

**Bourahima Ouattara, *Penser l'Afrique*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), pp. 41-5
extract translated by Jean-Paul Martinon.**

How can a philosophy that would singularize Africa as being-third become relevant once the learned and scholarly interpretations on the third world are abandoned? Such relevance cannot emerge from these old interpretations (Ethnophilosophy), but from the site of Africa itself, that is, as what opens itself to thought: a thought "without-Book," a thought that knows no Book. If this happened, then this thought would have to break away from the Concept as Hegelian philosophy understands this term. It would have to become not another philosophy like Ethnophilosophy or Sage philosophy comparable to that of the West, but the other of philosophy. It would have to become, if you would allow me such barbarism/neologism, a Euro-African philosophy. This means that, following my own trajectory it would have to come up with not a "paired" being (Africa and Europe together), but a heteronomic being. It is precisely this attempt to pair things together that Claudia Moffa criticizes in her book *L'Afrique à la périphérie de l'Histoire*:

"The inherent error of all those theses that attempt to 'pair' Europe and Africa during the pre-modern area has one common psychological root. One simply has to re-read revisionist histories to realise this: the need to re-instate Africa within History, thus absolving for ever the famous Hegelian condemnation of 1830 that relinquished Africa to "immobile" cultures "without history."¹

This psychological need would represent the heinous and neglected side to the victory of Rationality when it extended its false universality and domination over this Other who is really nothing but a twin. Philosophy is nothing other than the invention of concepts developed from an infinite hermeneutic of already existing concepts belonging to the Book. But Africa is without it; Africa is only an actor, the punch-bag for those who have it. As such, it falls upon this being-third to seek out its freedom and redemption.

Without Book, that is, without an upright Concept, this other of philosophy, or more precisely, this being-third (to the world and to philosophy) will have to submit the question of conceptuality through a questioning of limits. These will inevitably expose the unbearable suffering and intolerable sensation of "being superfluous" in a world drunk with its own alienation. Once it has managed to overcome this major philosophical hurdle, it will have to latch upon what I see as a fundamental concept, that of anticipatory inertia. This notion, which hides a purposefully logical paradox, is precisely that from which we will try to examine this being-third. Up until now, we attempted to delimit and circumscribe this being-third both with regards to its spatiality and what we called its fragmentary historical accounts. In doing so, we had to take into account elements, which, while not being crucial, remain operative notwithstanding the clichés and the known truths that structure them. For example, what we called the polar opposite to the Book, Africa's absence of writing and its a-historical nature. This is not how we will examine this being-third.

Before exploring the concept of anticipatory inertia, it is worth reminding ourselves that, being-third refuses to submit itself to the concept and this refusal is what we

understand as its main determination. Let us say that this refusal to submit to the concept isn't the result of some intellectual lethargy, weakness of spirit, of some "decided aversion towards reason," or of some incapacity to think. To refuse submission to the concept isn't a mental faculty unique to inferior societies as the anthropology of Levy-Bruhl and the colonial imagination wanted us to believe for so long. The fact that we need to say this again shows how difficult it is to dissipate these misunderstandings. To think Africa in the way we are attempting to do here requires that we distinguish the non-conceptual from the a-conceptual or from what requires conceptualisation. The important thing here is that the object isn't confused with the subject. Once this is understood, it remains to examine the non-conceptual that animates being-third as embodied by the black-Africans of Africa.

The idea of a non-conceptuality comes from both Adorno's negative dialectic and Heidegger's fundamental ontology. These references are problematic in so far as history seems to only have retained the differences between these two authors. However, if one reads closely, one realises that they both attempt against the whole western world to undermine the arrogance and imperialism of the Concept in order to think a "letting-be," an "other," and a "being-third." Overall, attentive readers of both Adorno and Heidegger will notice easily that the non-conceptual is the other, but the other irreducible to any form of category. This being-third that exposes the weakness of the Concept is an unexpected consequence of how one reads black Africa. Being-third is to refuse the world as order, as over-determined (Henri Lefebvre). It remains its negation; it stands for what resists rationality, what undermines the techno-centric modernity that marks our world's destiny. It is reminiscent of what the systematic theory of Niklas Luhmann calls "noise" or perturbation, which here takes on its first social and historical dimension. The perturbations and the quasi-volcanic irruptions that came from "below" in the 1980s only show to demonstrate its political dimension. The political theorist Jean-François Bayart foresaw this non-concept in these terms:

"When it comes to the interventions from "below," they could only take on the legitimacy of counter-manifestations, massacres, delinquency, looting, and the daily destabilisation of the State. In short, people willingly undermining democracy."²

But let us return to Luhmann's "noise" as the opposite side to the cognitive social system, and therefore to the political. African philosophy would then be the Other of the World of concepts and systems. This is how we understand Ferdinand N'Sougan Agblemagnon's words:

"When it comes to black Africa (...), there can only be a resistance to the idea of system."³

Let us expand on this. If black Africa resists the idea of the system, then the whole apparatus of anthropology, ethnology, and even sociology would become if not obsolete, at least incomplete in its attempt to grasp conceptually Africa as being-third. In this case, being could only be understood as a third-party with regards to all forms of episteme and the result would only be pseudo-knowledge; or better still, pseudo-wisdom, which would be a joke. The resistance to system, which is one of the ways being-third manifests itself is self-evident when it comes to social, political, and economic spheres. What one calls, for example, "informal economy," is a

practical translation of what refuses the concept. In its own way, being-third is a way of showing the decline of the processes of legitimation of modern society elaborated during the twentieth century (Jean-François Lyotard); something which was confirmed yet again during the discourses against western modernity, discourses that led this being into systems that were “determined to excavate the most intimate aspects of its being.” And again when it came to suspect the spectral world of an ordered society elaborated by Adorno. Any careful observer of African affairs will be able to multiply here the examples to show how the resistance to the system structures ontologically Africa as third.

This is the virtue of this malicious anticipatory inertia. Let us add immediately that with this virtue, we imply against the usual discourses about black Africa, neither optimism nor pessimism. Linked with the idea of resistance, this malicious anticipatory inertia recalls Habermas’s word of *Entkoppelung*, which means “uncoupling.”⁴ In being-third, there is a necessary uncoupling between the fluidity of being-in-the-world and the systems that aspire to order this being, even if these are endogenous or exogenous. In other words, there is an uncoupling between the World and the lived world of being-third.

However, if a *Rückkoppelung* (that is, an aspiration specific to black Africa) must take place, then it can only be understood as an inverted logic. In other words, the recoupling can only take place if being-third admits that aspirin equals launching a satellite. It ensues that the logic uncoupling-recoupling functions only by maintaining individualities within their own specific and often contradictory aspirations. Anticipation cannot accommodate itself of an already existing and autonomous system because it necessarily aims to render it obsolete. Anticipation, whether conscious or not, inscribes being-third in a perpetual uncoupling: being-uncoupled. In this way, if one extracts black Africa from the power of rational discourses and make it the other of the concept, we open up a new philosophical space and through it, we give birth to the idea of a continent-third. Being-third. Being-uncoupled.

¹ Claudia Moffa, *L’Afrique à la périphérie de l’Histoire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995), p. 13, my translation.

² Jean-François Bayart et Achille Mbembe, *La Politique par le bas: Contributions à une problématique de la démocratie* (Paris: Karthala, 1992), p. 17.

³ Ferdinand N’Sougan Agblemagnon, “Totalité et système dans les Sociétés d’Afrique Noire,” in *Présence africaine*, No. 41, 2nd Semester, 1962, p. 15.

⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Théorie de l’agir communicationnel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), Vol. II, p. 170.