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Kasereka Kavwahirehi

Over the last two decades, concepts of “disorder as political instrument in Africa,” “politics of belly,” and “re-traditionalization” (Chabal, Daloz, 199) have been used and reused in African studies by European and African scholars to describe the African social and political condition of the last decades. However, despite their canonization, one can question their efficiency and relevance to the analysis and understanding of what is really happening in postcolonial Africa. One might even wonder if these analytical concepts are not reawakening the imaginary of the colonial anthropology which pathologized the “Dark Continent” in order to enclose it in its difference and represent it as the absolute alterity as Hegel did in his philosophical ethnography.

My intention here is to problematize these concepts by showing their limits and ambiguity. I will suggest that one should not use such marked concepts as “disorder,” “retraditionalisation,” “abnormality” without interrogating their archaeology. This is an *ethical* and *scientific* exigency, particularly if we want anthropology or social sciences to be, as Mudimbe puts it, a real *anthropou-logos*, that is a discourse on *Human Being* (Mudimbe 1988: 186) or on *human societies*. But my ultimate intention is to suggest that the concept of Crisis, which was mobilized by European philosophers of the Crisis (Husserl, Heidegger, Cassirer, etc.), and which, at the wake of the independences, has been mobilized by African philosophers and social sciences scholars (Benoît Verhaegen, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Kä Mana, Dimandja, among others) in their attempts to analyse and understand their postcolonial condition, could be more efficient for analysing what is going on in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore instead of being seen as the signs of irrationality, pathology or abnormality of African societies, tensions, conflicts, factors of mobilization and change, as well as contradictions, can

appear as manifestations of a profound crisis which is to be understood not only as a revealing moment but also as the most real essence of the contemporary (modern) society in search for new rationalities and new social and political orders.

Disorder and Retraditionalization, or the way Africa works

As we all know, concepts of “disorder as political instrument in Africa” and re-traditionalization” were made popular by the acclaimed book, *Africa Works. Disorder as Political instrument in Africa* by Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz. Brilliant and tremendous, this book was immediately translated in French as: *L’Afrique est partie. Le désordre comme instrument politique en Afrique*. This title echoed René Dumont’s famous essay, *L’Afrique noire est mal partie*, considered as the landmark of Afropessimism. It is this echo that renders the title of Chabal and Daloz’s work very interesting and anguishing in its oxymoronic formulation. In fact, is it not contradictory or at the very least ironic and cynical to state: *Africa works*, but through disorder as instrument or, as others say, through incoherent and irrational conducts? In fact, it is this paradox that attracted the attention of francophone Africanists, mainly from France.

Indeed, when we examine the reactions to Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz’s book, we can see that it has generated mixed feelings in its francophone readers who still had René Dumont’s famous book, *False Start in Africa (L’Afrique est mal partie)*, in the back of their minds. In other words, there has been a conscious or unconscious expectation when dealing with the representation of Africa for at least five decades. If on the one hand, readers initially applauded the vigour with which the authors defend their thesis – namely that Africa works, but in its own way –, on the other hand, some do not hesitate to confess to a vague malaise, while others state explicitly that the book poses not only epistemological problems but also, if not mainly, problems of an ethical nature and this, despite the admission of the authors to want to be positioned beyond good and evil, to produce not only a scientific work or, perhaps more so, scientific, by keeping only to facts or observable behaviours, which implies that we are completely free from ideological inertia of the place from which we are speaking. René Luneau, a specialist of religious phenomenon in Africa, and Colette Dubois are representative of the first category, while Jean-François Médard, who wrote a critical analysis of *Africa Works*, represents the second.

The first lines of René Luneau’s book review suggest a vague malaise. If he shares René Dumont’s view that, in the wake of the independences, Africa was off to a bad start, and seems to recognize the originality of the approach undertaken by the authors of *Africa Works*, he does not stop himself from suggesting to the careful reader his difficulty in writing: “That

Africa works, well or rather badly as René Dumont once thought, of this, no one is in doubt. But that the continent managed to make a political instrument of a certain number of behaviours that are at first glance *unusual if not aberrant*, in social, economic, religious domains, this is what is *surprising*." How are we to understand the adjective "surprising" if not as a synonym for disconcerting or unexpected. It is indeed this adjective which crystallizes René Luneau's malaise. But do not be mistaken. In fact, despite the apparent discomfort or reservation first expressed towards the thesis of *Africa Works* – René Luneau is almost certain that the book "will generate many controversies" – he quite quickly changes sides unambiguously supporting elements of Chabal and Daloz's thesis.

Our authors point out, and rightly so it seems "the extraordinary ability of Africans to appeal quasi-simultaneously to multiple registers, even contradictory, without concern with coherence. It is a question of, while being at the mercy of circumstances, to instead of playing on one or the other. (...) In black Africa, it proves not only permissible but profitable to operate on all available ranges (...) African modernity paradoxically encourages them to draw on traditions and to use them dynamically ... It goes without saying that the same logic is at work in the religious world and that we can even make good use of witchcraft (Luneau 2001: 74)

At the end of the review, Chabal and Daloz's work is, surprisingly, described as "iconoclastic and highly stimulating." In other words, the malaise felt at the start, quickly gave way to an acquiescence tinged with exultation and to a total support of their stripping analyses. The discomfort which was initially that of the author migrates to the reader who has carefully read the book under review. The reader can, indeed, ask whether the initial discomfort felt by René Luneau was not just feigned or if the opening of the review was a mere rhetorical game. Given that René Luneau is renowned as a specialist of religious phenomenon in Africa, it is appropriate to question whether the introduction describing "behaviours that are at first sight unusual if not aberrant," "contradictory" and "incoherent" – the adjectives are well chosen – do not discredit the African religiosity that he has celebrated.

Admittedly, it would be unfair to judge the seriousness of a researcher from a short book review written generously to help disseminate the work of Africanist colleagues. But the review may be symptomatic of other issues. Indeed, if we give credence to Congolese theologian Benoît Awazi Mbambi in his essay *De la postcolonie à la mondialisation néolibérale*, the view expressed implicitly in the book review can be found deployed in another work by René Luneau with the fairly ambitious title: *Comprendre l'Afrique. Évangile, modernité et mangeur d'âmes*. Benoît Awazi suggests that if Luneau has well identified the religious mutations that occur in postcolonial Africa, he seems nonetheless unable to interpret them without first resorting to the patterns

of outdated ethnography which pathologized Africa as irrational and secondly, to an orthodoxy or normality of which the West would be the embodiment (Awazi Mbambi 2011: 31-34). The demons of the past struggle against being laid to rest.

L'ouvrage de R. Luneau : *Comprendre l'Afrique. Evangile, modernité et mangeur d'âmes*, écrit Awazi, fourmille de récits et de faits qui révèlent, selon lui, l'irrationalité génétique des cultures africaines, où les questions liées à la sorcellerie, à la magie, à l'envoûtement et à l'inflation d'étiologies irrationnelles pour expliquer la crise sont légion. Bien qu'il faille reconnaître une bonne part de véracité empirique et narrative dans les faits racontés et rapportés dans son ouvrage ... il n'en demeure pas moins vrai que R. Luneau occulte volontairement la violence sauvage et démesurée qui a présidé à l'évangélisation et à la colonisation de l'Afrique... En oubliant que les couches populaires interprètent la violence irrationnelle et symbolique de la sorcellerie, en se basant sur la violence non moins réelle, physique et effective de la colonisation militaire de l'Afrique et des dictatures nègres postcoloniales, R. Luneau se ferme les voies pour une compréhension dynamique et dialectique de l'inflation sociopolitique et religieuse des phénomènes relatifs à la sorcellerie dans les grandes mégapoles africaines (Awazi Mbambi, 33-34)

[The book by R. Luneau : *Comprendre l'Afrique. Evangile, modernité et mangeur d'âmes*, writes Awazi, abounds with stories and facts that reveal, according to him, the genetic irrationality of African cultures, where issues related to witchcraft, magic, enchantment and the inflation of irrational etiologies to explain crisis are legion. Though one must recognize a good deal of empirical and narrative truth in the facts described and reported in his book ... it is nevertheless true that R. Luneau deliberately obscures the wild and excessive violence which presided over the evangelization and colonization of Africa ... While forgetting that the working class interprets the irrational and symbolic violence as witchcraft, by basing himself on the equally real violence stemming from the physical and effective of the military colonisation of African and of black postcolonial dictatorships, R. Luneau closes himself from paths leading to a dynamic and dialectic understanding of the sociopolitical and religious inflation of phenomenon related to witchcraft in large African megalopolises. (Ibid., 33-34)]

In other words, what is lacking in René Luneau's analysis of phenomena that he describes as irrational is a comprehensive framework and an appropriate interpretation of phenomenon observed empirically. Hence, perhaps, the use of the adjective "aberrant" which, if we trust the *Petit Robert*, means "that which deviates from the norm," "that which deviates

from the rule, goes astray, is contrary to reason." Moreover, this is also insinuated by the authors of *Africa Works* who, while holding their own, seem to take what is happening in the West as "the norm" in relation to what takes place in Africa, more specifically, in black Africa, which could be called abnormal, if not pathological.

But, as I have suggested, the most interesting reaction to *Africa Works* – *L’Afrique est partie*, is, without a doubt, that of Jean-François Médard entitled "L’État et le politique en Afrique" published in the *Revue française de science politique* (vol 50, numéro 4-5 (2000), pp. 849-54). As in the case of René Luneau, the author begins by admitting unease if not feelings of discomfort towards the book which, he writes, "has something stripping and salubrious." He adds:

Pourtant l’ouvrage nous pose un problème : comment se fait-il qu’un travail dont nous partageons bien des analyses nous laisse une telle impression de malaise? L’impression dominante qui se dégage à la lecture de l’ouvrage est celle d’une Afrique irrémédiablement enfermée dans son passé, d’une histoire répétitive et d’une incapacité de ce continent à se transformer en profondeur et à se développer, suivant les normes occidentales, précisent-ils chaque fois. Non pas que l’Afrique resterait figée dans un passé intemporel et archaïque – ils insistent à la suite de la plupart des auteurs, sur la dynamique du continent et prétendent qu’il se modernise "à sa façon," mais en parlant de "retraditionalisation," ils laissent bien entendre que ce qui change est secondaire par rapport à ce qui perdure.

[Yet the book presents us with a problem: how is it that a work upon which we share many analyses leaves us such a feeling of unease? The dominant impression which emerges from reading the book is that of an Africa irretrievably locked in its past, of a repetitive history and of an inability to fundamentally transform and grow, following Western standards, they specify each time. Not that Africa would remain frozen in a timeless and archaic past – they insist, following in the vein of most authors, on the dynamics of the continent and claim that it is modernizing "in its own way," but by speaking of "retraditionalization," they make it clear that what changes is secondary to what endures.]

The author does not limit himself to this general statement which is already rich in nuance; he throws himself more deeply in the analysis of the book and specifies the reasons for his "profound malaise" and, sometimes, for his disagreement. These reasons are twofold: epistemological and ethical, the two being for that matter linked. Is it not true that in the field of humanities and social sciences (about which we can always wonder to what extent and under what conditions they can be described as sciences), the

epistemological and the methodological, even when they seek objectivity, are more closely related to ethics than we think?

In epistemological terms, Jean-François Médard's "profound malaise" is due to an overly scientific conception of the social sciences both in terms of the classic problem of axiological neutrality as well as the no less classic problem of determinism. The French political scientist thinks that the two authors have gone too far in radically and exclusively opposing the analytical and realistic approach and the normative point of view. Indeed, as he writes:

Une telle position qui prétend adopter le point de vue de Sirius, ne (...) semble pas défendable ni d'un point de vue éthique ni d'un point de vue scientifique, alors même que l'aspiration à la neutralité axiologique reste un point cardinal de notre démarche. Nos interprétations scientifiques ne sont pas formulées dans le vide, elles sont récupérées et réinterprétées par les acteurs sociaux et politiques.

[Such a position, which claims to adopt the point of view of Sirius, does not ... seem defensible either from an ethical point of view or from a scientific point of view, even though the desire for axiological neutrality remains a cardinal point in our approach. Our scientific interpretations are not formulated in a vacuum, they are recovered and reinterpreted by social and political actors.]

And he adds, insisting on ethical issues accompanying such a position which claim essentially to be scientific or epistemological:

Qu'on le veuille ou non, ce que nous écrivons n'est pas neutre. Une certaine manière de distanciation débouche sur le cynisme, qu'il soit apparent ou réel, et donc une justification implicite des pratiques qu'on est en bon droit de condamner, tout en poursuivant une démarche scientifique. Il est trop commode et confortable, ajoute Médard, alors même qu'ils diagnostiquent par ailleurs de façon lucide les problèmes que rencontrent l'Afrique, d'écrire qu'après tout c'est cela l'Afrique : *Africa Works, l'Afrique est partie!* Sous prétexte qu'il s'agit de prendre en considération les représentations des acteurs et que le comportement des Africains est rationnel par rapport à leurs représentations.

[Like it or not, what we write is not neutral. Somehow detachment leads to cynicism, whether apparent or real, and becomes therefore an implicit justification of practices that we would be right to condemn, while pursuing a scientific approach. It is too convenient and comfortable, adds Médard, even though they diagnose lucidly the problems facing Africa, to write that after all, this is Africa:

Africa Works, l'Afrique est partie! Under the pretext that it is a matter of taking into consideration the representations of actors and that the behaviour of Africans is rational in relation to their representations.

In fact, the real risk run by the individual who claims to take the mental universe that governs this sort of phenomenon seriously following the example of corruption described in Chabal's book, is of slipping surreptitiously from legitimate consideration of "the moral economy of corruption" (J.P. Olivier de Sardan), permitting an illumination of mechanisms, with the idea that, according to the established formula, despite its quite problematic character, "the African does not know corruption." What results is if we can ultimately speak of "politics of belly," we cannot speak of "corruption in Africa," this latter concept being an ethnocentric concept. But what is to be made then of the frequent denunciations and protests of ordinary individuals against corruption? How can we justify the many associations, which, today, take on the mission of fighting against corruption and promoting transparency in the African management of public affairs? Finally, what attitude should we have when facing those who pay the heavy price of a corrupt society that is excluded from accessing vital resources?

Moreover, Jean-François Médard notes that despite their scientific claim, the two authors do not manage to distance themselves from a normative perspective. In fact, how can we speak of disorder or inefficiency without referring to norms? Even if we refer to positive norms, such as order and rationality, to counterbalance negative norms, we have still not moved beyond normativity. More concretely, how can we understand expressions such as economic development or failure "in the Western sense of the term" without using the West as the benchmark, the norm from which we can speak of failure or success?

The second pitfall Jean-François Médard raises is as crucial as the first. He suggests precisely how scientific discourse in the humanities and social sciences can be an imposed violence on the object which we claim to speak about, in the sense that, under the guise of discovering or speaking about the object, it is presented through a distorting prism, that of the dominant scientific ideology and the status of the researcher in a given society. As Mudimbe writes in his essay *L'Autre face du Royaume*, judiciously subtitled: *Une introduction aux langages en folie*, and in *L'odeur du Père*, "the problem is then knowing how scholarly constructions that claim to take it (ideology) into account can correspond to reality; and secondly, what 'scientific' exercises allow, in the case of formalist and positivist sociology, to evacuate ideology." (1982 : 55) The problem which arises concerns all disciplines that have the social as object, especially once one agrees, as Mudimbe suggests again in *L'Odeur du père*, "that everything that is social escapes from processes of reduction and from all modalities of objectification. When

approaching the social as object and claiming to explain it signifies also evacuating the subject from experience, denying it radically. Thus, as stated R. Laing, 'falsifying our perception to fit our concepts' while it is obvious that even for specialists of the social sciences, 'human reality is irreducible to knowledge. It must be lived and produced'" (*Ibid* : 52-53).

With regards to Chabal and Daloz specifically, Jean-François Médard draws our attention to the fact that we can consider that the image of the fatalist African/Africa which emerges from their work is the effect or, if you will, the product of their deterministic conception of the social sciences based on confusion between probability and causality. He writes:

Malgré quelques précautions sémantiques, l'ouvrage est totalement verrouillé et ne laisse aucune échappatoire. Or, malgré les contraintes structurelles considérables qui ont engendré des pesanteurs culturelles qui en aggravent les effets, il n'y a pas davantage de fatalité en Afrique qu'ailleurs. Une conception aussi déterministe des sciences sociales me semble dépassée. Elle repose sur la confusion entre probabilité et causalité. Comme l'a bien montré Norman Uphoff, les sciences sociales en sont restées à l'épistémologie de la physique newtonienne et n'ont pas vraiment intégré la notion d'incertitude et de probabilité.

[Despite some semantic precautions, the book is completely locked and does not leave room for any loopholes. Yet, despite considerable structural constraints that have led to cultural constraints which exacerbate the impact, there is not more fatality in Africa than elsewhere. Such a deterministic conception of the social sciences seems outdated. It is based on confusion between probability and causality. As Norman Uphoff has well demonstrated, social sciences have remained within the epistemology of Newtonian physics and have not really embraced the notion of uncertainty and probability.]

There is another effect of the deterministic design of both authors highlighted by Médard: it consists of neutralizing the differences between the trajectories of various African states, under the pretext that they are not significant. Thus we are left with a catch-all concept of Black Africa where Botswana is the same as Burundi, Namibia is the same as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Cameroon etc. Ultimately, facing the representation of Africa that emerges from the book, one could reproach – but is it really a reproach? – the pair who flaunted their claims to realism, to be condemned like other less ambitious attempts, presenting nothing but theoretical constructions about African societies.

The fundamental problem thus posed and to which we have already alluded is that of knowing under what conditions, in the social sciences, a

description can express the truth and authenticity of an experience or a social situation. When we look closely, we come to realize that what Mudimbe wrote about the undertakings of Herodotus, Thucydides and Dionysius of Halicarnassus can apply to the authors of *Africa Works* with their claims to scientificity and to quasi-absolute objectivity. He notes that each initiative is, from the outset, marked by a question, by a concern. Prisoner of an epistemological framework, it is also locked in its own scientific and legal options and, under the pretext of “speaking about something,” it only further leads to the consequences of its own assumptions, making use of a “good” or a “bad” subjectivity. This amounts to saying that there is no strictly objective discourse about a society, past or present (Mudimbe 1973: 93). And further, he significantly adds: “In this regard, G. Gusdorf pertinently noted that the explanatory interpretation of human reality according to scientific ideology, fascinated by the success of experimental sciences, can only be a sort of wish, a faraway ideal in relation to which the most positive historians will always feel caught” (Mudimbe 1973: 94) and will elicit a smile, if not a laugh, that according to Michel Foucault, we can dare to describe as philosophical or ironic.

Faced with the scientific claims of the authors, we cannot forget Michel Foucault who, about ethnology, though his remarks may extend to other disciplines in the field of humanities, suggests that whatever its methodological refinements, it is rooted in the possibility that belongs in its own right to the history of Western culture, “even more to its fundamental relation with the whole of history, and enables it to link itself to other cultures in a mode of pure theory.” (Foucault 2001: 411). And he adds very judiciously:

Obviously, this does not mean that the colonizing situation is indispensable to ethnology: neither hypnosis, nor the patient’s alienation within the fantasmatic character of the doctor, is constitutive of psychoanalysis; but just as the latter can be deployed only in the calm violence of a particular relationship and the transference it produces, so ethnology can assume its proper dimensions only within the historical sovereignty – always restrained, but always present – of European thought and the relation that can bring it face to face with all other cultures as well as with itself itself. (Foucault, 411)

Other points could justify, *mutatis mutandis*, the use of V.-Y. Mudimbe and Michel Foucault’s ideas discussed above. Examples include the updating of a characteristic opposition which Mudimbe, in *The Invention of Africa* (1988: 3), referred to as the “colonizing structure” with its system of opposition which structures Africanist literature. Chabal and Daloz recuse the use of the concept of the individual in the African context. In fact, for both authors, speaking of the individual in Africa is an abuse of language because the modernization of the continent occurs within a non-individualistic

conception as opposed to the individualistic conception, which prevails in the West. But more interesting is, on the one hand, the characterization of the State in Africa as a “‘complete illusion’ or ‘a superficial front,’” while on the other hand, people lost their lives to defend it. I am referring for instance to the March of Christians in Kinshasa in 1992 to demand for the reopening of the National Conference whose mission was to rebuild the Congolese state. Many lost their lives for a “complete illusion”! This applies as much to the reduction of civil society in Africa to a complete illusion or to non-existence. Again, one might ask, as Médard proposes, how to understand all the upheaval that followed the assassination of Nobert Zongo in Burkina Faso in 1998 and, more recently, the assassination of the renowned defender of human rights, Rigobert Chebeya, in Congo-Kinshasa. Is it not once again in relation to the normativity of civil society in the West that the absence of civil society is categorically stated?

Following Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, in an essay entitled “Société civile: Analyse, diagnostique et ‘prescription’,” one wonders whether a nominalist approach to “civil society” was not more efficient than a quasi-dogmatic and normative one? As Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga suggests, “nominalism reminds us that the expression of civil society does not evoke the same thing for everyone, it has neither an obvious meaning nor an evident reference point. Nominalism enjoins us to give all of our attention to the uses that are made by those who employ them, to raise an issue, to express the feeling or desire for a solution.” (Eboussi Boulaga 2005 : 47) Then we can work to ensure that what we saw at work, in action “finds in itself the lucidity and the theory of practice that is to say the tools to judge and evaluate itself, to take change and to rectify itself.” (*Ibid.*: 55)

These remarks echo the method implemented in *Les conférences nationales en Afrique. Une affaire à suivre* (1993) where, to referring to Hannah Arendt, the Cameroonian philosopher speaks of “an elucidating thought” which “is born from the events of lived experience and must remain linked to them as to its unique appropriate guide.” (Arendt 1972: 26) In accordance with this elucidating thought, to analyse the modes of existence of civil society in Africa is to explain the internal structure of which, in Africa, presents itself as such, reveals its internal logic and its avowed aims of action. “It is from one and the other that we are at liberty to criticize, to give formal notice that the action undertaken is to be more rigorously faithful to itself, to its intentions and deeper tendencies, to go to its proper end.” To proceed in this way, to plunge “in the flux of actuality to uncover its meaning, its implicit “normativity” (Eboussi Boulaga, 1993 : 10) is, in a certain way “joining its existence to the totality of the historical moment and to join the world by contributing to its elaboration.” (Ladrière 1955 : 19) Anyone positioned within such a perspective never discovers the eternal laws that weigh upon us, like determinism and the fatality of our humanity,

our cultural legacy or of an obscure supernatural curse. They exhibit their necessity and contingency, all together, that is to say, their historicity. Ultimately, it is appropriate to ask whether the illusory character of African civil society is not the invention of Chabal and Daloz's same closed system of analysis and explanation, a system whose implementation necessitated the quarantining of disruptive elements considered, a priori, as insignificant? The explanation could be even more simple: was it possible to speak of the existence of a civil society in Africa since the State itself is a "complete illusion" or "a superficial front"? The following expression of a proverbial nature could find meaning here: we invent what is found and we find what we invent.

Taking a Stance: The Structural *Impensé* of Africanist Discourse

Let us return to the major concepts used to describe and analyse Africa, namely those of disorder, of retraditionalization (which gives the impression that Africa is unchanging), the updating of the classical opposition between the individual and the community, the normativity of the Western experience, etc. When paying attention to the way these concepts are updated to characterize Africa, one cannot help but think of an *impensé* which, consciously or unconsciously, structures the discourse of both Africanists who, *nolens volens*, refers to a not so very distant state of the representation of Africa, an invented Africa by the "Colonial Library." (Mudimbe 1988) The relationship of this *impensé* can be approached from what Michel Foucault said of the relationship of signification to the system. "Signification, he writes, is never primary and contemporaneous with itself, but always secondary and as it were derived in relation to a system that precedes it, constitutes its positive origin, and posits itself, little by little, in fragments and outlines through signification; in relation to the consciousness of a signification, the system is indeed always unconscious since it was there before the signification, the system is indeed always unconscious since it was there before the signification, since it is within it that the signification resides and on the basis of it that it becomes effective." (Foucault 394-395)

But what would be this *impensé*? Michel Foucault remains a good guide when attempting to characterize it. Indeed, presenting, in *The Order of Things*, the succession of the three dominant models in the recent history of the humanities – the biological model, the economic model, the philological model – that Michel Foucault indicates, another shift, observable in the game of precedence of the concepts constituting three pairs: function and norm, conflict and rule, signification and system. Once the canonical valance was accorded to the first terms (function, conflict, signification), as was the case in the 19th century, he suggests, we are witnessing clear epistemological

demarcation, disassociating two types of knowledge: on the one hand, sciences of normality, and on the other, that of pathologies. In this manner, “a pathological psychology was accepted side by side with normal psychology, but forming as it were an inverted image of it (...), a pathology of societies (Durkheim), of irrational and quasi-morbid forms of belief (Lévy-Bruhl, Blondel) was also accepted; similarly, as long as the point of view of conflict carried more weight than that of the rule, it was supposed that certain conflicts could not be overcome (...); finally, as long as the point of view of signification carried more weight than that of the system, a division was made between significant and non-significant: it was accepted that there was meaning in certain domains of human behaviour or certain regions of social area, but not in others.” (Foucault 393) What is thus indicated by Foucault is also what Jack Goody refers to as “the grant dichotomy” in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977), in which types of societies and ideas are established in a grid of binary oppositions of gender, historical versus ahistorical societies, civilization versus barbarism, domesticated thought versus wild thought, culminating in the opposition of Western versus non-Western. But, Foucault continues:

When, on the other hand, the analysis was conducted from the point of view of the norm, the rule, and the system, each area provided its own coherence and its own validity; it was no longer possible to speak of ‘morbid consciousness’ even referring to the sick), of ‘primitive mentalities’ (even with reference to societies left behind by history) or of ‘insignificant discourse’ (even when referring to absurd stories, or to apparently incoherent legends). Everything may be thought within the order of the system, the rule, and the norm. (*Ibid.* 393)

It seems to me that Michel Foucault’s remarks help indicate the underlying problem in Chabal and Daloz’s brilliant essay which, systematically, interprets “under negative grids what in rigorous Marxist analysis Benoît Verhaegen qualified a consequence of the colonial rule.” (Mudimbe 2013: 409) They thus confine Africa to an ahistorical and quasi-pathological negativity, which is measured in terms of the norm represented by the West. This implies that Africa is not truly thought of within the logic of its own norms, of its own standards, of its internal rules, in short “within the logic of (its) own systems.” (Mudimbe 1997: 40)

The issue here is not to categorically reject the analyses of our Africanists and their African epigones, but rather to emphasize the ideological and ethical issues related to a negative reading of all society. It is a matter of re-evaluating any pretense of ethical neutrality when the social is the object of study. In this area more than any other, the epistemological and ethical responsibility of researchers is already engaged and the refusal to assume it can have huge consequences: among other things, considering

others that we meet in our research terrain as natural things, not endowed with freedom, who have no understanding of their situation and its historicity. Yet, as Jürgen Habermas emphasizes in *Logique des sciences sociales*, “social subjects proceed ahead of interpretations about their field of action. Their overt behaviour is but a fragment of communicative action as a whole. Hence the need for a methodological interpretation oriented towards the subjects. Scientific concepts must begin from interpretive frameworks of the actors themselves. The conceptual constructions draw on the reserves of prior knowledge, which, transmitted by tradition, guides and interprets daily practices and even rebuilds them at the same time. Scientific constructs are located in the second degree.” (Habermas 1987: 141)

It is not even a question of challenging the concept of disorder as a political instrument, but to emphasize this, that seems crucial: to make sense of events in human and social history, we need to cast our gaze into the epistemological mutations which have shaped them and the politics which have provided the context of their possibility. It is in this vein that, in his book, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, the Ugandan academic Emmanuel Katongole, stressed that it is not evident that the chaos, the war and the corruptions in African State are indicators of bankruptcy or if you will, of the superficial nature of the state in Africa. To reach this conclusion, one must have taken the time to question the founding narrative in which the postcolonial state and its institutions are inscribed, and to ask himself “*why* it works in the way it does.” In fact, for Katongole, chaos, war, and corruption are not indications of a failed institution; they are ingrained in the very imagination and script of modern Africa. (2011: 2)

It is this kind of work, it seems to me, that African intellectuals have been engaged with since the 1970s by emphasizing a concept which could be more fecund than that of disorder, in that it is not limited to observing how Africa works but most of all why Africa works in this way. This is the concept of “crisis” if not of “megacrisis” as preferred by the young African philosophers who, inspired by Mudimbe’s work, launched, in the 1980s, at the Catholic University of Louvain, a philosophical movement called “*Les Nouvelles Rationalités Africaines*.” The concept seems fair to me because the task that lies before us is to understand, without renewing past imaginaries, what is happening, to enter into its logic and spirit to extend, consolidate and rectify trajectories, in short, to be attentive of precisely what emerges from the chaos. This means that crisis is understood “as the time of speech (word), of historicity and genesis” (Eboussi 2014: 113), therefore of negotiations between the old and the new for the emergence of new trends, new subjectivities and new sociabilities.

In fact, as suggested by Célestin Monga, Africa needs bold theorists of a new sociability, capable to evaluate the positivity which hides behind the most innocuous behaviours, contradictory or incoherent at first glance. But for that, Africa must be liberated from paralyzing paradigms (paradigms of

bankruptcy, of disorder, of abnormality) that tend “to govern any progressive thinking on African societies, and to distort the terms of a substantive debate on the future of democracy on the continent.” (Monga, 1994 : 81) Essentially, as Eboussi Boulaga suggests, the challenge is in this mental reversal of thinking of Africa as a finality without end, without assigning targets and external goals, but as what emerges from the vital power of the living multitude practicing, in these natural and historical spaces, by millions of microscopic daily actions, by interaction, of these millions of people adapting their conditions of existence, by modifying them, creating them trying to make their lives livable, that is tolerable and well thought out. (Eboussi Boulaga 2004: 63)

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