

History, Democracy, Values: New Lines of Reflection

Adame Ba Konare

The Leopold Sédar Senghor Lecture
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Before starting my speech, may I, dear guests and colleagues, express thanks to CODESRIA for having chosen me as a special guest and presenter of the Leopold Sédar Senghor Lecture at this important symposium on 'Rethink the Development of Africa: The Alternatives Beyond the Impasse'. I see the honour done to me as both a formidable mark of confidence and a challenge, for I know that this is an important assembly of learned African intellectuals. Therefore, it is without any pretension whatsoever that I would like to submit, dear colleagues, my present position about a topic that, as I know, worries all of us. This is democracy, which is one major question within an otherwise wider array of questions about the development, or rather, the inappropriate development of Africa.

Since the famous book *Et si l'Afrique refusait le développement? (And What, If Africa Refused Development?)*, by Axel Kabou¹ many works have been published about Africa in the last fifteen years, with more or less pompous, pessimistic or aggressive titles like *L'Afrique, le spectre de l'échec (Africa, the Spectre of Failure)*,² *L'Afrique est-elle incapable de s'unir? (Is Africa Incapable of Being United?)*³ and *L'Afrique des incertitudes (Africa of Uncertainties)*.⁴

There are also works written by foreigners, openly accusing and pillorying Africans themselves, such as *Négrologie (Negrology)* by Stephen Smith⁵ and *God Bless Africa* by Bernard Lugan.⁶

The media are notorious in this area. They talk about indolence, opposition to progress, laziness, nepotism, corruption, the spectre of tribal wars, famine and diseases, with AIDS coming at the top of the list, as the foundations of Africanity. Even worse, we are facing the biologization of a complex reality, though no people and no continent has the monopoly of barbarism. Therefore, it is not futile to remind you that Europe was, only half a century ago, a wasteland, guilty of the biggest crime perpetrated against humanity, the slave trade; a Europe that was the breeding ground of Nazism, Auschwitz, Dachau and other Sarajevos. Today, the US leadership, which uses force to express itself in the name of a so-called democracy, of which it pretends to be the standard bearer, is certainly the most destabilizing phenomenon experienced so far in the world.

Through this reminder, I simply would like to restore the order of relationship. I do not want trouble with anybody, I am only talking about history.

Africa, and especially African youth, must also know that **our continent has contributed a lot to humanity** and to the enrichment of its heritage; and that, all things considered, the history of world civilization is only based on a give-and-take platform. This is evidenced by archaeological findings, which have corroborated that human beings originated in Africa, that it was first of all in Africa that human beings walked. The beginning of technology, the emergence, the origin and the root of culture and conscience are therefore African. Léopold Sédar Senghor also demonstrates that Africa has contributed poetry, plainsong, polyphony, Negro dance and fine arts to the world. Cubism or the Ecole de Paris (the School of Paris) was inspired, above all, by Negro-African art; not to mention that in the seventh, sixth and fifth centuries before the Christian era, the leading Greek scholars, philosophers and writers went to yank the torch of civilization from the 'hands of Egyptians'.⁷

If I do not forget, I am not inventing anything either.

In Africa, the near future is also important. Within twenty-five years, that is to say tomorrow already, Africa, with its 30,300,000 km², its 1.3 billion inhabitants, its rich mining and mineral resources, its forests and water reserves, will be the first continent, the new continent, whose population is the youngest on the planet.

It is important to remind you of these facts, for rethinking the development of Africa involves first and foremost getting rid of Afro-pessimism, which, just like wild weeds, stifles us. We are all contributing to it because the present tragedies darken the past. Africans must avoid demoting and despising themselves for these are paralyzing and inhibitive factors. There is one thing not to lose sight of: you must love yourself if you want to be loved.

Let us then fight for Africa with our heads high as, for example, Léopold Sedar Senghor and others who did so with the Negritude discourse, Joseph Ki-Zerbo with the rehabilitation of African history, Cheick Anta Diop with the Egyptology battle and Nelson Mandela with the freedom and dignity of the African; not to mention our freedom fighters against colonial penetration and domination.

But let us come back to the subject: History, Democracy and African Values: New Lines of Reflection.

Yet another speech on democracy? Yes, yet another one. In tackling this work, I have been constantly thinking about the functional impact of other studies and reflections on democratic experiences in Africa. More than just being mental gymnastics meant to prove our capabilities as researchers, what is critical, be-

yond theoretical statements, is how to help Africa make progress. Swamped with the abundance and quality of the documentation existing on this theme, I have, above all, used the most recent sources, the majority of which were published in 2005, especially those that have allowed me to escape from the narrow prism of publications about Africa. To me, it is unfair to believe that denouncing the scourges that beset Mother Africa and considering them as inherent specificities and values of the continent is enough to explain the African democratic discomfort, especially in this era of globalization. This is why I try to reflect on the African problem regarding democracy from a comparative perspective, which offers better understanding, but also to put it into perspective and take a bird's-eye view of the question; hence, my emphasis on the use of publications about the health status of a democracy as old as France.

I would not like to clash with anybody, but my duty as an intellectual recommends me to share my analyses and convictions, which are enriched very fortunately and by chance by the recent experience of the practice of power, in a certainly peripheral but nonetheless privileged position, which was mine for a decade. Therefore, please do not regard what I say as annoying or subversive, for I simply intend to play my role as an intellectual and a militant.

First, let us remind ourselves of the basic definition of democracy: **government by the people**. Its origin is in ancient Greece. Its modern application is found in Western Europe, England, France with the 1789 revolution, then in North America, subsequent to the industrialization of that region of the world. Etymologically, it means government by the people, exercised by the people and for the people: *demos*, the people and *cratos*, power.

In reality, there are two main theories: direct democracy and representative democracy, based on the thinking of Locke and Rousseau.

In the nebula of definitions, I adopt two positions. The first perceives democracy as a government mechanism, based on an **institutional organization** and whose role is to protect individuals and the community against all risks of dictatorship and authoritarianism by those in power. It is therefore both a preventive and protective mechanism. This form of democracy, called procedural democracy, in which personal freedom prevails, is derived from the US revolution. It also tends to combine, as Guy Hermet puts it in *Culture et Démocratie (Culture and Democracy)*,⁸ the two rather antagonistic principles of majority will with personal freedom, at the cost of a series of constitutional arrangements that increase the counterbalance of people's expression (a counterbalance called *checks and balances* by the Anglo-Saxons).

Among the Anglo-Saxons, this fear of the arbitrariness and of the coercive potential of power is limited by laws which, in fact, have a more important role

than the governance itself, so much so that one refers to the 'rule of law' rather than the power of those who govern.

As a mechanism for the management of human beings, democracy **must guarantee an environment for human beings and communities to enjoy their freedom**. It is reflected in transparency in decision-making by governments as well as in their obligation to be accountable to the population for their actions. It must ensure **justice for all citizens**.

The second conception sees democracy as a societal project for the personal and collective well-being of citizens. This is therefore **aimed at social and economic progress**. The main objective of a democratic government must be to eradicate poverty, to ensure that its citizens enjoy adequate living standards. This 'substantial' or progressive democracy, marking the political thinking derived from the French revolution, then from the Russian revolution, subjects everything to

the progress of equality of men and women until reaching the point of perfection where they will all be in a position to take better advantage of their personal skills. In such a vision of democracy, it is therefore its quite utopian end that is important and not the means to achieve it.⁹

Beyond these main conceptions, organizing free and fair elections at regular intervals, with many candidates in competition, remains an urgent need in democracy.

Now let us come back to Africa. Can one talk about democracy in Africa today? Yes and no. To avoid generalization, I will base my analysis on the case of Mali, which is best known to me and which is referred to as being one of the students of democracy in Africa, on the supposition that, overall, what is true for Mali holds for many other African countries.

The Republic of Mali is known to have gone through its democratic revolution in 1991, when the people overthrew, in a bloody coup, the 23-year-old military dictatorship of Moussa Traoré and his single-party rule through the Malian People's Democratic Union [l'Union démocratique du Peuple Malien, UDPM]. Why is it said that Mali has entered the democratic era? Because as soon as Moussa Traoré's regime was overthrown, the transitional government led by Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré established multi-partyism. The principles of national sovereignty, democracy, territorial integrity, national unity and state secularism were proclaimed by the new constitution of the Republic of Mali, which was adopted through a referendum in early 1992.

Following free elections, Alpha Oumar Konaré was elected president of the Republic of Mali. After two consecutive constitutional mandates, he handed the

baton, again after free elections, to Amadou Toumani Touré, whom he had promoted to the rank of General on the very day of his inauguration on 8 June 1992.

The Third Republic was born with Alpha Oumar Konaré, and the establishment of the democratic institutional bedrock was confirmed by him.

Now, let us move away from statements and examine more closely democratic practice in an old democracy, such as France – which by the way is the former colonial master of Mali – and the young democracy of Mali itself.

In her work *Les pathologies de la démocratie (The Pathologies of Democracy)*¹⁰ Cynthia Fleury maintains that ‘each society must go through the test of the various stages of democracy’. Any democratic catching-up or leaping-ahead would therefore be illusory. At this stage, we are in the heart of a debate that must stir up the African intellectual. If the democratic leap is inconceivable, what would be producible and productive, in theory and in practice? Whether you agree with Cynthia or not, it remains the case that the values of democracy are not applied vigorously everywhere; there is a wide gap between the democratic profession of faith and practice. Nowhere is democracy a rigid value. Sometimes it embraces socio-cultural, even economic and demographic realities; sometimes continuous protests in the form of union strikes, demonstrations and revolt against the established order demonstrate that democracy is not a final state, an acquired value, but only a process.

In Mali, a power that stops threatening people with authoritarianism, that reassures people with its words and actions, that speaks the language of tolerance, and acts with humility, gains support from the people. The March 1991 events can be analyzed in this light. The collapse of Moussa Traoré’s regime was not only due entirely to the stubbornness of the players in the democratic movement, but also and eventually to the fact that the general had stopped being in tune with spirit and will of the people, with their aspirations and the way they saw their representatives. In fact, on Friday 22 March 1991, the so-called black Friday, the people, mown down by the bullets of an enraged regime, had been looking forward to the head of state’s televised address, the announcement of which was the only thing that was enough to stop them from burning and looting.

Instead of sending a reassuring message on that day, Moussa Traoré excelled in vociferating threats like: ‘I shall not yield, I shall not resign.’ Not to mention the fact that in January, on the occasion of the New Year’s presentation ceremony, he had already promised to bring hell to opposition members and those he called good-for-nothings and nonentities.

By contrast, to expand my reflection further, the secret of candidate Konaré's success in the 1992 presidential elections lay partly in the fact that he was able to understand his people's philosophical and psychological outlook, by appealing constantly to the spirit of tolerance, humility and patience, all of which are highly democratic values, and which are also the expression of the Malian people. During the presidential campaign, he referred ceaselessly to God, to destiny, to fate: 'It is God who decides to give power to whom He wants, and there is nothing one can do against divine will.' Or even: 'I want power, but for my people's happiness. If that happiness lies in my hands, well! Let God give it to me, but if it lies in someone else's hands, well! Let God give it to that person.' Thus, candidate Konaré promised his people what reassured them most, what took away from them the spectre of arrogance and dictatorship so related to power, but so much held in contempt by the people. This assurance of **peace and security**, coupled with a **deep sense of humility**, was enough of a programme for this people just coming to terms with recent traumas. The goals of a democratic regime for progress and the improvement of citizens' living conditions, though contained in this small word - happiness - could wait. This happiness, eventually, depended on God, on the fortune of the incoming president as granted to him by God. Democracy here, therefore, has a physical and metaphysical model.

During the electoral campaign, candidate Konaré called on people living in the most remote rural areas, in their vestibules or under their tents and warehouses. 'It would take time to find a more iconoclastic power-seeker than this one,' the dignitaries and elders used to say. Likewise, the opponents to Moussa's regime lost ground because of their lack of vision. They dangerously neglected the people's *a priori* ideologies, their ideals of peace and security. They showed constant acts of defiance through demonstrations, organized damage caused to public and private buildings, and through their aggressive words against him and his regime such as: 'We shall kick Alpha and his party, the Alliance for Democracy in Mali [l'Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali, ADEMA] out of power.' 'We shall make this country ungovernable' said a Malian opposition party member, who is a government minister today. Those opponents not only frightened the power in place, they also frightened the people. They showed their authoritarian propensity, which could only be dangerous when given free rein. The people could see their rulers defying excessively a power that eventually derived from God and was exercised by a president chosen by God, who, moreover, was uttering reassuring words as opposed to their excessive words.

I am not settling scores, I am giving an account of events.

This adaptability of democracy to the current reality and its capacity to slip into people's cultural orientations, beyond institutional arrangements, makes it appear less as the people's power exercised by their representatives, directly or indirectly (president of the republic, elected directly, and members of parliament), than as power in which **people recognize themselves**.

Here, we are once more faced with a new problem: **extending the conceptual field of democracy, following the extension of its geographic field**. Moreover, we refer to issues relating to the relativity of democracy, and therefore to its domestication. Would not each nation be required to adapt democracy to its own context? Intellectuals, such as Marc Mvé Bekale, reject this position by explaining that the universal development of democracy is related to its ontological basis, which makes it possible for it to transcend cultural identities. As an ontological basis, Bekale sees freedom in the same way as Jean Paul Sartre did, 'as the fundamental complex of human being'.¹¹

Based on the notion that democracy does not exist outside the individuals who put it in place, and that individuals are both its strength and weakness, Cynthia Fleury demonstrates how personality disorders can affect the evolution of democracy.

As part of my presentation, I shall reconsider the problems already located by Alexis de Tocqueville. I am talking about the tyranny of the majority that characterizes fledgling democracies; in other words, the 'great democratic consensus' appears less about the coming together of the greater number than their omnipotence. On the one hand, we have the 'official circles' and 'right-thinking persons', and on the other, those who think differently, who find themselves among the dismissed and the excluded, the exiles and the 'censored'.

'The empire of the majority performs better than all the other inquisitions put together', said de Tocqueville.¹² To this is added nowadays, according to Fleury, media hype and the proscription of some intellectuals as 'wet blankets'.

De Tocqueville denounces other facts reported by Raymond Boudon in his most recent work which he dedicated to de Tocqueville on the occasion of his bicentenary, in *Tocqueville aujourd'hui (Tocqueville Today)*.¹³ These facts are related by de Tocqueville, discussing the July monarchy (1830–48), as still being characteristics of the Ancien Régime, that is to say prior to 1789:

Nobody thinks about being able to carry out an important business if the state is not involved (...). The government having also replaced providence, it is natural for everybody to appeal to it to meet their particular needs... It

[the government] is blamed even for bad weather... Citizens, desperate to improve their lots themselves, rush up turbulently to the head of state and request assistance from him. To put oneself at ease at the expense of the Treasury seems to them to be (...) the easiest and most widely open way for all to get out of a condition that is no longer adequate: seeking for positions becomes the most widespread business.¹⁴

Talking about the state, de Tocqueville added:

The state, instead of sticking to its ruling functions, which are rightly assigned to it, has come to be, not only a benefactor and an educator, but also an entrepreneur. It becomes the biggest actor (...). As the power of the central government increase, the number of civil servants representing it increases.

What seems to me even more astonishing and remarkable is the durability and continuing presence of these defects, as described by Perry Anderson in a book published in 2005 entitled *La pensée tiède. Un regard critique sur la culture française (The Lukewarm Thought: A Critical Look at French Culture)*, which was followed quickly by Pierre Nora's reply, *La pensée réchauffée (The Heated Thought)*. Nora commented:

Power concentration in an exclusive institution, which produces a political, administrative and economic elite, has probably no equivalent elsewhere in the world. In a country with sixty million inhabitants, the ENA [college for senior civil servants] admits only between a hundred and one hundred and twenty students every year, that is, a total of five thousand graduates since its establishment. Not only does that elite monopolize the higher positions in the public service sector, as well as in the business world, but it also provides the hard core of the political class itself.

Anderson quoted Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Laurent Fabius, Jacques Chirac, Michel Rocard, Edouard Balladur, Alain Juppé, Lionel Jospin, François Hollande and Dominique de Villepin. The consanguinity of this oligarchy has inevitably brought about rampant corruption, Anderson suggested. On the one hand, the practice of 'pantouflage' - high-ranking civil servants moving from the public service sector to business circles or to politics and *vice versa* - increases opportunities to embezzle public or private funds for partisan purposes. On the other hand, the main political parties, which cannot rely on a sufficient number of members, have for a long time financed their operations only through small savings and the trading of favours. Hence, the scheming mess that was

revealed in recent years, starting with the system set up during Chirac's time at the Paris town council.¹⁵

Anderson goes even as far as saying that the mobilization of opinion is so low in France that indignation about corruption is less voiced there than in a country such as Italy. Forgetting his inquisitive sword, he adds that this state of affairs is not a matter of citizens' lack of concern but relates to their 'ever-increasing contempt for the members of the caste who, in turn, share positions among themselves'.¹⁶

Lionel Jospin, the former French prime minister, in his recent book, also denounces 'the new aristocracies' which consist of institutional groups of people like bankers and business managers who earn very high salaries on the back of the poor whom they ask to make more sacrifices. This practice, Jospin thinks, may be a source of demoralization. He also advocates that politics be separated from the economy because their overlapping creates disasters.¹⁷

Let us consider another pathology, the tyranny of the minorities denounced by Cynthia Fleury as being typical of adult democracies. She thinks that minorities try to impose on the rest of the people their need to have specific rights, and maintains that they

act anti-democratically, under the cover of democracy, their right to be different and the defence of their cultural identity by cleverly circumventing the notion of equal rights and conditions. This becomes therefore a seizure of rights.¹⁸

It is, of course, a perversion to convert a right into a privilege, to enjoy oneself without hindrance and at all costs, being not outside the law but using the law and instrumentalizing it.

Comparisons are odious, but they educate: I do not explore the miserable life of French democracy in the mid-nineteenth century or even that of today for nothing. The examples I found are all the more important when we know that France is considered to be the cradle of human rights, is among the democratic mentors of Africa and that many African democracies are only copies of France's. It is precisely because they are copies that our democracies are contaminated by the viruses of French democracy. They get accustomed to it, and its mutations lead to disastrous consequences. Let us talk first about the African state.

The African state is also a centralizing state. It monopolizes everything, decides on everything and interferes in everything. It is the entity that hires, fires

and promotes people. It distributes posts, jobs, scholarships, contracts, favours, relationship networks and address books. It centralizes, controls and screens information, from both the printed and spoken media. It even controls the parliament. Without the state, you are nobody or almost nobody. You must bother to please it or be worried if you do not please it. All this is inhibiting, since nobody wants to take the risk; even if one likes taking risks, one would think twice because the state can afford either to make things easy for you – which does not often happen without selling oneself out – or stifle you. The stakes of the struggle are reduced to having one's place in the sun. The main victims are those known as the executives.

Once more, let us make a comparison with France's situation in de Tocqueville's time:

The master no longer says: you will think like me or you'll die. He says: you are free not to think like me. You can keep everything, your life, your properties; but from this day onwards, you are an alien among us, you will keep your privileges in the city, but they will become useless to you... You will remain among human beings, but you will lose your rights to humanity. When you approach your fellow men, they will run away from you as if you were impure; and those who believe that you are innocent will themselves abandon you, for fear of being abandoned in return. Go in peace, I let you keep your life, but it is worse than death.¹⁹

This centralizing state extends itself into adventitious or parallel structures that reveal its monopolistic and often speculative tendencies. Take, for example, the blurred constitutional outlines of 'first ladies', which allow them to assume prominence in a rapid and uncontrollable manner.

I am not spitting into the soup, I am digesting it.

After all, it is not about first ladies being bad; it only seems to me that they are losing the relevance of their role. It is a popular belief that when the husband cannot act, his wife, who is the mother of the nation, the cornerstone of the republican family, the mere replica of the family, can act.

This obesity of the state is in contrast with the citizens' thinness. It increases poverty, for the more the state centralizes the more it makes citizens dependent on it and the more it makes them greedy, destroys their spirit of enterprise and weakens democracy. This collective dependence is a kind of insidious dictatorship. In addition, it is a serious hindrance to progressive democracy, in terms of responsibility and individual development. More than a pathology, it is a crime.

Let us now consider the pathologies of African democracies, which must be dissociated from the endogenization of the democratic processes and which seriously undermine the latter. These are endogenous or tropical pathologies, in a sense, which complicate the pathologies already contracted through contamination. In addition, they mix with what I shall refer to as **fundamental defects**. I think that the 'democratic haste' – and please pardon the expression, which am using for greater convenience – did not allow us to adjust outdated situations. Democracy, as an institutional system and mechanism, generally came into being in Africa in the early 1990s in the haste that we all experienced. Very quickly, constitutions, which were mere copies of European constitutions, were drafted here and there by lawyers advised by Western legal experts. New political parties, sprung from the 'revolutionary' fever, appeared to be election machines rather than educational ones.

This haste has had adverse effects, the first being not only the lack of control over the conceptual approach but also, to some extent, what we would normally term constitutional 'fiddling'. Once more, avoiding generalities, I would like to concentrate on the Malian case. What do Malians mean by democracy? It is a parachuted term that has been translated as *bèjè fanga* in the Bamanan language. *Bèjè* means the thing held in common and *fanga* is strength.

Bèjè fanga, the people's power, refers therefore to the original concept of democracy. It is important to analyze the concept to avoid falling into saintliness. First, there is an antinomy between *fanga*, a title born in the seventeenth century among the warlike slave kingdoms of Ségou, and the notion of democratic power. It means all that the royal power involves in terms of violence, force of coercion and even of nuisance to all those who dare to defy it, including the people. Therefore, linking this with the term 'the people' and making it the 'power of the people' seems absurd to me, as it depends on a superficial and dangerous approach.

Can we say that there has actually been people's power in traditional Mali, if only through the crooked perspective of the elected elite? Is it only true that its people had exercised sovereignty? I doubt it, for – and this is the second obstacle – the fact of regarding power as sacred is still a deeply rooted cultural reality. The mystique of the chief does exist, and it is not the checks on royal absolutism, such as a group of religious counsellors or of troubadours who gravitate around kings and who are often cited by Africans, that can be substituted for the people's power. Even the Muslim regimes have not succeeded in erasing these beliefs; the king is appointed by God. Closer to us still, in the nineteenth century in

the Bamanan kingdom of Ségou, which is still vivid in collective memory, the king, though demystified, was still greeted with the title of provider of riches, master of waters and mankind, of gunpowder and iron. In the face of the new democratic powers, attitudes have changed only slightly. The president is still referred to as *jamana tigi*, that is, the head of the country (in the possessive sense of the term), or *faama*, which was the specific dynastic title of the kings of Ségou, and means power-holder (in the coercive sense of the term). It is symptomatic to see that only warlords, those who handle weapons, whose names only indicate bravery and cruelty, remain referential heroes. These are those whom certain political leaders identify themselves with. If you see them swaggering about when troubadours sing their praises, especially when there is a patronymic collusion, you would think that 'their brave ancestors' were still present.²⁰

They do not even hesitate to behave like power-holders and to adopt the leader's behaviour. It is said that when you hold power, you should be strict. You must punish if need be, especially when it comes to containing **anarchy**, which is the deviation denounced as the Achilles' heel of democracy and its foundation defect. Popular reasoning goes even further: power should not be shared at all. **The leader, the president of the republic, is vested with the role of supreme guide**, whereas in democracy he would only be a guide whose existence depends solely on the citizens' will. People keep alive in him the cult of the personality and of histrionic delirium.

People also want him to be the power-holder and support of his family, his friends, his close relations and a distributor of emoluments as in the time of the warlike empire where the king used to share the collected spoils between his warriors and favourites.

Similarly, bribery and corrupt practices are no longer regarded as an evil by the majority of people. On the contrary, these are evils necessary to power; as long as the leader can distribute emoluments around him, as long as he can take under his wing – financially, of course – close relations, friends and courtiers, everything is well. What is disgraceful is a leader's miserliness, a lack of prodigality towards his lieutenants and other close relations. Generosity and prodigality are part of his prerogatives.

This role of the state as a distributor has other harmful effects: nepotism, ethnocentrism (focus on the ethnic group) and regionalism. These corrupt the state machinery, create a divide between citizens, promote inequality and injustice, and hence, endanger democracy. These harmful effects may even lead to genocide and jeopardize the institutional system. It is, however, the social system as a whole that is in danger of dying. Impacted by the mercantilist mentality, all relations are affected, including the closest and most sacred ones:

relationships between husband and wife, brother and sister or brother and brother, aunt or uncle and nephew or niece, cousins, brother-in-law and sister-in-law, and so on; all adversarial or friendly relations. The increase of poverty, the taste for the superficial, for being credited with an improved image through high-ranking relations or through one's bloodline, ethnic and regional ties, weigh heavily on the state and its structures.

The role of the state as a distributor results in another harmful effect similar to that of couch grass. That is, a court of greedy and opportunistic sycophants surround and stifle power in order to please it, to take advantage of it, exactly as de Tocqueville describes for the fledgling French democracy. The opportunism of executives, in search of privileges, with depersonalization as a consequence, is another major problem facing our democracies. It takes courage, as intellectuals, to denounce that fact. The search for positions exhausts our executives physically and mentally, and is a serious blow to their dignity. That very dignity is one of the cornerstones of democracy. Even the opposition is fond of power and cannot resist 'attractive' offers such as ministerial portfolios. The offer is so tempting that some determined members of the opposition move to the other side at full speed.

This method has been presented as the new concepts of management or consensual democracy, participatory democracy, convivial democracy and open government. In this way, heads of state kill two birds with one stone. Beyond the material interest, by attracting the opposition members and appointing them as ministers, they neutralize their resistance in order to calm things down and pacify the social climate for lack of other means of stemming them. The main objective is peace and security for the country, and certainly for themselves first. It becomes therefore a matter of self-defence.

In my opinion, such strategies are, unfortunately, a serious blow to the democratic vitality that is necessary to move forward. The imperative quest for peace becomes a real hindrance to the goal of development. If everybody says yes to the leader, if everybody confines himself/herself to submissiveness or is apathetic to it, it is to be feared that our democracies will take time to assert themselves. For, let us be assured of one thing: it is attacks from the opposition that always motivate any power-holder to make progress. Conflict is necessary in any democratic society. For the sake of consensus, problems are masked and the raw material for conflict builds up. Nonetheless, it must be a responsible opposition with a sense of proportion. I will come back to this concept of a dynamic compromise. Such a balance is yet to be seen in practice.

Marc Mvé Bekale rightly denounces this form of 'entryism'. Granting that consensual democracy is suitable for 'weakened states', that is, those states

devastated by disastrous and protracted conflicts, which for a short period need to rebuild their entire structure, he suggests

the absorption or swallowing up of forces likely to embody the counter power leads to decline in many areas: restoring de facto the single-party system, poor political practices, mediocre governance, increase in poverty, etc. (...). Although establishing consensual democracy is aimed at strengthening national unity, it is necessary to underscore the fact that it hides certain political bad habits, shows the lack of alternative projects and ruins the balance of power necessary for the good management of a state.²¹

National unity: here we are at the heart of another crucial debate, of the republic versus democracy. In the name of exigencies of national unity, a certain school of thought advocates the existence of a strong executive power. As we know, there is a kind of combined system in the United States where the president embodies, through his power, the demand for unity; but is at the same time weak because he must take into account the diversity or multiplicity of interests as well as the inalienable rights attached to democracy.

Another impediment to African democracies, affecting the basis of all political entities, namely, justice under the law, is what might be called the underpopulation of our countries. Everybody is a relative. When you sentence somebody, when you touch somebody, it is the whole republic that mobilizes to put pressure on you, for a hundred or two hundred families are related to that person. Therefore, you reap unpopularity when you sow justice. Moreover, in the past, foreigners were most successful in the exercise of power. They managed to accomplish bold actions, for they had no family and social ties; they were not integrated socially and morally. Nearly all founders of empires in traditional Mali came from elsewhere. Either they were simply foreigners (*dunan*), like the founders of the Songhay Empire, those from the Bamanan kingdom of Ségou or even El Hadj Omar; or they were foreign natives (*dugulen dunan*), that is, they must have gone into exile for a while and returned home later (as was the case of Sunjata).

As another defect, I will mention the weakness and failure of political parties, which are rather election machines than political parties. All African elections are marked by vote-rigging and violence. The appetite for power, combined with increasing poverty, results more and more in using money to vote, instead of citizens. The distribution of grain, hard cash, printed fabrics and tee-shirts bearing the seal or the effigy of a candidate, the promise of positions, jobs or scholarships for children, are what determine and shift polling trends. In

practice, more and more, he who sweetens the electorate most has the greatest chances of gaining victory.

This **merchantization of democracy** is certainly one of the most extraordinary and most dangerous deviations of African democracies, as it puts them in mortal danger.

Finally, as the last and not the least pathology observed, I would mention the disintegration of the foundational values of democracy: freedom, equality, equity, subjected to the thrust of the merchantization of states and elections as well as the triumph of individualism and unrestrained liberalism.

According to de Tocqueville, the human being is guided by a principle: the overarching concern for **dignity** and well-being. 'The desire for equality is a general and dominant passion.' It is a fundamental value, a frame of mind essential for everybody. Durkheim confirms this desire for recognition.

The desire for equality, recognition and dignity leads to the heart of another fundamental debate. This principle explains all the revolts by people subjected everywhere and at all times, since ancient Greece, feudal regimes and national liberation struggles under the various colonization enterprises, whether French, English, Portuguese or Italian, in the last two centuries. It is in the name of these values that some of our ancestors preferred to die rather than let themselves be caught. I am thinking of King Babemba Traoré from Sikasso versus the French General Audéoud.

Was it not Sékou Touré, the first President of Guinea Conakry, for his part, who declared: 'We prefer dignity in poverty to slavery in opulence' when it came to deciding for or against the integration of French colonies into the French Union in 1958?

I cannot, of course, forget Nelson Mandela. He is a living monument, a symbol of resistance to the discriminating laws of the apartheid regime.

It is also in the name of dignity that everywhere in the world is ringing out the cries of harassed young people or minorities who express their bitterness in violent forms. The most extraordinary of these remains terrorism, a transcontinental and delocalized movement, the expressions of which are as unexpected as they are ruthless. The revolt in 2005 of thousands of young immigrants from the suburbs of Paris and other French cities reflects, according to the most unbiased analysts, beyond what President Chirac described as a 'crisis of direction, a crisis of reference and a crisis of identity', a thirst and a quest for justice, well-being – as Chirac himself has recognized – less exclusion; in a word, for more dignity. This violence reflects therefore a severe pathology: the denial of equality

and the lack of equity that are the foundational principles of democracy. In these recent clashes, identities are repressed and ghettoized, French citizens – the ‘French-born French citizens’, I would say – are constantly reminded of their origins, Black or Arab, of Islam, even though they no longer have anything to do with these origins, given that they were born and raised in France and are full French citizens.

Moreover, what is dignity worth? Where is the spirit of equality and freedom, when democracy is validated by foreign countries that judge or approve it according to exogenous standards by distributing laurels, giving orders, reprimands, condemnations or even bombardments? In Africa, we do not even have the right to determine the prices of the raw materials we produce, restrained as we are by the diktats of the democratic police force.

Once the diagnosis is made, let us turn to the treatment. What lines of reflection can we identify? How can we solve African democratic pathologies? Shall we say less republic, more democracy? Or less democracy, more republic? What do we need? A combined system such as that in the United States? It is certainly a strange and obsolete debate, but one that African constitutionalists must look into. Yes, let us put back in motion the African democratic imagination.

Start with the power, the African state. Its excess weight must be readjusted by putting it on a diet. The state must relinquish part of its sovereignty. More importantly, it remains to make the exercise of executive duties perilous and unenviable, starting with the role of the president. When I say perilous, I am not referring to violence, but to a constraint to which the holder submits himself or herself and which is as yet theoretical. This can include, as long as he or she remains in office, the restriction of certain rights (such as the right to own, to carry out business, even of free movement) to requirements of a sacred nature. This might be issuing sworn statements at regular intervals, to serve his people, only his people and his entire people, in front of the lay priests whose moral standards will have been proven overtime. In Mali, even nowadays, the *hogon*, that is, the leader of the Dogon people, who has both temporal and spiritual prerogatives, once enthroned no longer goes out of his hut and is forbidden to do business with women, including his own wives. Nice provision! One should also be able to unlink the term ‘self’ from heads of state, from personality cults, from paranoiac and histrionic deliria, in order to set limits to their super-power by reshaping the protocol procedure and security measures with a view to making them flexible. I think these are two aspects that make power so cherished. The extensive and budget-consuming official trips that, by the same

token, are opportunities of maintaining the climate of an endless election campaign, should also be limited and incorporated into a lightened agenda with a reduced budget.

One must also break state control, put an end to the monopolistic and wheeler-dealer role of the state through transparent, popularized and verifiable legal provisions that are also made known through information provided in national languages by political parties, the print media and radio news. Those languages ought to be taught in schools.

But breaking the state's control requires market liberalization. **Liberalism** seems to me to be inescapable to ensure promotion of the individual and put an end to the alienation of families, citizens and businessmen. Coupling money with power is devastating. What do we see today? The battle of political liberalism has certainly triumphed, but in our fledgling democracies political parties have no economic power; none of them survive solely on members' contributions. In the beginning, businessmen funded their candidates' electoral campaigns, gambling on the chances of success of one or the other and juggling between the favourites. The reward for their involvement included the return of favours, issuing of contracts and all kinds of facilitation in their transactions with the elected prince. Therefore, the ruling party has its businessmen who benefit from contracts, bank loans, tax reduction, banquets, private dinners and other advantages; but as soon as the party that protects them loses power, their business as a whole declines, as they are deprived of privileges. They are replaced by other businessmen, who in turn will be thrown out tomorrow because they also belong to a new majority. This cycle results in precariousness and the continuous weakening of those who drive our economies and the erosion of our economies and political parties.

Let me come back to our opposition party members. I mentioned the importance of the role they play, but this is possible only if the power-holders have respect for them as full-fledged citizens who are also concerned about the destiny of their fellow countrymen. Belonging to the opposition does not turn a man into a lout or a good-for-nothing; you must be convinced of it. It is precisely because of their role as watchdogs, because of the breath of life they inject into democracy – a real factor of progress – that the members of the opposition should be treated respectfully and be protected from material hardship. Conversely, given the importance of this role, the opposition should have a responsible attitude, being aware that the exercise of power does not necessarily turn a man into a devil. Democracy cannot allow a Manichean approach: it is only a system in which everyone renegotiates his or her 'self' as part of a balance between reciprocal rights and duties. If the sense of that responsibility is not well understood,

the persecution of 'holy' opponents by dictators and heads of state would then become a simplistic image, if it is not already so. Worse, an over-powerful opposition may constitute a hindrance to economic and social progress, which is so vital to any democratic government. It also strengthens the enemies of democracy. Those who proclaim that democracy means division and instability hence strengthen the position of indecisive persons from autocratic regimes and all those who, in the name of a so-called unity, would rather see autocratic governments remain in power as so-called guarantors of stability. 'Yes, democracy is the spirit of revolution, but it is above all the spirit of a revolution which eventually can exercise self-restraint and assert itself in moderation,' says Cynthia Fleury.

Therefore, oppositional behaviour should be readjusted. Be an opponent who does not scare those in power and especially the people, an opponent who does not self-destruct. Be an opponent who does not cross the red line, who does not cross the democratic Rubicon, as Marc Mve Bakala beautifully puts it. Indeed, the opposition should reconsider its methods, for it tends to prove that it is brewing its own authoritarian potential by repeatedly showing off its biceps; and in the end, it may use up its martial genius. We need constructive opponents. The dialectic shift between opposition and moderation, conflict and consensus, in a word self-restraint and balance, should replace the wishy-washy current movements in politics.

I believe that to sustain our democracies, we should endeavour, as de Tocqueville puts it, to turn democracy into an ethical regime, a way of being, of thinking, of behaving. The African democracy soup is short of too many ingredients. This is why we need **visionary leaders**. To be a democratic leader requires a great capacity to withstand blows, to be patient and tolerant, to have a sense of self-restraint and of course knowledge, vision and an unwavering faith in democracy. Otherwise, we will quickly backslide into autocracy.

Moreover, some thinkers, including Agnès Antoine,²² consider the fact that democracy has its back to the wall in the twenty-first century as lying in its 'unthought' aspect, 'its profound sense in terms of man's fulfilment'. Democracy can stick solely to its physical sense, to the detriment of its metaphysical sense; and yet, it could be both at the same time. Agnès Antoine wonders: 'What type of faith is it possible to envisage within the democratic condition? Can democracy, outside religion, create within itself, mechanisms of transcendence?'

Fleury goes further by suggesting that reform be related to the notion of metaphysics:

To reform is to try to solve the disappearance of metaphysical democracy, or even to try to think faith without religion, belief without cult, spirituality without orthodoxy.

The strength of democracy is indeed secularism, but how do we found a democratic profession of faith? We need to revive the 'reason of the heart', the 'common passion' that prevailed at the inception of democracy.

I say almost the same thing in *L'Os de la parole*,²³ when I argue in favour of the promotion of moral leaders, capable, through their behaviour, their conduct, their humility and their dignity, of bearing the weight of democracy. Yes, I believe in the tractive force of moral leaders, **the democracy fanatics** (as I choose to call them), giant beacons such as Nelson Mandela, to enlighten us and illuminate us. I believe in their voluntarism to radiate around them and on the peoples the cardinal virtues of democracy.

I go even further, since we ought to produce what we can imagine: on top of the promotion of moral leaders, I argue in favour of the establishment of **committees on democracy ethics**, composed of men and women who would draft a text of profession of faith, full of sacred words. As guardians of the temple, those men and women may be entrusted with a mission of education in the field and would spread in their wake the ethical and metaphysical code of democracy. They would be selected according to strict guidelines while allowing for the necessary temporal adjustments inherent in the changing of stakes and values. They would be the leaders *par excellence* of centres of values, designed as care and maintenance centres for our metastasized values: values of peace, dialogue, tolerance, humility and equity, sharing and solidarity. They would thus help us partner with the cardinal values of democracy and prevent democracy from falling into dormancy, because again as de Tocqueville anticipated, **apathy** is a serious threat to democracy. Democracy is not a system that can afford to rest on its laurels; if it did so, it would mean a return to its initial stage. The gradual fall in turnout at many elections attests to the dormancy of democracy. The members of committees on democracy ethics would help, together with other structures – schools, political parties, associations – to forge a less convulsive citizen identity, see to it that the customer-citizen gives way to the accountable-citizen, according to the happy turn of phrase of Guy Hermet.²⁴ Those committees on ethics would also help us to send back democracy beyond the marked-out frontiers, in its 'unthought(s)'.

I take the case of liberty, that individual liberty so dear in democracy. Could it be confined to be just Liberty with a capital L, immutable, or is it meant to change into Libertism, into tyranny to quench the individual's enjoyment in all

fields? Freedom of action, freedom of thought, freedom of opinion? For my part, I think that man is not free because he is free to do or say what he wants. He is not free because he has broken the bonds of slavery, colonization or dictatorship. He cannot be free unless he frees himself from his own impedimenta, from the shackles of the supremacy and superpower of his 'ego', which forms an insurmountable barrier to the vast project for living better together - that is the ultimate project of democracy.

How to legitimate in the eyes of the people those 'democracy fanatics' and the leaders of committees on ethics and see to it that their path and that of power do not meet, that there are no possible contacts? Here also, let us produce the imagined. I am not imagining things, I am proclaiming my faith.

There is another key idea, also from de Tocqueville. He saw in democracy an initiation process, which makes him a 'demanding humanist', for whom democracy is something other than itself, which touches on man's essence, his freedom, his responsibility vis-à-vis the world - in a word, the sense of his destiny, the 'future fate of mankind'.

I go even further. For my part, such fate includes a broader relation that goes beyond mankind. Reflections on the sense of life no longer have currency. Since man declared himself an exceptional creature, lowering everything, dominating all living creatures and objects, he has set himself on a giant pedestal above all, assuming rights, those famous human rights. In short, since he settled in anthropocentrism; since individuation, which enables man to blossom, gave way to individualism, even egocentrism, every man for himself, under the frantic thrust of consumerism, he has lost the sense of moderation and of his responsibility. He has lost the 'reason of the heart', obscured by his desires.

But the problem is that nowadays it is proved by the greatest scientists in the world that man is no longer at the centre of the universe, that he shares the responsibility of the Earth with all other living species - plants, animals - and even with apparently inanimate elements like mountains and watercourses. 'We are all stardust.' That is what is established today: my fellow men, my goat, my cat, my mango tree, my work table, my laptop, my dress, my beautiful dress, the perfume I splashed myself with ... all have the right not only to be loved by me, but also to be respected by me. Besides, does not Nature call us to order through unexpected and furious manifestations such as cyclones, earthquakes or tidal waves, which for the foreseeable future will challenge our sagacity and our controlling pretensions? I for one will be glad if we could have people like Wangari Maathai flourish everywhere!

Can we not modify, as suggested by the late entomologist, Thomas Odhiambo in *Sciences et quête de sens*²⁵ 'the measure of progress; taking into account notions

not necessarily quantifiable, such as progress made in the field of social relations and the community?’

Odhiambo recommends that the foundation of such visions of progress be durably built by ‘taking root in the constant search for understanding of the divine, a primordial belief in a supernatural order existing beyond the natural world, a deep sense of humility and tolerance vis-à-vis opinions advocated by the others’, which would result, at the level of international relations, in the banishment of any spirit of domination on the part of superpowers, of the progression of mankind towards less wealth and power.

Finally, another key idea, which I am delighted by, because it helps me to revive hope, the hope I raised at the beginning of my speech: if it is true that democracy is also debate, the exchange of opinions of all citizens around issues of public interest, I have grounds for maintaining that traditional Africa also initiated forms of democracy. The palaver tree, the vestibule and the *toguna* of the Dogon in Mali are also centres of democracy.

The relativism of our skills and our values, which necessarily induces a deeper reflection on the sense of life and the relations between men and between other elements, was known in traditional Africa. Individualism and possessiveness were contained in African traditional societies.

Other elements exist in our cultures, which support my hypotheses. The people of Mali are resolutely attached to social justice, peace, tolerance, patience, humility, the spirit of dialogue and a sense of negotiation and consensus. Tolerance and patience are the two cardinal virtues that make a leader: ‘He who says: «This will not be done to me, that will not be said to me,» does not deserve to be our guide,’ the popular song says.

To accept these ideas is to refuse to see in democracy a rigid system absolutized in self-sufficiency and to take it, finally, as a dynamics of sharing, an art of governing together in the respect of one another. To acknowledge them is also to equip ourselves with tools of endogenous reference to go forward; the imported part will be our spoils of war, which we have gathered following the long colonial night, but also with the help of globalization.

I have just presented you part of my convictions, but the reflection on such challenges does not go without the remobilization of African intellectuals, in order to both nurture the concepts and find solutions suitable for our ills. I am not talking about intellectuals whom international institutions often resort to in order to work on sensitive issues in the name of a supposed academic qualification. If the technical quality of the so-called consultants or experts is not

in question, the reports produced, a road map for those who commissioned them, are unfortunately nothing else but expedients; they can only serve as a foil to minimalist reforms in lieu of the necessary fundamental reforms. Besides, the search for consultancy missions, apparently meanly paid, is becoming, in this Africa where many intellectuals are after everyday life, a thriving industry. Unfortunately, it also often loses its way in a kind of clientelism aimed at offering a helping hand to friends or comrades, with a view to helping them supplement their income, particularly if they are retired or out on the sidelines for political reasons.

No, the intellectuals I am thinking of are the 'constructive intellectuals', as Roland Castro²⁶ rightly puts it, 'who would endeavour to make a society where living together is possible'. Like Zola in his *J'accuse* who invented the intellectual, who intervenes in the city. Not court intellectuals, nor grumpy and square intellectuals ready to destroy those in power; nor intellectuals who are given media coverage because they are sheltered under the kind protection of far-reaching voices, the category of intellectuals who kick over the traces of power while projecting their bazookas in all directions, without ensuring that they themselves are clean and honest, at least from an intellectual point of view. The intellectual I am thinking of and who should be promoted is a thought-producing intellectual, moderate while being implacably dedicated body and soul to the defence of democratic ideals, who redefines his culture in a democratic perspective. Africa abounds with them, which is very fortunate.

I shall conclude my speech with strong convictions, my own, of course. We must, it seems to me, move forward at our own pace, without arrogance, without maximalist orthodoxy. We do not need terrorism, democratic totalitarianism and democratic avatars nor democratic patching-up around accommodating concepts like consensus or participatory democracy, which will only remain democratic parentheses, as long as they depend on the will of the heads of state and are not defined on consensual legal and political bases. The only participation that is worthy in democracy is that of the citizens: a responsible participation at the level of decentralized localities and in decision-making concerning the destiny of the common city; a participation in the form of associations and pressure groups, in areas of freedom governed by the law of courtesy where harmony between individual and collective interests will be established. Neither overheating nor marking time; but fundamental reforms that close up the meshes of our local fabrics and which dip them in the medicinal dyes of the present and future stakes in surpassing the superpower of the individual, collective, state or super-state 'ego', in order to contain those

terrifying fears that devastate and jeopardize our planet. Only the relation of order, humility, again humility and always humility.

I also intend to serve dishes, which are my convictions, with African proverbs I wrote down during my reading or which are part of my vocabulary of wisdom,²⁷ – humility, if you prefer – said around me or by myself, with the help of circumstances that life has brought me. This initiation vocabulary is so rich and deep that no philosopher or scholar can claim authorship of it, and it bears only the humble hallmark of the elders or ethnic communities.

If we disregard those words of wisdom or stray from them, if we fail to teach them to our children and to those of contemporary Africa, if we fail to meditate on them and filter their abundant and rich sap, we assuredly deprive ourselves of quenching our thirst from a miraculous source. Miraculous because it may help those refreshing droplets, that is, the bold reforms I have referred to, to flow out.

Therefore, I will proclaim that the day man will understand that ‘you can defeat an enemy without humiliating him’; that the day the elders will admit that ‘old people’s heads are not a godsend and when the heads of the children have lived for a while they will become old people’s heads’; that ‘the snake sloughing will not become a snake any more, but the small snake, if it does not die, may well become a big snake’; that the day the rising generations will understand that ‘to be able to climb trees or swim is good, but there’s nothing like self-knowledge’; that ‘the adult knows what youth is all about, but that the young are ignorant of what lies in manhood’. And finally, I address women to tell them that their biggest crafty trick is to put on the act of their self-effacement before their dear husbands, to let them take all the credit for themselves, knowing that ‘the hen knows that the day is breaking and yet she lets the cock crow’.

Thank you.

Notes

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10. Fleury, C., 2005, *Les pathologies de la démocratie*, Fayard.
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13. Boudon, R., 2005, *Tocqueville aujourd'hui*, Odile Jacob, p. 120.
14. Ibid., p. 246.
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16. Nora, P., *La pensée réchauffée*, p. 70.
17. Jospin, L., 2005, *Le monde comme je le vois*, Gallimard.
18. Fleury, C., 2005, *Les pathologies de la démocratie*, Fayard, pp. 156-7.
19. Ibid, p. 155-156.
20. Historians know how to dissociate mansaya from faamaya; mansa was the dynastic title of the emperors of medieval Mali (thirteenth to sixteenth century). It used to be a more harmonious system, synonymous with peace and tranquillity. See the work of the historian Drissa Diakitité.
21. Bekale, M. M., ed., 2005, *Démocratie et mutations culturelles en Afrique noire*, L'Harmattan, pp. 60-1
22. Antoine, A., 2003, *L'Impensé de la démocratie. Tocqueville, la citoyenneté et la religion*, Fayard, cited in Fleury, 2005, *Les pathologies de la démocratie*, p. 271.
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27. See, inter alia, Bailleul, P. C. and Bambara, S., 2005, *Proverbs et sentences*, Editions Donniya, Bamako.