

13

Afterword

A Meditation of the Convener

V. Y. Mudimbe

One

Not a preface, this is a testimony in accompanying voices in African studies. They are of the participants in the Durban, South Africa, Social Science Campus of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) of 17-21 December 2007. An afterword, it expresses an attitude. For a Convener arriving directly from meetings in Bogota (Colombia) which were devoted to intercultural perspectives for agendas of pedagogical institutions, the attitude meant a journey in obedience. This qualified itself from precautions in listening to participants' explorations. It implied working at merging two ways of acquiescence, a 'thinking with an intellectual tradition', in terms of methods; and, on the other hand, a 'thinking it within an intercultural perspective', in terms of ethics. The first motion signified an attention to disciplinary procedures; and, in a climate dominated by the so-called 'Afro-pessimism', the second meant a teleological awareness for necessary distinctions in evaluating pre-moral or moral wrongs vis-à-vis the programme of the Campus on cultural productions. This collection brings together the proceedings of the seminar.

The membership of the seminar included twelve CODESRIA laureates from different countries. Conceived and written in three languages (English, French and Portuguese), the contributions were empirically oriented, and dealt with issues in the field of contemporary African cultural productions. Expected to relate to insights and judgments on African issues of identity, the economy of thematics coheres interventions on cultural performances (mainly videos and music), anthropology of art, literature, religion and development.

After the Campus, participants reworked their contributions in line with three goals:

- (a) to uniformize their system of reference according to principles inspired by *The Modern Researcher* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2004) of Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff;
- (b) to make an informed exploitation of the seminar exchanges;
- (c) to consider a good usage of the Africa centred bibliography prepared by CODESRIA.

These recommendations were points for a common style. They premised questions on assumptions that concerned the framing of research, the relation to an intellectual configuration, and the bibliography of the seminar. On cultural dispositions about research framing, no formal discussion took place on the validity of the Barzun-Graff. Defining modes of inquiring and exposing results, its precepts were however to accompany some fundamental questions, including what telling metaphors such as the 'searcher's mind and virtues' or 'handling ideas' convey. Dealing with topics at the crossing of traditional attributions and contemporary injunctions, all the projects had to take also into account a series of conflictual demands apropos intellectual filiation, interdisciplinary scenarios, and politics of cultural identities. Thus, the centrality of the notion of conflict, and the exceptional measure for addressing it in a dispassionate language.

This discerning exercise on questions of method could not but be an exercise on the inherence of conflict in socio-cultural researches.

In principle, the consented discipline in approaches was a matter of governance. In practice, to conceptualize arguments meant to actualize specific rules in a particular framework, in relation to the necessity of a more general structural governance.

On the general idea of governance, as Allen Hammond of the Washington DC World Resources Institute, had put it ten years before in *Which World? Scenarios for the 21st Century* (Island Press, 1998), the fact of the matter was that '[t]ranscending all other issues, including population growth, environmental degradation, poverty, and economic stagnation, is governance – in a broad sense, including not just the national government but the judiciary, state and local governments, and other institutions that form African society's collective decision-making and managerial process' (op.cit.: 191). In our analyses and interpretations of conflicts and modernity, the seminar was dealing with issues related to governance. On the other hand, their renderings were not detachable from questions of method on how to speak about cultural events, or discourse; and, how to handle political or religious dissent. Unifying the disciplinary angles, political economy theories helped reduce the

complexity of debates to manageable grids by focusing on imports of ethnicity and gender. On this, one would agree with the essential of chapters on social formations in *Postmodernism, Economics, and Knowledge* (Routledge, 2001), edited by Stephen Cullenberg, Jack Armariglio, and David Ruccio, and particularly with its impeccable critique of presuppositions in all the big humanisms. In fact, Jean-Francois Lyotard's 'incredulity toward metanarratives' was, if necessary, a good reason that proved right the routine critique of the Colonial Library. Yet, this critique should not be abused. Economic constraints are real even if they can be perceived as socially constructed. Equally, ethnic or gender identity conflicts, invented everywhere, have proved more than often to be cloudy.

Two

If the preceding precautions, which represented an opportune challenge to administer, were met without difficulty in the task of the Campus, and contributed efficiently to a discourse attentive to the African environment, the bibliography seemed to have alarmed a number of participants. Intended to moderate the usually heavy references to sources of a normed research tradition, its style of mapping an African reference list for grounding approaches, could have appeared to restrict perspectives. Its contrast represented, in fact, a healthy *remise en question* by reframing usual academic strategies with a permanent 'how', doubling each one of the classical propaedeutic interrogations: what, who, where, when, why? Our innovation consisted in situating the 'how' of textbooks within the geography of intercultural paths.

From an interrogation about 'the researcher's mind and virtues, its two angles – a synchronic and a historical – and two main precepts (namely, 'get your facts right' and 'knowledge for whom?'), one can justify a first tentative grouping of contributions included in this volume according to a traditional organization that accents the interrelatedness of perspectives in disciplinary obedience. Practical, yet it seems to impoverish the effort of the seminar in transcending disciplinary frontiers and screening controverted methodological demands.

In any case, three clear disciplinary entries could be distinguished from internal options of participants' articles themselves. The headings chosen here delimit what the topic of the contribution asserts, and indicate their allegiance to a field.

1. To the field of sociology, four articles, from four different countries: South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
 - (a) Muff Andersson's 'Researching the "risque"' retraces a walking into the youth culture of Johannesburg, an exploration in the flux of the South African popular show, the Yizo-Yizo.

- (b) Identifying factors of a Christian inculturation in the Kenyan district of Vihiga, Susan Mbula Kilonzo demonstrates the positive effects of accommodating diversity.
 - (c) Saliou Ndour describes the social and cultural effects of structural transformations in the Senegalese musical industry of the 1980s.
 - (d) Focusing on the emergence of video-clips in the Kinshasa milieu, Léon Bulu Tsambu correlates the efficiency of new electronic tools and technological inventiveness, to suggest how a style of *métissage* is testified to by the rhetoric of clips.
2. To the domain of political affairs, three articles on the body politic and cultural creativities in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire.
- (a) Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri accounts for a remarkable paradox in a Zimbabwe torn by a structural crisis, the coexistence of a dynamic musical institution and its impact on creativity.
 - (b) Reuben Adejoh tries to reinterrogate imperatives of nationhood as they are symbolized in the Iniki legend of Igala communities of Nigeria.
 - (c) With Silué N'Tchabétien Oumar, one enters into the virtual space of a contestation that identifies with an intellectual symbol, the Sorbonne. Issued forth in political disturbances that followed the death of President Houphouët-Boigny, the Sorbonne invaded the Côte d'Ivoire political space with an agenda for a transformation of national institutions.
3. In arts and literature, five articles, all of them concerned with rapports between artistic imagination and management of social upheavals in Mozambique, Cameroon, the Congo, Zambia and Uganda.
- (a) Vera Azevedo outlines a project. Invoking the efficacy of arts, particularly the socio-psychological tools of the theatre, Azevedo suggests ways of serving the work of reconstructing cultural identities in Mozambique.
 - (b) In her presentation of a Brazzaville popular orchestra, 'Les Bantous de la capitale', Gèneviève Zibouidi Mayamona circumscribes the history of a complex production, the values it conveys, and its relation to a nation-state.
 - (c) Laure Nadeige Ngo Nlend outlines the interrelation between the 1980s-90s slow economic environment of Cameroon, the force of techno-logical innovations in music, and the successful record of female singers.

- (d) Using the allegory of ‘striking the snake with its own fangs’, and adjusting this figure to an Acoli background, Bengé Okot labours on a major theme in gender performativity theory. Acoli songs, he says, impact social structures by working on variations of the usual binary distinction within gender identity.
- (e) Revisiting the traditional intimate connections between the *Makishi* masquerade and the *Mukanda* initiation ritual of Zambia, Victoria Phiri Chitungu describes issues for its adaptation in a context dominated by constraints of an urban space.

Unifying and dividing, images are deducible from this brief exposition of contributions. There is, on the one hand, assuming the geography of social formations concerned and the domain of disciplines with its procedures; and, on the other hand, mirroring what the titles call for, an absence or a presence of interfering viewpoints on cultural productions, and the ways they accord themselves in intellectual and artistic traditions. Africa Studies as a framework accommodate the spectrum of their variety. That this field might be dominated by social sciences nowadays is a recent phenomenon, contemporary with the emergence of African history and sociology, the two main branches that in the 1950s-60s came to supplant colonial sciences, and at the same time to question the validity of applied anthropology. Central in all the chapters, the notion of modernity assumes a multiplicity of imperatives. In differences of style, it is at work in all the settings. Relational creativities accommodate the adaptive capacity of ancient memories (songs, legend, ritual), along the inculturation of technologies and artistic industries (media and music). Significantly fertile are the dynamics issued forth by social relations of production and systems of values.

Three

Granted, the continent is a reality. From yesterday to today, an attention to its representations in a global economy cannot afford to ignore the series of figures that constituted it. They include the ‘Africa that Never Was’ or ‘The Myth of Africa’, to use the metaphors of Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow’s 1977 book, in a manner of linking it to a period that J. F. A. Ajayi, a few years before, had called ‘An Episode in African History’. These figurations would essentially and mainly apply to the past of Sub-Saharan Africa whose XIXth century fabric still distinguishes it from both the North of Sahara and the South of the continent. In this collection, the dominant synchronic view of thematics transcends these geographic frontiers. Empirical or speculative, the essays confront today’s issues and situate them in their background.

Coming from sessions on intercultural studies at one of the pedagogical universities in Bogota, Colombia, I had in perspective anti-authoritarian postulations concomitant with principles for avenues of dissent. The right feel seemed to force thought to re-examine methods about ways for reflecting and inflecting theoretically the exigency of cultural difference. From Latin American conversations on a 'why' interculturality should matter in the education of teachers, to a CODESRIA Campus on practices of disciplines, the simple awareness of surface similarities, if any, was a positive feature in rethinking the global from comparable regional frustrations.

Critical precautions were to guide such an awareness as attitude. Of papers as poles, to negotiate angles for, first, historicizing the idiom of difference in an intercultural modernity; secondly, for contextualizing the process in integrative projections; and doing it in accordance with an anti-essentialist will of raising questions about the process itself. The angles that emerged could not but feature positions about alterity.

Four

From an everyday dictum, 'every other (one) is every (bit) other', in *The Gift of Death* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), Jacques Derrida exemplifies this as a victorious sign, alterity as that 'monotony of a tautology', everywhere repeated and often simultaneously misestimated. Writes Derrida:

[...] the monotony of a principle of identity that, thanks to the copula and sense of being, would here take over alterity itself, nothing less than that, in order to say: the other is the other, that is always so, the alterity of the other is the alterity of the other. And the secret of the formula would close upon a hetero-tautological speculation that always risks meaning nothing. But we know from experience that the speculative always requires a hetero-tautological position. That is the definition according to Hegel's speculative idealism, and it is the impetus for the dialectic within the horizon of absolute knowledge. The hetero-tautological position introduces the law of speculation, and of speculation on every secret (op.cit.: 83).

That is the alterity which names its own otherness, incessantly altering the very definition that supports its own quest. By the credulity it gives to commonsense codes, any of its approaches works on metaphors from hypothetical keys in reading paradoxes of identity politics, and conversions and inversions are some of its best. In Bogota, as well as in Durban, they could serve the patience of attending to our own papers and interpreting them with regard to contextual socioeconomic troubles and the objective reality of our 'anthropological poverty', to use this powerful expression of the late Engelbert Mveng.

In 2007, from optimist versus pessimist surveys of Sub-Saharan Africa, the ‘Afro-pessimist’ trend was a concrete sign. In relation, or in opposition to Latin America, it was apt at differentiating our respective conditions from the 1980s to the 1990s global projections onwards. For sure then, to contextualize our problems meant for us, in addition, a task in qualifying creativities by assessing locally and internationally their social value in situations of crisis.

An instrumental rationale could be hypothesized from the hierarchy of a ‘new wealth of nations’. In the IMF and the World Bank grids, one would get three lines of distinction: the line of first class group (with Japan, United States, European Union, possibly India); the second line, an intermediate one (with Brazil and, possibly Mexico, etc.); and a third line, that of ‘the rest of us’, as some students of social sciences have called it. About Sub-Saharan countries, a variety of assessments were summoning images about impending risks already in mid-1990s. It was difficult to ignore the price of a general mobilization in controverted processes described by the acclaimed book of William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not: the Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (Simon & Schuster, 1997), and the problematics of marginality of *Modernity on a Shoestring: Dimensions of Globalization, Consumption, and Development in Africa and Beyond* (Eidos Leiden, 1999), edited by Richard Fardon, Wim van Binsbergen, and Rijk van Dijk.

In the multiplicity of their functions, the cultural goods as well as the cultural performances studied by the seminar papers were socioeconomic factors engrossed in the global of policies.

The Convener’s position was to uphold a leverage in an Africa-centred perspective of explorations about contemporary cultural productions. The dynamics of the seminar were to be kept with the utmost seriousness between the horizon of an academic research and its type of deliberations, but with a relative exacting attention to projections that could explain the ‘air du temps’.

Three references. First, Gerald Celente of the Trends Research Institute, *Trends 2000: How to Prepare for and Profit from Changes in the 21st century* (Warner Books, 1997), a vade-mecum for business people considered to be one of the best, had promised a ‘compassionate’ capitalism within more englobing economic structures. An illustration, the United States was to experience a Renaissance by 2001, and a steady ‘techno-tribalism’ harmonizing technology and ecology, cultural and spiritual creativities. This idyllic feature had already been initialized in the 1992 *Megatrends: Ten New Directions* (Warner Books), and the 1994 *Global Paradox* (Avon Books), both by John Naspitt. One main issue: ‘Politically, the world has shifted from left versus. right to local versus. global, or universal versus tribal. New leadership begins to re-emerge as the engine of individualism’ (1994:59). Reaffirmed in the 2000 Avon edition of *Megatrends* that Naspitt signed with Patricia Aburdene, the

estimation accented for the first world signs of power that were shifting from the State to the individual. Ambiguous elsewhere, the projection was in effect conjecturing the possibility of a political instability. The economy of globalization had to favour the implosion of any vast social formation, any linguistic cohesive area being a unit of reference. The context of 2007 could record hypotheses from 'megatrends':

The breakup of countries (artificially put together) into national or tribal entities is surely as beneficial as the breakup of companies. It eliminates duplication and waste, reduces bureaucracy and promotes motivation and accountability, and results in self-rule (subsidiarity) at the most basic level – just like in companies.

If we are going to make the world a single market world, the parts have to be smaller. It is not that all countries will break up. The key is that there will be tens of thousands of different crisscrossing communities co-located on the same territories. Territory as a defining concept will become increasingly meaningless (op.cit.: 39).

In themselves, these mid-1990s projections did not intend to destructure any country. On the other hand, arguments for managing a forecast global system could be seen as justifying implosions indirectly. The account of languages – e.g. one hundred in Latin America, forty in Kenya, two hundred in the Congo, etc. – might be approximate. Retrospectively in 2007, they could be tested against explanatory grids of political insurrections and regional wars. Moreover, the World Bank and the IMF prescriptions, notably structural adjustment policies meant for development, were inducing a general climate of dissatisfaction. The issue became a major item of deliberation among social scientists. Technicalities were one thing, the quality of life another.

A reading of this period of Afro-pessimism would correspond for any mind to a reading of the absolute negation of comprehension signified by the Rwandan genocide. In the *Manifeste d'une nouvelle littérature africaine* (Homnispères, 2007), the Cameroonian Patrice Nganang put it well: 'l'universalité n'est plus à rechercher sur le chemin de la différence, main dans l'abyme infini de l'origine' (op.cit.: 129).

In this collection, analyses detail items on sociocultural adaptation of ancient memories, religious systems, and modalities in integrating new technologies. They delimit modernity as a name at the crossing of privileges of a hegemonic model and its regional effects, and these structure a cultural inventiveness between the awareness of a radical alienation and the alienating grasp of this awareness itself. Singularity of the studies, the modernity-event anchors values in its own right. Basically, in reference to the very notion of modernity, this singularity would witness to the rift existing between studied subjects in their context, the inner

experience of the artist, and the critical intelligence of the analyst. The loss is assigned to the positive in Susan Mbula Kilonzo's explanation of religious intercultural acts. It is engaged in the regrets suggested by Victoria Phiri Chitungu apropos the *Mukanda*. One could also accord the modernity site to external principles in the approach to symbolics of gender gap by Okot Benge, stretches in Saliou Ndour and Léon Bulu Tsambu. In sum, modernity casts the condition of a lack. The analyses stand mediating processes induced by, on the one hand, constraining socio-political forces; and, on the other hand, the semantics of postcolonial narratives, as in the case of Muff Andersson, Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri, and Victoria Phiri Chitungu.

Another entry could relate the patience of these perspectives to the critique of the volume edited by John Cavanaugh and Jerry Mander, *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible. A Report of the International Forum on Globalization* (Berret-Koehler Publishers, 2002). A technical claim, the report dwells on the unfairness of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which in the 1980s supplanted the GNP (Gross National Product). A good 'tool of corporate globalization', points out the Report, the GDP had been evaluating the wrong 'thing' and was inherently 'biased against the Third World and the poor'. The argument was there during the Durban seminar. It could still serve any reason against a host of running certainties. But this sign of an unethical effectiveness of the global economy in managing its capital and investments was also, for those attentive to it, the measure from which to question the complexity of integrated interests of the global and the regional.

Finally, a last reference, another projection from the mid-1980s, had been confirming the vibrant worldwide marketplace, vis-à-vis what was standing as its illustrative exception, Sub-Saharan Africa. Edited by Ann Mattis, Consultant at the Society for International Development, *Prospectus 1984* (Duke University Press, 1983) stressed the globalization process as a 'virtual "sure thing"'. Pursuing debates over the future, the editor could ask 'what should the world be like in the year 2000?' The 'should' rings ethical. In the same issue, Jonathan Chileshe, of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, introduces his report by a hard diagnosis: 'Africa has twenty of the world's thirty least developed countries, with five more African states anxious to be admitted to the club of the poorest nations.' He concludes with a grimmer note about his own intervention, that 'seems to have lost sight of the fact that all aid has eventually to be repaid. This is why today's Africa expresses disquiet about burdening its unborn generation with having to pay or service debts incurred before they are even born' (op.cit.: 231).

Five

Born after the African independence period of the 1960s, the members of the Campus did belong to that generation. Was it sufficient for a Convener to orient the debates on cultural productions from the detached angle of, say, semiotics? Even within such a point of view, the problem would not have been different vis-à-vis analytical allegories of Afro-pessimism.

Combining high growth in population and low economic growth, many African countries have been declining since the early 1980s. And since the early 1990s, consequent Africa-centred programmatic positions of leading theorists have been labouring on structural similarities between mechanics of globalization, mechanics of hegemonic power systems, and mechanics of new geographies of inequality. One may even argue that the 'dependencia' postulations of the 1960s were back recycling a past doxa apropos glaring paradoxes in development theories, and the incompatibility of goals. On the premise of similarities, even suggestions for horizontal comparison, periphery-periphery, against vertical dependence, were still conforming to variations of classics. By 2000, one could indeed invoke Johan Galtung's 'structural theory of imperialism' and, in accord or discord with Archie Mafeje's critique of development theories, revisit two main intellectual lines in political sciences as represented by half a century of the work of Samir Amin and that of Crawford Young. These two lines, with their two different but equally critical positions, have been addressing capital imports, their determinations, and their impact. On ethical principles, their analyses of structural economic and political contradictions were equally naming the same fundamental misapplication and misuse of norms. Grounded in an ethics of human dignity that transcends ideological divides, their renderings of conflicting paths met and coincided. Both can be qualified as works in the patience of intelligence. Samir Amin called it a 'route to freedom from the economic alienation imposed by the logic of capitalism'. He was speaking about his own commitment during a conversation with Naima Bouteldja published by *Third World Forum* (16, 7-8, 2003). He adds:

[...] I often remember that one of the first chapters of *Das Capital* is called "The Fetishism of Commodities." That is, it begins not with an analysis of the positive and negative aspects of competition, but addresses the fundamental problem – the alienation of human beings and their submission to a logic that they believe to be exterior to their being, while it is in fact a product of their social organization.

During the Durban seminar, of regional inspirations, three reflectors could not be ignored. There is, first of all, the regular 'Acts' of *Journées Philosophiques Canisius* of Kinshasa, for the way these regular proceedings marshal ethical principles. There is, secondly, the CODESRIA Programme and its will to challenge the

fragmentation of researches on the continent through projects transcending political and linguistic boundaries. Finally, there is, third reflector, lessons from *Terroirs. Revue Africaine des Sciences Sociales et de Philosophie*, founded in 1992 by the philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga. In its last issues of 2007 that coincided with the Durban Campus, stressing a triple objective – the necessity of a cultural anchoring for the intellectual work, the accentuation of an ‘Afrocentrist’ viewpoint, and a critique of international politics of allocations –, the journal defines a mission:

[...] à savoir *la conquête de l’Afrique par les Africains en ce XXI^e siècle par l’industrie, la connaissance et l’amour d’eux-mêmes*. Alors, sans pour autant à devenir les maîtres fous et vindicatifs du monde, ils ne seront plus les damnés de la terre que nombre d’entre eux croient être aujourd’hui. Ne parlez pas d’égoïsme bien compris mais d’une rigoureuse interpellation éthique exprimée dans cette question nullement rhétorique, mais angoissée et grave du célèbre Rabbi : « *Si je ne m’estime pas moi-même, qui me prendra en considération ? Mais si je ne me préoccupe que de moi-même, quel homme je serais ?* ». L’abjection africaine est une inacceptable provocation à la violence et à l’inhumanité des *autres*.

In sum, *Terroirs* was marking out imperatives that the seminar was interrogating in its own manner, specifically conditionals for linking questions of ‘faith’ to conditionals of a realist ‘action’, at least in three directions.

One, from a lesson in economics, to address politics of allocation and to count on how to live according to our own limited means of production;

Two, from a lesson in comparative politics, to resolve enticements of global prospects for the rich, and learn how to detach our perception from precepts in charity;

Three, from demands of an ethics of responsibility in an ascetic self-discipline, to engage efforts on how to invest our creativity in thinking the foundation of the universal in the time of the world from our own condition.

Duke University, Durham, NC

