 2004, pp. 28-29.

Plato, and Aristotle stayed in Egypt close to Egyptian professors and drew theorems, maxims and thoughts that made them famous<sup>14</sup>?

The African identity is not a mere abstraction, but rather a plenitude: the Missionary white father, Dominique Nothomb, in his book entitled ' *l'Humanisme africain: valeurs et pierre d'attente*, testifies his happy meeting with the African man as a man with heart. Meditating on his generous meeting with the African, he concludes his testimony under the title of ' *L'homme achevé*'. There is, however, no expression in a foreign language to express all the semantic richness of 'all the African man's wisdom'. This lack is not without consequence as long as historians of civilizations coincide the birth of history with that of writing invention. Writing is to think, doubt, assert, verify, invalidate, according to this famous expression of Descartes 'I think therefore I am'.

### **3. Exit from the 'unexpressed knowledge' argument**

Very positively in Africa, men forge but do not make the theory of energy their great concern. They make decorative and architectural arts, but do not separate the proportions laws, prospects and theoretical laws of line, circle and aesthetics centrality. They govern, make wars, conclude pacts and settle differences, but do not have specialists especially reserved for military, political, strategic, legal, intelligence ideas... The arts known to these people are basketwork with geometric motifs, but without geometry theory. On these artisanal objects, they draw complex lines, but forget to trace them in their minds (abstractions' faculty) and in space for trajectories at infinity and for the universe in ever expansion. They throw javelins, make jumps in high heights, but ignore the laws of universal gravitation, gravity and orbit. Would these laws have not enabled them to invent stakes that gravitate in space? They make music, dance and succeed in the choreographic setting, but without theory of solfege, movement and rhythm. They practice religion, but without exegesis. They speak, develop eloquence, but do not theorize grammar and logic. They poison and treat all the diseases of their era, but do not formulate theories of organic chemistry.

These men act in their environment without worrying about the theoretical criteria of validity, transposition of a theory into another area of knowledge and know-how, without worrying about the trans-territoriality that verifies their knowledge even outside their borders.

These additional theoretical frameworks to the natural wisdom are not useless: when nature was ready to receive the man and all livings, it was still estimated in a stable and absolute universe. These frameworks were considered sufficient, future environmental disturbances and multiplication of the livings put aside. It is however true, the man evolves in a universe with many disturbances. And the developed intelligence is what enables necessary adaptations. Precisely, the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Cheik Anta Diop, Théophile Obenga, BOA Thiémélé et à Jean-François Bergeron dont les écrits sont indiqués dans la bibliographie de ce travail.

theoretical concepts, highly separated from actions, are invariants that can be transposable to all conditions in a constant change.

It is these boundaries between action and theory, between nations that are formed and lasting, and the science still hidden in them leads to insist on these criticisms. The symbolism, allegories and analogies often invoked to enhance African cultures are immediately given to any culture. But myths are not science. It may be objected that the great thinkers and philosophers have used myths to express ideas that cannot easily be conceptualized. However, they have worked on them and striven to proportions' calculation still veiled in these myths and symbols.

It is through efforts that historians divide the human era into two major periods: prehistory and history, establishing that writing is the decisive criterion of history, civilization and culture. The written knowledge remains the explanatory and distinctive principle of the human effort. Writing is to consent to a long and patient pain. Writing is to reflect, correct, abandon, and recommence up to the limit of the acceptable by a larger human community. Writing is to discipline thought, while talking entertains it. Thinking is a profession. Men/women who have produced thoughts and systems of thought have, according to the rule of division of labor, consecrated their lives to the patience concept, leaving the worries of daily life and practice to others. They have made themselves professional specialists who operate satisfied degrees of separation between acting and thinking.

#### **4. Surpassing the simplistic historical scheme**

Probably it is this unsuccessful dialectic between Thought and Action that gave a framework to the human sciences to think negatively of Africa. From outside, human sciences have helped to brutally pull Africa out of its traditional cultural universe, break the mythical-religious harmony of traditional societies, responding to questions of anthropological curiosities that have consisted only of spreading anti-social and anti-progress stereotypes, thus blurring the process of integration and construction of larger nations and stronger states and more cooperative states that already existed in germ at the time of autonomous kingdoms. But the answer to frustration was another desire to absolutize the black culture.

From this fundamentalism comes a reading of Africa according to continuity principle, assuming the same African "type" that moves in history and which, even if the place and time change, invariably remains the same and always victorious. It is the fundamentalism or absolutization of the black genius corresponding to the search for an original identity. What is targeted is the tranquility of harmonious and quiet societies. The ensuing new ideological discourse of human sciences is thus developing according to the following scheme: 1° Africa prior to contact with the outside world was good and innocent, 2° Africa has been corrupted in its contacts with the outside world, and 3° Africa is now to be rebuilt.

Such fundamentalism makes lose the essential of the thought: the criticism and the innovation. The important thing is the opportunity, instant illumination, complete and non-complete moment which neither mean the before nor the after, but the KAIROS (the opportune moment, the propitious space by which the possible can hatch in Africa). A non-triumphalist reading of cultures favors discontinuity and detail, the margin of uncertainty. Human sciences should then dare to formulate absences and missed appointments in African historical moments, clarify the lessons to be learned from missed opportunities, conceptualize the historical and identity assets that are sometimes unique and translate them into life in virtue of the fact that thinking is problem solving.

#### **5. Moderating the vitalist conception of the African man**

The missionary Placide Tempels, in his book "*La philosophie bantoue*", develops a vitalist Bantu ontology in which the being is synonymous with vital strength. From Tempels, a whole literature has been developed around a conception of the man, necessarily vitalist, fideistic, and only admitting one form of causality: magical, mysterious or divine. In vitalism, what is privileged is life, without elaborating external conditions of this life.

Any scientific knowledge is also a critical discourse. It is irrelevant to conceal the being of the Negro in an essence that would be vitalistic and religious at any cost. The Negro's being is not only strength and life, it is also expressed in many ways. Only in Africa, we have privileged the vitalist, finalist and deist dimension which has resulted in justifying the Negro's attitude to passivity, docility, a pre-established acceptance order and fatalism.

The error occurred when the human sciences, under the influence of fixism, should absolutely insist on what constitutes the original way of life of 'the African people'. The reason has two main activities: discover and invent. By insisting that first of all, the human sciences are rooted in ancestral religious and political beliefs and practices, and mostly forgetting that reason is also luminous and cannot only observe and describe, but also create and prescribe a new order. The reason is deployed twice, within a posteriori and a priori. A posteriori starts from what is already there, whereas a priori is a light of reason which produces what is not yet elaborated.

We can then continue to learn from the modern people, whenever they assert the autonomy of reason: Descartes, by reminding the man that essential is not to say that he has the common sense, because it is the best common thing shared, but for the good use of reason; Kant, by recalling that the situation of inferiority and minority which the Lights have so long fought in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Europe was nothing other than the inability of that Europe and that epoch to use its understanding without the other's conduct. Hegel by exhorting his disciples to think for themselves talks about the essence of the modern thought: faith in science and reason, self-confidence.

Human sciences on Africa, by simply feeding on the crumbs of empiricism, drawing only from below, as in traditional deposits reject a highly rational work. The a priori reason has this intellectual advantage that leads those who dare it to the decision of analytic understanding and strictly formal thought, proceeding by true statements formulation, necessary, called indistinctly, "essential definitions of form: this is ... ", "true premises", "simple ideas", "axioms ", "first principles", "postulates", "idea", or "maxims". This work of definition is accompanied with a rigorously rational work of deduction.

It is also within these lights of reason that morality finds its strong foundations where human freedom, about physics and mathematics model emerges from contingency and instinctive caprices: to act freely is henceforth to follow the order. The human action, in the light of the understanding frees man from determination by fortuitous empirical contingencies, determinations that can be physical, climatic, cultural, etc. Henceforth, to live is to carry out a struggle of oneself against oneself. Nowhere else, the man has never learned to take charge of himself, accept himself, and self-create, because, contrary to the static vitalism of African societies, the man is a project (pro-ject, it means that, what is here and thrown there, and it is absolutely necessary to go and see what is there for me).

How do we want that only concepts such as life, vitalism, and pragmatics on the resourcefulness slope, participation, communion and presence can generate a culture of development? Human sciences, by privileging the independence of reason, would create a culture where only the necessary, universal, long term, infinite, etc. deserve attention, where what is valuable comes to justify itself before reason, never before contingency. It is the independence of rational discourse that is required here.

## **6. Translating situations into operational concepts**

The effort is all the more demanded that the human and social sciences in Africa are more participative than anticipatory. A logic has already been reversed. In principle, the intellectual precedes the state and indicates the direction to follow, reminds it of paths and ways to abandon because they lead to nowhere. But when African universities and intellectuals, in their work, theses, researches, repeat the policies that governments have already undertaken or even abandoned, do they really think to serve for prospection? The change of paradigms is all the more necessary because certain concepts still used do not adequately render the realities or fall under the anachronism. The concepts of colonization, neo-colonialism and paternalism are not only less operational in Africa's favor, but they also no longer reflect the relations between modern states which function basing on economic powers, active geopolitics, so that in reports, a state that is powerful economically, morally or politically dictates the requirements of its sovereignty. Thus, the call for the human and social sciences is to reflect the realities and relations of current societies into adequate concepts.

## **7. When Africa expresses the will to liberate itself from the Western model, but to project itself again to the Eastern horizons**

The human and social sciences in Africa encompass a positive balance of unconditional refusal of the denial of humanity to the African man. They propose an Africa that seeks to see itself within the horizons of progress. The continuation of political events which led to the reconstruction of international relations diverts again Africa which is still trying to think through the new superiors' mirrors, not the West but the East. Is not this a new way, always to be interiorized only by changing landmarks? The truth is, it is always this refusal of a self-reading from oneself. What is not said in Africa is always this refusal of self-projection for oneself.

Is this new model not rather a false appreciation? The Eastern states offer only for free and cheaper. On the basis of these assessments, several mistakes have already been made. How can we imagine a free economy? How not to understand that cheaper products are also less durable and that what the African economy gains in the cheaper price, loses it in the less durable products and what the external economy loses in the cheaper price, it gains it in the successive flow of a same type product as soon as it is delivered, immediately annihilated?

The importation of foreign industries to the African areas, however enchanted, also covers two errors: on the one hand, money is only beneficial to the investor, never otherwise and on the other

hand, the technologies' transfer is never guaranteed. Do the recruited local staff have requirements for the technologies assimilation? Are they recruited for technical occupations or for jobs such as marketing, communication, drainage, carton transport and other accessory tools?

This model is encouraged by the innocence of finding similarities between Africa and the East. The East is quickly developed by importing technologies, assimilating and developing them. It is successful of its economic progress by associating development and culture. When Adm Smit published his book on "the wealth of nations", he had pertinently shown that nations were developing by foreign capital. It was at the area of nations without borders intangible and forbidden where foreign capital was taken without a contract of repayment. Africa, long afterwards, recovers the same model but in contexts of the market economy. Before rejecting the Western model to try out the Eastern model, three situations must first be clarified: free capital insurance, insurance for technology transfers, the cultural background and economic contexts that support the development of the Easterners. Most likely that the East not only presents an original cultural wealth, but more always sought to have a more acute awareness of itself. The error of the imitators of the East consists in fixing themselves only at the exterior, forgetting that this exterior in terms of development of these countries springs from their interior.

What is the ideal of the East ideal that Africans seek to imitate? What is the interior of the outside, that is to say, the spirit that leads the scientific, technological and economic development of the East? The Oriental conception of the world is gathered in this thought, at once simpler, but which exceeds the horizon of understanding of ordinary men. The ideal of life in the East is a mystical union between spirit and world, through meditation, contemplation and discipline... Life then presents itself as a subtle and astonishing effort made by man to understand mysteries of the world and the spirit and the nature of the relations between the spirit and the world.

Never, with the Easterners, man can be abandoned to life according to apparent exteriority. All its look is retracted inward and certain formulas of life merely call for silence: fasting, asceticism, recollection, renunciation, abandonment to the absolute, ways of meditation, exaltation of duties and obligations, accomplished works detachment, sacrifice, spirit of finesse joined by spirit of geometry, fundamental virtues such as humanity, righteousness, decency, royalty and spirit joined to the heart. We can also propose the bodily and spiritual assets of Yoga, such as refraction (observation of moral commands), discipline (prescription of purification, asceticism, and study),



good posture, control of breath, retraction of the senses of objects, fixation of thought about a specific point, meditation and exhalation (union of mind with the divine, dissolution of individual existence).

The cultural background of the East is rather the elevation of self to the extinction of self in Nirvana, thus internalizing a culture of voluntary asceticism, discipline, meditation pushed to the extreme of the mystic or union with the absolute. This is not only the cultural heritage but also the wealth that these people have always wanted to internalize, develop and introduce into the struggle for modernity.

Africa is basically one with the same impetus which will have to evolve in converging lines, going beyond polemics against other cultures and reactionary criticisms (against Westerners), blissful acclamations (in favor of the Easterners). This is the African life itself that these Western and Eastern cultures question about, mostly about the balance between the ideal of Euro-American rationality and spirituality and Eastern interiority, in a serene reflection for a self-projection of Africa.

### **8. Some breakouts for human sciences in Africa**

Africa as any other thing else, is also a project and future. It is not an obvious future because it is part of the future movement that animates everything, but of a destined, invented and planned future. Several hypotheses provisionally explaining this stagnation are debatable:

- 1) The Racial hypothesis is that the African is congenitally lazy: This hypothesis is eliminated itself, merely because it is a matter of racism. Let us examine the other hypotheses.
- 2) According to the Climate hypothesis, Africans live in a tropical climate that is conducive to existence and does not require adaptation efforts. The example of the Pygmies in the tropical zone that live from nature: hunting, gathering and fishing is highlighted. They live without any need for invention, except in the field of health where nothing is given to them in advance. There, they are ingenious. Their pharmacopoeia is famous in Black Africa; they cure almost all diseases of leprosy to mental illness. Only modern surgery is lacking.
- 3) According to the World vision hypothesis, Africans represent an ordered, complete world and have only to render cults "magic" to the gods, yet in a future world. Magic enables to wait for famous goals without effort.
- 4) According to the hypothesis of religiosity of men who think only of worshipping god to maintain this timeless and pre-established harmony, Engelberg Mveng states what Herodotus

says: Negroes are inventors of religious cults ... Ethiopians are the first to teach worship to the gods, to offer sacrifices and honor divinities.

- 5) Hypothesis of structures of societies and cultures that do not tolerate the emergence of talents, heroes, ascending motilities.
- 6) Hypothesis of states-cities providences or absent.
- 7) Hypothesis of a static conception of sciences. From the closed, completed and ordered world can only result into a static conception of sciences. We only have to learn them and not build.
- 8) Hypothesis of a more adaptive education to the traditional pre-established order than dynamic and creative of a new order.
- 9) Hypothesis of a work which is merely a repetition of insipid and insignificant gestures.

Given these assumptions, some breakouts require human sciences for a desired future in Africa. The main breakout must be historical. History in Africa has consisted only of internalizing fictitious enemies and polemics ranging from the local scale (village, ethnicity ...) globally. History in Africa takes place in the following way: Chapter 1: Heavenly Africa; Chapter 2: Slave trade; Chapter 3: Colonization; Chapter 4: Impossible Independent Republics. In this way, it can only produce generations, which during their strong moments (youth) internalize fictitious enemies (which no longer exist). The memory is good, but the presentiments to have enemies in all circumstances and linger there is rather a weakness. It is on this condition that the new generations will succeed in making other ruptures, especially against the vision of a full, orderly and complete universe to consider an open world in which one can take multiple perspectives. Education and science will stop to be adaptive but inventive to new perspectives. It is a transformation of the depths in the sense that the values, attitudes, behaviors and appreciations that structure traditional societies of a stable universe are inconsistent with the new demands of current and future societies.

## **Conclusion**

In Africa, we note that facts are still dispatched and not reflected, what complicates any possibility of intervention. They must be translated into operational concepts, collected and brought to unity in which the multiple finds intelligibility. The founding fathers of positive Africa find this unity in such principles such as "life", "soul", "black soul", "African identity", "heart", and "emotion". The new unities which still bear the multiple will no longer have to be discovered or excavated in

deposits of traditions, but invented by reason. How can we achieve this without remembering that every science comes from astonishment, fulfilled, desired and organized silence and from fixed attention? This is what is not too much given when the man, his intelligence and his will fix themselves on the simple immediacy, contingent, and entertainment. Beyond this, pessimism refutes itself because it implies resignation to life. Life is defined as a project. But progress does mean the absence of delicate moments. It only implies that these moments be exceeded in time: Descartes, reminding man to make good use of reason; Kant, formulating the imperative to be courageous to use his reason without the conduct of others; Hegel exhorting his disciples to think about themselves. This is the very essence of what the human sciences in Africa must prepare: faith in science and reason, self-confidence<sup>15</sup>. Each in their own way only emphasizes autonomy, even the whole power of reason which is called Liberty.

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<sup>15</sup> Hegel, *Précis de l'encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques*, p.9.

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