AFRICAN AND AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY TODAY

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While recognizing African and Africana philosophies as grounding traditions and as expanding domains of research within contemporary philosophy, this special section aims to contribute to their growing visibility in the field of continental philosophy today. At stake is the passage of one tradition into another and their mutual resonance, as well as a change of direction, in the midst of historical circumstances in which the variety of philosophical styles reorients the sharing of ideas and their conceptual genealogies. Rather than incorporating African philosophy in the predetermined style of continental philosophy, we wanted to take the opportunity to reflect on the formation of the continents of philosophy and their multiple geopolitical mutations. Therefore, the task of thinking about African and Africana philosophy as part of continental philosophy today was first of all guided by the will to allow the reality of a continent of intellectual effervescence to emerge—a continent whose traces are historically inscribed in our philosophical inquiries, and whose future concerns us.

We also tried to establish a communication over the waters and over time, in order to acknowledge the contemporaneity of Africana philosophy within our philosophical reflection, a contemporaneity that should not be reduced to the mere reception of a peculiar cultural legacy. Bringing together different perspectives on the African continent and its diasporas today, we wanted to celebrate their philosophical depth and diversity. It is a fact that the two domains of African and Africana philosophies are rooted in the same tradition of one continent, in its various forms of culture and hence in its history, of which they each express the dramatic convulsions. Even if these domains have different trajectories and corpuses, they also participate in the same historical conjuncture, which structures the relations of domination between the North and the global South. Geographical anchoring and historical participation are two important axes through which to articulate a bond between African and Africana philosophies. In building this bridge, what was at stake was to "re-member," in the triple sense of a recall, of an affiliation and of an organic connection—as

expressed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o[1]—without hiding their stylistic and thematic differences. The latter consist, through a large diversity of philosophical expressions, in contesting the monopole of the universal, each time it has been claimed as the proper good of a hegemonic knowledge.

Consequently, an important aim of our enterprise here has been to deconstruct some pre-existing knowledge about Africa and to contribute to the configuration of alternative spaces of reflection on knowledge production. To what has been identified by Merleau-Ponty, in a more general context, under the species of "thinking from above,"[2] we wanted to oppose a philosophical research resolutely anchored in the spaces and the problems it examines. While doing so, our intention was to confront already-made knowledge with more humble and patient methodological inquiries, leading to explorations that allow for a reconnection of epistemological research with historical studies and theories of culture, thus nurturing a critical reflection on the geopolitics of knowledge.

From the perspective opened in this special section, the goal of this "decolonization of knowledge" is not to quit all requirements of universality, but to re-institute its meaning as something that is never entirely given, therefore demanding to be thought differently. Here, we followed the lead of the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji, who conceived of this epistemic break in this way:

> The essential task today is…to create other circles, to trace, to delineate, to separate or, if necessary, to reinforce in Africa and elsewhere other autonomous spaces, other territories to become places of research and of invention capable of exchanging, on an equal footing, with the culture that is dominant today. In other words, we need to invent another form of globalization which cannot be reduced to a unique center dictating its will to multiple peripheries, being rather the common work of a plurality of centers negotiating with each other on an equal footing, building a world of sharing, a world that is more just and more human.[3]

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[1] See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o*, Re-membering Africa* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 2009).

[2] "La pensée de survol" has also been translated as "high-altitude thinking" or thinking that "hovers over." See the translator's note in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, (tr.) A. Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 13.

[3] P. J. Hountondji, "Construire l'universel : un défi transculturel," in *Méthod(e)s: African Review of Social Sciences Methodology*, vol. 2 (2017), 155–56; our translation. See also Bado Ndoye, *Paulin Hountondji. Leçons de philosophie africaine* (Paris: Riveneuve, 2022).

The operative concepts of the Western philosophical tradition have to be questioned, reevaluated, and rethought in the light of this requirement of a renewed universal, which means to put philosophy as we know it today in a crisis. Nothing expresses this crisis better than the explosion of differences that are obstinately thought of in an old reductionist fashion that sees plurality—of languages, of historical contexts, of cultures and genres—only as a negative to be brought to a positive dominant unity. However, the heterogeneity of historical contexts and of different forms of life shows that each cultural formation is justified in itself as a spiritual figure, which means not only that there is no more a unified *Weltgeist* to follow, in a Hegelian sense—as all cultures have equal dignity—but also that each of these formations offers an original perspective on existence. If there is a crisis of philosophy, it will involve its necessary regeneration, as from now on we will have to rethink its historical foundations and political orientations. The articles gathered in this special section respond to this call, converging toward a horizon where cultural difference is to be thought as a factor of theoretical transformation and political emancipation.

In his article "Negritude, Universalism, and Socialism," Souleymane Bachir Diagne shows that it is important to revisit the significance of the Negritude movement without reducing it, as is often the case, to a mere counter-essentialism of the discourse of colonialism. Rather, it is important to acknowledge that Senghor, Césaire, and Damas were philosophers of totality and thinkers of the plural and decentered world that the Bandoeng conference in 1955 envisioned. This is why, in the convergence of their different perspectives, they wanted to think a humanism of our time grounded on a non-imperialist universal, which is a universal of the encounter and of translation[4] based on equality—and consequently a socialism that is, first of all, in its various iterations, a force of emancipation, and also of humanization and spiritualization of the earth. Souleymane Bachir Diagne concludes that this project is still ours today, to receive as a legacy and as a critical call.

In "What Life is Not: Aimé Césaire as Phenomenologist of Domination," Vincent Lloyd poses overtly the following question: "What does 'life' mean in the protest slogan 'Black Lives Matter'?" In order to find a response, his article is built on a close reading of Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to a Native Land*. In his poem, Césaire attentively examines the ways in which racial and colonial domination distort life in the richness of its expressions. He also identifies several false

[4] See also Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *De langue à langue. De l'hospitalité de la traduction* (Paris : Albin Michel, 2022).

concepts of life complicit in colonial domination, and points toward a philosophical alternative that still remains to be explored. The article ends by comparing the alternative offered by Césaire with the concepts of life proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Henry, suggesting that Césaire's reflections push in a similar direction, yet go further in encompassing the political horizon of the lived experience under the sign of coloniality.

In "Forms of Death: Necropolitics, Mourning, and Black Dignity," Norman Ajari explains that being black means having ancestors whose humanity has been denied by the experience of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, and social segregation. Being black also means facing the legacy of the systems and theories elaborated to justify and intensify these modes of domination, manifested mainly in an increased exposure to violence and death. Today, premature death and habituation to loss remain the constitutive features of black existence. While dignity is often defined as a value that is intrinsic to every human being since Kant, it is still the case that in philosophy as well as in Modern politics, claims for dignity have coexisted with a profound negrophobia. However, outside this Western interpretation of dignity, there is another tradition to explore. Indeed, the concept of dignity is omnipresent within black radicalism, and more generally in Caribbean and African philosophies since the 18th century. This article is inspired by their legacy, elaborating on the project of an ethics centered around the specificity of the life exposed to racial violence.

In his article "The Colonial System Unveiled," Dalitso Ruwe focuses on a methodological shift in philosophical research on colonial racism, which aims at deepening and reorienting its hypotheses. While essential works in the field of Africana philosophy are now available, clarifying the dangers of the constructions of race and racism, there is still research to be done to explore the genealogies of the critiques of Western slavery by thinkers of the Africana tradition, as distinct philosophical themes that contribute to the understanding of slavery from the standpoint of those who have been subjugated. This article is a call to more attention to such genealogies, where the standpoint and the anchoring of perspectives is a decisive factor for the orientation of future investigations of Africana philosophy.

Mohamed Amer Meziane's programmatic article, "The Invention of North Africa," proposes an archaeology of the racial division of North Africa and of Black Africa, examining its participation in the birth of Modern geography during the 19th century. The article shows that the "disafricanization" of North Africa is inseparable from the racial identification of "Africa properly speaking," as Hegel calls it, to a dehumanizing concept of blackness. The second part of the article is an attempt

to overcome the plan of mere archaeology, analyzing the counter-geographies produced by decolonization. This part focuses on the manners in which continental pan-Africanism in solidarity with the Algerian revolution in Fanon displayed a living critique of the division between North Africa and Black Africa.

In his article "'No Less than a Complete Revolution': On Paulin J. Hountondji's Negative Pluralism," Thomas McGlone examines closely a concept that is central to the work of the Beninese philosopher Paulin Jidenu Hountondji : pluralism. The theoretical dimension of Hountondji's pluralism highlights the importance of debate in the fields of philosophy and science, while his political-economic pluralism opposes the dominant tendencies of cultural nationalism and of the capitalist world-system. The author shows that in the center of Hountondji's theoretical and political-economic pluralism one can find a concept of *negative pluralism*, which is a political principle derived from the immanent critique addressed by Hountondji to his historical conjuncture. It is important to notice that the pluralism in question here is not a directing ideal nor a mere methodological instrument, rather asserting itself as a critical vector of already-available positions and theoretical orientations. Through a critique of the existing political structures, this negative plurality allows us to identify relationships of constraint and exploitation that function as obstacles to universal emancipation.

We would like to thank the contributors to this special section for their collaboration and all those who accompanied us in its conception and preparation. This special section of *Symposium* is dedicated to the memory of Philippe Van Haute—founding father of another philosophical symposium that meets every year in Perugia—with the wish that his unmatched friendship and his love for African philosophy continue to light our paths.