AFRICAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND ETHNOPHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: The paper explores the articulation between African social and political philosophy and ethnophilosophy. It first analyzes the nature, objectives and trends of this philosophy that is considered as a rational search for people's well-being within the polis. Secondly, the paper concentrates on the concept of ethnophilosophy to clarify its origins, specific meaning and current process of its rehabilitation. Relying on the poor balance sheet of the previous attempts of articulation between African political philosophy and ethnophilosophy through theories such as African socialism and African humanism, for example, the paper call for a critical approach to both the African context and precolonial legacy.

Key words: Democracy, emancipation, ethnophilosophy, philosophy, African socialism.

Resumo: O artigo explora a articulação entre a filosofia social e política africana e a etnofilosofia. Primeiro analisa a natureza, objetivos e tendências desta filosofia que é considerada como uma busca racional pelo bem-estar das pessoas dentro da *polis*. Em segundo lugar, o artigo concentra-se no conceito de etnofilosofia para esclarecer suas origens, significado específico e processo atual de sua reabilitação. Baseando-se no pobre balanço das tentativas anteriores de articulação entre a filosofia política africana e a etnofilosofia através de teorias como o socialismo africano e o humanismo africano, por exemplo, o documento pede uma abordagem crítica do contexto africano e do legado pré-colonial.

Palavras-chave: Democracia; emancipação; etnofilosofia; filosofia; socialismo africano.

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Introduction

The paper concentrates on the relationship between African social and political philosophy and ethnophilosophy. From the outset, it can be observed that this relationship is poorly approached despite that the idea of ethnophilosophy was (and still is) on fashion and subsequently source of endless debates in the framework of African philosophy. Attempts of articulation of those disciplines through theories such as African socialism and African humanism, for example, were hardly separated from the ideological context of their production. This concatenation produced as an effect the omission of contradictions and irrelevances inherent to those theories for the benefit of ideologies' considerations. The paper aims at going beyond this ideological barrier and finding out critical ways to avoid the blindness of the past and to make possible the African precolonial legacy match current African challenges.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the identity, purposes and sources of contemporary African social and political philosophy. It considers this philosophy as a people's anchored and rational search concerning their well-being, the power, the adequate paradigm of social and political organization, and the critique of concepts and theories in use. The paper also distinguishes African social and political philosophy from ontology in considering that the former deals with issues anchored in the people's daily struggle for a living while the latter focuses on the search for African quintessence.

The second section explores the idea of ethnophilosophy as one of the major trends of African (social and political) philosophy. It establishes that beyond the pejorative use of this concept generated by Hountondji and Towa, the word ethnophilosophy is being rehabilitated thanks to the discovery of its original meaning and encouraging development of philosophy and social sciences. It also evokes the resort to ethnophilosophy on behalf of both the African intelligentsia and postcolonial leaders to resist to racism and colonization, to set out and strengthen African nationalism as well as to restore the failing African modern state.

The last section analyses the limitations of the articulations between ethnophilosophy and African social and political philosophy. It calls the attention of African thinkers on the risks of anachronism and essentialization of African realities, as well as on new configurations due to the current process of globalization. Standing on those observations, the paper calls to go beyond conventional approaches to both African social and political philosophy and ethnophilosophy as well as to promote a critical thinking that matches contemporary African challenges and generates emancipative alternatives.

I.   Defining african social and political philosophy

1.   What is African Social and Political Philosophy about?

African social and political philosophy is a less explored field of study in comparison to research areas such a metaphysics, anthropology, theology, sociology and economics (Táíwo 2004, 243; Boele van Hensbroeck 1998, 9). Many people confine this discipline to theories of emblematic African leaders such as Nkrumah (1909-1972), Senghor (1906-2001) and Nyerere (1922-1999), for example. Others reduce this philosophy to both the vicissitudes and hazards of African politics in considering it as a chronicle of ups and downs of African nations. These approaches deform the nature of this philosophy because they skip over the effort of African people to frame rationally their social and political organization.

From the outset, I consider the African social and political philosophy as a reflection on the management of the polis and people's common life. As such, it deals with people's everyday life and experience of alliances and collective actions. This reality constitutes its roots and nourishing sap. It is advisable here to speak of "common world", to make use of Arendt's expression (Arendt 1994)[2]. This idea refers to political sphere as a space where people reveal themselves to each other as equal, and where they manifest their shared desire to build together a humanizing community. This anchoring of social and political philosophy in the common world is unavoidable and necessary at a time because it is the means by which this philosophy specifies its object and forges its identity.

A range of concerns of conventional political philosophy can be considered as essential to African social and political philosophy. It can be reminded purposes such as the well-being of (African) citizens, the power, and the search for suitable paradigm of social and political organization. The well-being of citizens, for example, is a permanent topic of political philosophy. From Socrates up to today, nobody omits this topic even if each philosopher assigns to it a particular content and sketches differently its modalities of achievement. In this regard, African social and political philosophers deal with multiple challenges including, for example, emancipation, poverty, human rights, gender, and democracy. African social and political philosophy also addresses both the nature and justification of power. As an illustration, I can remind questions and debates concerning who governs the polis; by which

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[2] One can also think of the *Ubuntu* premise according to which « I am because we are » (Tutu 1999). I think that the comparison between the two expressions is weak, as the former refers to an individual choice while the latter evokes a state of things, a kind of spontaneous and automatic sequence.

principles does he/she achieve such a duty? According to what modalities and in response to what purpose does he/she rule? What is the nature and purposes of power? How far people, as city members, take part in decision making about the common good?

Up to the collapse of the communist regime, both African political leaders and a range of scholars reduced the search for an adequate paradigm of social and political organization to the choice between capitalism and socialism. Through this attitude, they ignored their own people's needs and aspirations to the benefit of the ideological antagonism known as the cold war. Protagonists of socialism considered this option to be in compliance with African culture, particularly because of its community spirit opposed to individualism. Leaders such as Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Sekou Touré, for example, made of this option their priority. Many other leaders remained loyal to capitalism in virtue of freedom value. This was the case of leaders such as Mobutu (Congo/Zaïre), Ahidjo (Cameroun), Eyadema (Togo), Bongo (Gabon), to mention some few.

This ideological cleavage kept African intelligentsia aligned to foreign ideology, interests and policy in name of which they developed a proxy war between them despite of their proclaimed belief in African precolonial and cultural legacy. Due to such a divide, African values of solidarity, humanism and life's respect were turned into empty slogans in support of opposite ideologies. In addition, I can also note that African social and political philosophy deals with the analysis and critical of both the concepts in use and the ruling African systems (Kasanda 2018, 2-6).

2. *African Social and Political Philosophy and Ontology*

The relationship between social and political philosophy and ontology is fundamental because it concerns the relevance of ontological considerations in the sphere of social and political philosophy, and vice versa. A range of African philosophers consider the search of African quintessence as an unavoidable background to analyze issues of the polis. Subsequently, some others view the political sphere as only a space of empirical attitudes and pragmatism, that means without any philosophical relevance.

The debate consecutive to Tempels' work, *Bantu Philosophy* (1945) revealed the difficulty for African philosophers to formulate a consensual definition of African philosophy (Bell 2002, 21-22). This debate put on light the metaphysical premises underlying theories such as African humanism and African socialism, for example, that rely on the Bantu ontology as developed by Tempels. A range of scholars and political leaders including

Senghor, Nkrumah, and Nyerere, for example, consider this ontology as their invaluable *vade mecum*. They relied on it to provide a philosophical background to their respective polity and world view.

This ascendancy of ontology in African social and political philosophy rises suspicion regarding two stumbling blocks of political philosophy, already denounced by Strauss in his lecture: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie politique?* (Strauss 1992). First, I can point out the temptation to consider political philosophy as a particular application or a subcategory of general philosophy, by transposing problems and concepts of the latter in the sphere of politics. The search for African quintessence characterizing political reflection of many African thinkers made this deviation more than likely. As already suggested, theories such as negritude, African socialism and African humanism are the most affected by this criticism, as they put much more emphasis on ontological speculation than on the daily struggles of African people. This attitude reminds what Arendt called in her criticism of Plato's political philosophy as the withdrawal of the thinker from the world (Arendt 1994). According to Arendt's view, the concept of "world" denotes the idea of "common world" which includes factors that are fundamental to human life and they cannot be reduced to metaphysical category. Such is the case of realities such as poverty, social exclusion and gender, for example.

The second stumbling block concerns the propensity to perceive political philosophy as a systematization of opinions that are already present in the polis, including the precolonial legacy I think that this perception constitutes the Achilles' heel of trends of African social and political philosophy relying on the exhumation of the African past and the rehabilitation of African cultures. This attitude implies the risk of anachronism, and subsequently it fails to match people's real aspirations and challenges. The misguided policy of authenticity developed by Mobutu in the name of African culture can be considered as an enlightening case in this respect.

3. Neglected Sources of African Social and Political Philosophy

This reflection started by an observation about the scarcity of studies and publications on African social and political philosophy. This observation can make believe that this philosophy is a discourse conceived and expressed only by professional philosophers[3] and

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[3] The expression « professional philosophers » is not here opposed to « ethnophilosophers » as concerning the debate related to the genesis and development of African philosophy (Smet 1980, Mudimbe

political leaders. To think in this way hides the diversity of its protagonists, sources and its modalities of diffusion. More and more studies claim the relationship between African social and political philosophy and disciplines such as literature, theology (religion), music and art. Due to the limited scope of this paper, let's shortly mention the contribution of literature to African social and political philosophy. In this respect, scholars such as Appiah (2004), Bidima (2004), Okolo (2007), Rettová (2013) denounce the prejudice confining these disciplines to the sphere of entertainment and denying to them all aptitude to conceive and express philosophical ideas. According to Bidima,

> both literature and philosophy have a number of intertextual relationships, particularly as regards three domains: namely, political philosophy, philosophy of history, and aesthetics. One illustrative fact in particular should be emphasized. The political tendency of the critique of ethnophilosophy among African francophone philosophers (…) owes a great deal to numerous passages in *Discours sur le colonialisme* by the poet Aimé Césaire; which is yet another confirmation of the extent to which philosophy and literature both journey along similar paths (Bidima 2004, 557).

Taking stand on the existentialist philosophy developed by Sartre (1905-1980) for whom the main broadcasting mode of ideas was theater, Rettová shows both the aptitude and the relevance of literature to express philosophical questions, to reach the public and to call them to an interactive and productive debate (Rettová 2013). In the same vein, Okolo examines the relationship between African literature and political philosophy (Okolo 2007). For Okolo, both these disciplines are equally interested in dealing with ideas. The affinity between them is noticeable in areas such as their moral influence on human behavior, their effect on language, their contribution to development, their social incidence and political criticism (Okolo 2007, 13-22).

The recent proliferation of African writers interested in African social and political philosophy strengthens the previous hypothesis according to which the overlooking of African literature –as well as areas such as music and art- as one of the major loci of production and diffusion of this philosophy is a prejudicial attitude. Achebe insists on that "an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant" (quoted in Okolo 2007, 2).

1988). It simply denotes the institutionalization of African philosophy and the ignorance of the non academic thinkers and practices.

II.   Ethnophilosophy and african social and political thinking

1. Ethnophilosophy: The Word and the Thing

The term Ethnophilosophy was successful in the euphoria subsequent to the debate on the existence of African philosophy (Bidima 1985, 9-15). For various African scholars, this concept refers to the assumption according to which

> [There] is a metaphysical system, and an ideology embodied in the traditional wisdom, the institutions and languages of Africa; and, consequently it aims at thrashing out from myths, folktales, beliefs, proverbs, and languages, *the permanent quintessential African approach to the world* (Kaphagawani 2000, 89. Emphasis added).

Contrary to a wide-spread opinion, this concept was not coined in the 1970s, by Hountondji (1970) and Towa (1971). Its earliest usage in African philosophy is attributed to Nkrumah. After his Master's degree in philosophy, in 1943, Nkrumah intended to present a doctoral thesis in *Ethnophilosophy* at the American university of Pennsylvania. He drafted a doctoral dissertation entitled: « *Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethno-Philosophy with Special Reference to the Akan Peoples of the Gold Coast, West Africa*" (quoted in Hountondji 2004, 533. See also: Hallen 2002, 72). He never gave the meaning of this expression. Considering this want of explanation, Hountondji formulated the hypothesis to search for it in the domain of ethnic sciences. For him, when Nkrumah elaborated his doctoral research project the ethnophilosophy "(…) était une de ces disciplines nées aux Etats-Unis dans la foulée des ethnosciences, (…) l'originalité du chercheur qu'était Nkrumah était donc d'appliquer à sa propre société la théorie et la méthodologie de cette discipline déjà reconnue"[4].

Through this expression, Nkrumah sought to promote the idea according to which anthropology should, by going beyond its traditional topics, set up "a synthetic ethno-philosophy" through which

> [elle] s'efforcerait de pénétrer les significations les plus fondamentales et les plus profondes qui sous-tendent toute culture, en sorte qu'elle atteigne une *Weltanschauung* culturelle de base par laquelle l'humanité reconnaîtrait que,

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[4] www.exchoresis.refer.ga./IMG/P.J._Hountondji.pdf

It can observed that Hountondji's search for the origin and original meaning of ethnophilosophy converges with the observation of Smet (1980, 161-162) who, years before Hountondji's hypothesis, perceived ethnophilosophy as a neologism used by Africanists during the post war II era to refer to auxiliary sciences of anthropology and ethnology, such as ethnohistory, ethnomusicology, and ethnopyschology, etc. This discipline was mainly practiced in the United States, and it aimed at stressing the specific *weltanschauung* of non modern societies.

> malgré les différences de race, de langue et de culture, elle est une en ce sens qu'il n'y a qu'une race : l'Homo sapiens. (Ibidem. Underlined in the original text).

This attempt to trace the original meaning of the concept *Ethnophilosophy* clarifies two things : first, the genesis of this concept has very little to do with Tempels's work as well as concerning his disciples. Secondly, it clarified the very contribution of Hountondji and Towa to development of this concept. I can note that these two philosophers diverted this expression from its previous positive meaning, assigning to it a pejorative content consisting of a criticism of a philosophical methodology and attitude they consider as not worthy to philosophy as such. As Hountondji himself observed, they both denounce

> une pratique de la philosophie qui se donnait pour tâche de *décrire les visions du monde collectives*, pratique qui (…) trahissait la vision première de la philosophie qui est non de décrire, mais *de démontrer ; non de reconstituer de manière conjecturale le système de pensée* de tel ou tel peuple (…) , mais *de prendre soi-même position* (…) sur des questions posées en acceptant la contrainte de justifier de manière rationnelle ces prises de position (Hountondji, art. cit. Emphasis added).

According to Hountondji's own words:

> Le mot existait bien avant les années soixante-dix. *Towa et moi ne l'avons pas forgé. Notre seule originalité était de l'utiliser dans un sens péjoratif et polémique pour stigmatiser une pratique que nous rejetions*, alors qu'il était jusque-là, quand il était employé, le nom d'un projet consciemment revendiqué (Ibidem. Emphasis added).

2. Rehabilitating the Concept of Ethnophilosophy

Following his clarification of Nkrumah's usage of the word ethnophilosophy, Hountondji reviewed his own and original approach to this word. Therefore, he wondered himself on the relevance of his previous criticism nowadays as follows: "(…) devons-nous toujours, aujourd'hui, maintenir cette connotation?" (Hountondji, 2012).

Answering this self-questioning, he thinks that the concept of ethnophilosophy can be positively interpreted in today's African philosophy debate, but only under some requirements including, for example, the extension of the concept of philosophy and the adjustment of the idea of ethnophilosophy itself. He observes that

> on ne peut nier l'existence d'un ensemble d'idées littéralement préconçues, d'un ensemble de « pré-concepts » et de « préjugés » véhiculé par une

> culture collective, pas plus qu'on ne peut refuser toute légitimité à une étude qui entreprendrait d'identifier, d'examiner méthodiquement ce système de « pré-concepts ». (…) *je ne vois pas d'inconvénients à ce qu'une telle étude soit appelée ethnophilosophie, à condition de reconnaître que dans ce mot composé, le vocable « philosophie » est employé dans un sens un très large*, pour désigner la composante intellectuelle d'une culture que l'on se contente de décrire ou de restituer sans prétendre en aucune façon la légitimer, à la différence de *la philosophie stricto sensu qui s'entend comme une discipline rigoureuse, exigeante, toujours soucieuses de justifier ses affirmations.* Il y a donc place pour une ethnophilosophie comprise en ce sens très général (Ibid. Emphasis added).

A range of scholars also defended the rehabilitation of the concept of ethnophilosophy using different arguments.[5] Mora (2004), for example, supports the idea that ethnophilosophy should be free from pejorative connotation. He thinks that this concept should be given new and broader interpretation as well as valued in philosophical debates because it refers to a set of raw material and contexts on which any thinker (regardless of his or her own identity and world acknowledgement) can rely to develop philosophical arguments.[6] For him, ethnophilosophy performs more than a descriptive paper or ethnological mandate. It is a philosophical discourse valid for every philosopher all over the world. In addition to its descriptive duty, ethnophilosophy can also serve as an argumentative horizon from which philosophers can argue in all kind of philosophical debates. According to him, this philosophical trend concerns "(…) toda filosofia (…), en tanto ella presente características étnicas o culturales y se diferencie en ello de la filosofía de otros grupos cultural o étnicamente determinados" (Mora 2004).

Defining the very role of ethnophilosophy, he insists on that

> […] este concepto de "Etnofilosofia" (…) describe formalmente un aspecto de la filosofia, a saber: si de la apelaciôn a las tradiciones, de la reflexiôn sobre las particularidades de una lengua o de las especificidades comparables y culturalmente determinadas, *se pueden extraer argumentos en cuestiones filosôficas*. (…) en tanto se cumpla con el mencionado criterio, Hegel o Heidegger pueden argumentar etnofilosôficamente tanto como N'krumah o Oluwole, Zea o Freire» (Mora 2004. Underlined in the original*).

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[5] See also Hebga's work, *l'Eloge de l'ethnophilosophie* (19 ??)

[6] Thoraval (1994), for example, takes stand on this interpretation and make use of the concept of ethnophilosophy to refer to various trends of Chinese philosophy.

3. Ethnophilosophy and African social and political experience

The articulation of ethnophilosophy and African people's political experience can be sketched into the three following categories: the metaphysics of resistance, the philosophical background of African nationalism, and alternative to contemporary political failures.

3.1. Ethnophilosophy as metaphysics of resistance

A range of African scholars kept memory of marginalization and contempt from slavery and colonization. For them, the debate on ethnophilosophy includes more than a speculative issue regarding the use of this concept. They view ethnophilosophy as a platform to tackle racist discourses and related prejudices. According to them, this way of thinking aims at asserting the presence of Reason in Africa, and consequently the existence of African people as fully human beings. In other words, the excavation of African precolonial legacy opposes racist theories justifying the exploitation of black people and excluding Africa from the world history (Eze 1997, 8-10; Bidima 1995, 29).

Regardless of both the reach and success of their discourse, protagonists of ethnophilosophy stand on different specialized areas and methodologies to tackle this challenge. Kagame (1956), for example, relies on Aristotelian categories to show how far Bantu languages can express philosophic and complex ideas as better as Aristotelian categories do. Laléyê (1970) relies on phenomenology's methodology to explore the African philosophy of development. Mbiti (1970) makes use of African religions to explore the African Otherness, particularly through the concept of time. Scholars such as Obenga (1973; 1990; 1993) and Diop (1979) focused on African history and linguistics to build their theory of black Egypt, to refute Hegel's assertion according to which black Africa is not historical part of the world and it has no movement or development to exhibit (Kebede 2009, 51; Imbo 1998, 56-60).

3.2. Ethnophilosophy as philosophical background of African nationalism

As already mentioned, ethnophilosophy relies on the idea that there is a metaphysical system and an ideology embodied in the African precolonial and cultural legacy whose rehabilitation contributes to finding out the African quintessence and to building new African nations. African leaders of the post-independence generation including Kaunda (1924-), Senghor (1906-2001) , Nyerere (1922-1999), Nkrumah (1909-1972), Mobutu (1930-1997), to quote those few, gave to this concept a nationalist dimension. Considered as pragmatic ethnophilosophers, they relied on ethnophilosophical approaches and methodologies to

implement their respective political views and projects including their dream for an emancipated, united and prosperous African continent.

Most of those leaders think that the idea of African nationalism is hardly understandable without any reference to African cultural and political precolonial legacy. I can note that they relied on ethnophilosophical premises to denounce conventional political paradigms and to sustain the search for African cultural and political quintessence through the exhumation of precolonial African legacy. This strategy allowed the elaboration of political theories such as consciencism, the family-hood –(*Ujamaa-*), African socialism, African humanism, and African authenticity, to mention a few. In support of the One-party rule as a mode of governance, for example, many of these leaders relied also on the ethnophilosophical metaphysics and precolonial political behaviors and modes of governance (Kasanda 2018, 91-94; Mazrui 2001).

3.3. Ethnophilosophy as an alternative to contemporary political failures

Following African political leaders, a range of African scholars including Gyekye (1997), Wamba-dia-Wamba (1994) and Wiredu (1997), for example, sustain the political view asserting the existence of a metaphysical system and an ideology in the African traditional wisdom, institutions and languages. They think of this legacy to be relevant alternative to the African state's bankruptcy and current failures concerning democracy as a mode of governance. In his work, *Tradition and Modernity. Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience (1997)*, Gyekye postulates that the omission of African precolonial political heritage in the configuration of modern African states constitutes a big prejudice toward those states Gyekye 1997, 116). As such, this omission can be viewed as the cause of their current deficit concerning democracy and their want of stability. Gyekye considers as urgent the recourse to this forgotten legacy to improve contemporary African modes of governance (Gyekye 1997, 114-116).

Wiredu (1997) also follows the same way of thinking in his search for alternative to the ruling liberal paradigm of democracy that emphasizes the paper of political parties (representation) in addition to the modern power's structures, like justice, parliament and government. He thinks that African countries should recover the precolonial mode of governance based on consensus and people participation into power. In his paper on Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity

(1997), standing on Akan traditional political legacy, he sustains the idea of democracy without political parties as an emancipative way for African states.

In 1992, Wamba-dia-Wamba published a paper named Beyond Elite Politics of Democracy in Africa. In this paper he analyzes the process of political transition taking place in the course of the 1990s in Africa as well as he denounces the failures of paradigms of governance and democracy imposed by the world ruling powers, regardless of their ideological obedience. As Gyekye and Wiredu, he considers as mandatory the return to African political legacy to build African states and to promote democracy in the continent. Such a return implies, for him, the rediscovery of traditional modes of politics, such as *Mbongi* (the lineage assembly) and their modus operandi, particularly the palaver. According to him, "we must (…) move away from the process of moving away from traditional society and internalizing the colonial state" (Wamba-dia-Wamba 1992, 32).

Iii. And beyond

I share the evoked analysis of Gyekye, Wiredu and Wamba-dia-Wamba denouncing the fallacy of African political systems and the lethargy of the African intelligentsia regarding political thought. Nevertheless, I would like to note that the alternative they propose seems to me to be the source of multiple questions concerning, for example, their perception of the African political field and the relevance of the precolonial legacy for today's Africa.

It is worth reminding that political philosophy doesn't emerge from ex-nihilo. It always relies on both the axis of space and time and it develops according to the historical trajectory of the concerned people. I have the feeling that the reference to both the dimensions of space and time is poorly taken into consideration by the evoked thinkers. They speak of precolonial legacy as if this heritage was out of time, irremovable to changes and that can be applicable to all Africans regardless of their respective social and political experiences. I can note here an anachronism on the basis of which a double mistake can be also pointed out: of the essentialization of African legacy and the subsequently the erasing of difference and particularities in the name of African quintessence.

While defending the rehabilitation and the modern articulation of the African precolonial legacy, all the evoked thinkers seem to be voiceless and amnesic concerning the assessment of the previous use of these traditions and values by the African leaders of the immediate postcolonial era. The balance sheet of this use through the already mentioned theories including African socialism, African humanism and authenticity, can be considered

as unflattering as it shows a huge deficit. Such a deficit should call the attention of African intelligentsia to searching for its fundamental causes as well as to rethinking conditions of application of this precious legacy. In other words, I can note that the application of the ethnophilosophical premises to contemporary African context requires a theoretical frame that takes into consideration changes that are occurring in the continent and is critical concerning values rescued from the past.

Eboussi-Boulaga (1977) is one of the main African scholars whose comments on ethnophilosophy are illuminating. In his famous work, *La crise du muntu. Aunthenticité et philosophie* (1977), he denounces the role that conventional protagonists of ethnophilosophy assign to philosophers and by extension to philosophy itself. He considers that for this category of thinkers "Le philosophe (..) est un révélateur, au sens chimique du mot ; il rend visible ce qui est, il appelle d'un nom nouveau ce qui a toujours été. Mais le vrai sujet de la philosophie, celui qui la fait, c'est l'ethnie anonyme et éternelle." (Eboussi-Boulaga 1977, 30).

It is my feeling that this perception of philosophy is far from matching the already evoked definition of political philosophy, because it fails to integrate any critical dimension, but it also cuts off the paper of individual thinkers and political leaders. Such a background implies various effects including the exemption of political agency and the refusal of pluralistic political debate in virtue of what I qualify as "ethnic metaphysics". Due to those metaphysics, conservative political paradigms and behaviors were sustained in Africa including, for example, modes of governance such as the gerontocracy, the warrior and the wisdom paradigms (Mazrui 2001).

As already suggested, I think that as a background for African social and political philosophy, this approach to ethnophilosophy contains the risk of anachronism and sterilization of the political thinking. I also consider that in addition to the already evoked request for the rehabilitation of ethnophilosophy, the articulation of precolonial legacy with contemporary African social and political philosophy requires both permanent vigilance and critical mind.

Eboussi-Boulaga also calls the attention on the methodology used by conventional ethnophilosophers, particularly their propensity to essentialize African realities. Relying on the idea that their own reality constitutes the centre of gravity of all the realities, the protagonists of ethnophilosophy permanently extend and universalize local realities and

related concepts. Concrètement, ils tombent dans le même travers que le discours hégémonique de l'Occident qu'ils dénoncent:

> *généralisation extensive*: l'ethnie se dilate jusqu'à la grande ethnie négro-africaine, plus abstraite, qui n'existe que comme sommation des traits, de constantes. (…) [cette] philosophie est celle de l'ethnie, puis celle de tous les négro-africains qui peuvent proclaimer: "nous avons des philosophies, nous aussi". (Eboussi-Boulaga (1977, 31).

I already examined the relationship between African social and political and metaphysics. I think that the search for African quintessential that characterizes ethnophilosophy allows the escape of philosophers from both the people's daily life and common world. This attitude leads to the withdrawal of the thinker from the people's daily struggle for a better social and political living. Césaire (1976, 36-37) also denounced this attitude in his critique of Tempels's work that he qualified as the search for ontological satisfaction. In his "Discours sur la négritude", Césaire (1987) insists on the relevance of paying attention to people's daily struggle and local experience to the detriment of ethereal concept of universalism.

The resort to ontology constitutes a permanent temptation and the Achilles tendon of African political thinkers. It is important to call their attention on such a trap. The increasing interest for human rights, gender, poverty and civil society can be viewed as a stimulating opportunity for them to concentrate much more on real social and political challenges than on the search for the African quintessence (Odera 1997, 81-93; 115-125; Graness 2012, 32-33).

Standing on this observation, I think that the articulation between African social and political philosophy and ethnophilosophy is not an end by itself. It fundamentally aims at promoting humanizing social and political living conditions for everyone. African social and political philosophy is a hardly past oriented thinking. It refers to African past to best understand its challenges today, and subsequently to consider its future by taking into consideration changes occurring within the continent.

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