

The African intellectual

Hountondji and after

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Every thought, however original it may be, is to some extent shaped by the questions that it is asked.

Paulin J. Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning*

One of the characteristic features of African philosophy is that it tends to pose epistemological questions in terms that preserve their dialectical entanglement with questions of agency. In what follows I will examine the kind of knowledge articulated and contested by Paulin Hountondji, arguably the most influential African philosopher alive, and, in particular, the kind of *habitus*¹ that Hountondji has argued must normatively proceed from a commitment to the sort of knowledge he champions. My definition of ‘African philosophy’, as will be clear from the discussion below, follows from Gramsci’s definition of the intellectual. As Gramsci points out, whereas everyone in some sense is an intellectual, not everyone in a society has the function of performing intellectual work.² One is designated an ‘intellectual’ by processes of recognition and credentialing that are inflected by power relations. By ‘African philosophy’, then, I mean discourses produced by those interpellated as African philosophers by institutions of power such as schools, ‘universities’ and the media. This article will closely map the contours of Hountondji’s thought as it offers a particularly fruitful starting point from which to understand the topography of African philosophical debate more generally.

Born in Abidjan in 1942 and educated in Paris at the École Normale Supérieure in the mid-1960s at the height of Althusser’s influence, Paulin Hountondji is one of the most lionized and influential in the African intellectual landscape. Not entirely paradoxically, however, there is also probably no philosopher who has been as much reviled within African philosophical discourse. This is largely traceable to Hountondji’s confrontation with a school of thought that he has

derisively dubbed ‘ethnophilosophy’. Ethnophilosophers like Placide Tempels and Alexis Kagame had asserted that African philosophy, in so far as it existed, consisted in communally shared, anonymous (because collective) *beliefs*. Hountondji charged that ethnophilosophy reiterated Eurocentric caricatures of Africans as members of a herd-like mob, devoid of the capacity to think as independent individuals. His critics in turn shot back that Hountondji was a Western stooge, even a Trojan Horse for a second, post-colonial *mission civilisatrice* in the African continent.

Hountondji carved out a place in the field of African philosophy largely on the strength of his major work, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1976).³ Twenty years later he published an intellectual memoir translated as *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa* (1997).⁴ The term ‘intellectual memoir’ may be misleading. The book’s original French subtitle, *Un itinéraire africain* (An African Journey), offers a better description of it as an attempt to retrace and explain his intellectual development.⁵ After an initial discussion of his own intellectual inheritance and influences (notably Husserl and Althusser), much of the book consists of Hountondji’s attempt to defend his work from the veritable cottage industry that sprang up in response to his critique of ethnophilosophy.

The episteme of the African intellectual

Hountondji affirms four main ideas concerning the definition and role of philosophy, all of which are intended to establish the domain in which an African philosophy might be articulated, while excluding ‘ethnophilosophy’ as an impostor (if not as a contradiction in terms). First, in his book *African Philosophy*, Hountondji defines African philosophy as a ‘set of

texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves.⁶ Though the definition at first sight comes across as disarmingly straightforward, it in fact rests on a number of assumptions diametrically opposed to the school of thought that Hountondji dismissed as 'ethnophilosophy'. Like other critics, Hountondji traces the origins of ethnophilosophy to the work of the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels (1906–1977). In his book *Bantu Philosophy* (1945) Tempels argues that 'Africans' conceive of reality as a hierarchy of interacting forces. According to Tempels, this view of reality is held by all Africans and is attributable to the natural disposition of the African mind. The Rwandese philosopher Alexis Kagame (1912–1981) attempted to extend and refine Tempels's theory, notably in his books *La Philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'être* (1956) and *La Philosophie bantu comparée* (1976). Kagame, unlike Tempels, argued that African philosophy emerged from a shared cultural essence, rather than an African 'nature'. This shared culture consisted in African traditions, customs and language.

It is these notions that Hountondji's definition of philosophy as a 'set of texts' seeks to challenge. The emergence of philosophy, Hountondji holds, is dependent on a dialectical or critical method which can only take place with literacy and written or 'archival' transmission. According to Hountondji,

oral tradition favours the consolidation of known into dogmatic, intangible systems, whereas archival transmission promotes better the possibility of a critique of knowledge between individuals and from one generation to another. Oral tradition is dominated by the fear of forgetting, of lapses of memory, since memory is here left to its own resources, bereft of external or material support.... Written tradition, on the contrary, providing a material support, liberates the memory, and permits it to forget its acquisitions, provisionally to reject or question them because it knows that it can at any moment recapture them if need be.⁷

Philosophy existed in the West, Hountondji asserts, because 'the history of the West is not directly cumulative but *critical*: it moves forward not through a mere plurality of knowledge, ... but through the periodical questioning of established knowledge, each questioning being a crisis.'⁸ Ethnophilosophy, Hountondji contends, errs in naming as philosophy forms of thinking that are merely implicit and unwritten. For Hountondji, genuine philosophy renders legible and meaningful bits of knowledge into a *text* of knowledge.

Hountondji's insistence on written texts as philosophy partly hinges on his belief that texts offer some

form of evidence against which duelling interpretations may be compared to determine the correct one. He argues,

The discourse of ethnophilosophers, be they European or African, offers us the baffling spectacle of an imaginary interpretation with no textual support, of a genuinely 'free' interpretation, inebriated and entirely at the mercy of the interpreter, a dizzy and unconscious freedom which takes itself to be translating a text which does not actually exist and which is therefore unaware of its creativity. By this action the interpreter disqualifies himself from reaching any truth whatsoever, since truth requires that freedom be limited, that it bow to an order that is not purely imaginary and that it be aware both of this order and of its own margin of creativity.⁹

In his intellectual memoir, Hountondji elaborates on a second reason why he opposes ethnophilosophy's claim to being genuine philosophy, one that draws on Husserl's distinction between a first-order *hyle* or matter and a second-order *morphe* or form. For Husserl, the *hyle* is the 'nonintentional' or 'primary' aspect of the mind, the stratum of thought through which sensory data or perceptual content is manifested or appears. The *morphe*, on the other hand, is the stratum of thought which relates the experience of the *hyle* to its objective correlate – that is, which confers on sensations their objectivity. In his elaboration and reconstruction of Husserl's thoughts, Hountondji argues that the *hyle* is the incipient first stage towards greater knowledge. The *hyle*, he continues,

expresses our primordial interlacing with the world, and the initial complicity that conditions any later distance that might be observed; it expresses this place of silence where, before any enunciation and verbal expression, the configurations of our relation to the world and to others are sketched out.¹⁰

Thus, in so far as ethnophilosophy attributes to Africans an implicit philosophy, Hountondji condemns it for making a category mistake.

If we pose that it is absurd to speak of unconscious algebra, geometry, linguistics, etc. and if we accept that no science can exist historically without an explicit discourse, then by the same token we must regard the very idea of an unconscious philosophy as absurd.¹¹

Ethnophilosophy is a rank failure because of its obliviousness to the difference between first-order and second-order forms of knowing. Africans, Hountondji holds, did and do possess – as do all humans – the capacity for abstract thought. Husserl had shown that there exists a universal architectonic of conscious-

ness. By alleging that the African's thinking was 'communal', ethnophilosophers were undermining the most basic condition of possibility for the existence of philosophy, namely the universality of individual human consciousness.

Third, Hountondji contends that philosophy designates, in its role as clarifier of scientific concepts, the privileged method for the discovery of truth. Husserl's method of the transcendental *epoché*, the bracketing of the world and the natural attitude, deeply influences Hountondji and inspires his general disdain for empiricism. For Hountondji, empiricism is mere 'psychologism'.¹² He states in *African Philosophy* that he remains attached

to a certain idea of philosophy which, since Plato, demands that it be *episteme* rather than *doxa*, science rather than opinion; to Husserl, who identifies in a very technical manner some of the intellectual devices and methods that allow philosophy to become 'a rigorous science'; to Descartes's cogito; and to all the doctrines that value intellectual responsibility and demand that each affirmation be sustained by a proof or a rational justification.¹³

One reason why Hountondji regards ethnophilosophy as something other than philosophy is because he thinks its empiricist methods reduce it to a form of anthropology. Moreover, Hountondji's adoption of the *epoché* as a methodology also strongly influences his own intellectual habitus. It is at least partly what drives his remarkable capacity for relentless argumentation, his readiness methodically to follow a train of thought, concept, or argument down to the furthest reaches of its claims.

Fourth, Hountondji argues that by making explicit the unarticulated, philosophy made possible the emergence of science. Hountondji follows Louis Althusser in conceiving of philosophical knowledge as signifying a *rupture* or break that founds a new science by a violent repudiation of subjectivism, myth and *doxa*. The history of philosophy, he states, 'does not move forward by continuous evolution but by leaps and bounds, by successive revolutions, and consequently follows not a linear path but what one might call a dialectical one – in other words, that its profile is not continuous but discontinuous'.¹⁴ If this signifies epistemological progress, it is no less a moral one as well. Philosophy is possible in literate cultures, he avers, because literacy 'liberates the memory'. He continues: 'Such is the real function of (empirical) writing. It leaves the task of conservation to matter (books, documents, archives, and so on) and liberates the mind to make innovations that may shake established ideas

and even overthrow them completely'.¹⁵ In his memoir, Hountondji hails his critique of ethnophilosophy as marking nothing less than an 'intellectual liberation'.¹⁶ Drawing on Husserl and Althusser, he argues for a conception of philosophy as *Wissenschaftslehre*, 'a theory of science necessarily called upon by the very movement of science as realization, or at least the condition of realization of this need for integral intelligibility that permeates science'.¹⁷ Through this method, Hountondji claims, ontology could then clarified as knowledge of a universal essence or foundation upon which all subsequent sciences can then be built: 'Therefore, there is an order of things, an objective articulation of being, a universal legality that regulates the sphere of truth. Scientific discourse must account for this pre-existing order'.¹⁸ The ultimate goal of philosophy is nothing less than a Platonic 'duty to truth and the desire for apodictic certainty'.¹⁹

Hountondji lays out the implications of these critiques in stark terms. 'We [Africans] must relearn how to think', he states.²⁰ Ethnophilosophers, he argues, 'have not seen that African philosophy, like African science or African culture in general, is before us, not behind us, and must be created today by decisive action.' To get it started requires that the African admit that African philosophy 'is yet to come'.²¹

Controversies and polemics

In his major work, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Hountondji is prone to dismiss those he disagrees with as engaged in a discourse other than philosophy. But he does so only on the strength of his definition of philosophy as a 'set of texts.' In doing so he simply begs the question. The lack of a textual basis for ethnophilosophy condemns it as non-philosophical in advance.

Unfortunately, in the case of African 'philosophy' there are no sources; or at least, if they exist, they are not philosophical texts or discourses. Kagame's 'institutionalized records,' or those which Tempels had earlier subjected to 'ethnophilosophical' treatment, are wholly distinct from philosophy. They are in no way comparable with the sources which for an interpreter of, say, Hegelianism, or dialectical materialism, or Freudian theory, or even Confucianism are extant in the explicit texts of Hegel, Marx, Freud, or Confucius, in their discursive development as permanently available products of language.²²

What Hountondji does not acknowledge here is that the status of what counts as 'philosophy' and 'philosophical discourse' is exactly what is being debated. It's not enough to define rival discourses as not-

philosophy and declare the argument won. Nor is it enough to treat the field of philosophy, oriented by a neo-Althusserian emphasis on revolutionary breaks, in terms that effectively reduce its structuring principles to a heroic clash between the ideas of Great Men.

The first thing that Hountondji fails to account for is the historical determinations that structure his own philosophical thought. In *African Philosophy*, he points to the historical conjuncture of racialist supremacy and African nationalism as the impetus for the favourable reception of ethnophilosophy. What he does not do, however, is subject his own philosophy to the same contextual critique. In his intellectual memoir, when he engages the influences on him, he offers a litany of Great Men (notably Immanuel Kant, Edmund Husserl and Louis Althusser) as his forebears, and he offers his text-based definition of philosophy as superior to other definitions because he sees it as simply referencing the 'philosophical intention of the authors, not ... the degree of its effective realization, which cannot be assessed'.²³ It is a short step from here to the bald assertion that philosophy is what the writer says it is.

And yet Hountondji's work bears ample testimony to the contextual determinations that structure the presuppositions of his beliefs. There is, to begin with, a set of broadly 'modernist' assumptions that he takes for granted. My definition of modernization, drawn in part from Perry Anderson and T.J. Clark,²⁴ takes it to be a historical conjuncture marked by the struggle for self-definition of the 'professional' classes, the rationalization and bureaucratization of the life world (including processes of standardization, routinization, and surveillance), and the emergence of a 'global' public sphere through the agency of mass media technologies. Modernization was of course highly variegated, and the response to processes of industrialization, mass commodification, professionalization and standardization were highly differentiated from field to field (thus what is often termed 'modernist' art and literature tended to be anti-modernizing in its thrust).

Hountondji's work is best understood in light of this historical conjuncture. Consider his portrayal of philosophy as primarily a value-free method, which goes hand in hand with his suspicion of 'engaged' subjectivity. Hountondji finds 'seductive' Husserl's argument for a science that foregrounds an 'ethics of effacement'.²⁵ In such a science the subject abandons itself to truth, 'neutralizes itself, to be nothing more than a pure spectatorial gaze'.²⁶ The 'neutrality' Hountondji invokes in his critique of ethnophilosophy's cultural relativisms is based in presumptions he adapts from Kant and Husserl: reason is not reducible to the accumulation

of sensory impressions or of cultural habits. Emphasis on the necessary and universal (a priori) conditions of cognition and experience, however, opens the door to a frictionless idealism: the rough ground and bewildering diversity of the empirical world are sacrificed for the sublimity of coherence and order.

Hountondji's own writing bears traces of the intellectual and ideological imprint of the Cartesian style on the modern French university. He lavishes praise on his teacher Georges Canguilhem for the 'beauty of his writings – rigorous analyses, an austere style, and conceptual rigor'.²⁷ It is a style that brilliantly shimmers in Hountondji's own prose: a pithy, impacted form of expression that is seemingly effortless in its translucence. It's a style that resonates with that ethos of objectivity so prized in our 'professional' era. But precisely because it works so hard at performing its transparency, there is at the same time an antipathy in Hountondji's work to this very performance. It is no wonder, then, that Hountondji himself is contemptuous of rhetoric, dismissing his opponents as 'rhetoricians' and contrasting his own logic to their 'rhetoric'.²⁸ The paradox, then, is that for all of his contempt for 'rhetoric', Hountondji's rhetorical style is in tune with modernity's ideology of clarity and transparency as signature strategies of distinction.²⁹

It is in the light of his modernizing allegiance to a form of transcendental idealism, therefore, that one ought to understand Hountondji's fetishism of writing and literacy. Hountondji regards literacy as essentially a neutral medium for the acquisition and engagement of knowledge. He claims that his definition of philosophy is intended to be neutral: 'I wanted to take note of the fact of [African philosophical] writings, outside of any assessment of value judgment'.³⁰ It is not a particularly convincing argument, for his definition is structured around a series of oppositions favourable to his own position: 'philosophy' versus 'ethnophilosophy', 'critical written philosophy' versus 'spontaneous oral thought', and 'explicit' written texts versus 'implicit' oral utterances. Hountondji assumes that written texts are explicit, articulated philosophies by virtue of the fact that they are *written*. But what is written, of course, is often as implicit as what is spoken. That is, written texts are utterances which are explicit about some things, implicit about others, and necessarily rest on certain assumptions. It is therefore important to try to reconstruct how Hountondji is blind to the diverse forms of written texts and reduces them to a single manifestation: those that explicitly argue a case, generally in the form of a *book*. For Hountondji, in effect, the only philosophy is written, and the only

philosophical writing worthy of the name is presented as a book. This idea of the book as a stand-in for all written texts is itself embedded within a very particular representation of the medium as inseparable from another activity, namely reading. It is not just that books are assumed to automatically possess explicit or critical *traits*, but that this can only be assumed because they confer particular *skills*. Reading is metonymic of technique, and contributes to a modernising *technicism* – the fetishization of technique and, its corollary, the sacralization of technology. However unconvincing the series of leaps required to enable Hountondji's conflation of the written with the philosophical, it dovetails with the modern state's bureaucratic function of cataloguing, measuring, recording and, not least, accrediting.

Hountondji's claims of transcendental objectivity notwithstanding, it is clear that his critique springs from a deep vein of *moral* disapproval of ethnophilosophy. If there is one word that echoes throughout his *African Philosophy*, it is 'courage'. African philosophy, he states, 'may today be going through its first decisive mutation, the outcome of which depends on us [Africans] alone, on the courage and lucidity we show in bringing it to its conclusion'.³¹ For Hountondji, ethnophilosophy was symptomatic of a kind of dogmatic sleep of consciousness that his compatriots ought to be awakened from. As he elaborates in his intellectual memoir,

What I refused deep down was a philosophy in the third person [that] consisted in lazily taking refuge behind group thought, in abstaining from taking a personal position and from giving one's opinion on the problems to which, in its own way, this thought of the ancestors was a response. In place of this lazy recourse to group thought, I appealed for the intellectual responsibility of the thinker, of each thinker.³²

Hountondji's anger at ethnophilosophy for what he considers its extraversion – its orientation towards 'the West', its desire to prove that Africa was equal to Europe because of its own storied civilization – thus, after all, springs from a sensibility he shared with the ethnophilosophers: the quest for recognition. He dismisses the ethnophilosophical consciousness as motivated by a 'desire to show off' that 'grows increasingly hollow until it is completely alienated in a restless craving for the most cursory glance from the [Western] Other'.³³ Ethnophilosophy is thus faulted for its cringing desire for approval from the West. In the interstices of Hountondji's rhetoric, then, seeps not only anger but also *shame*. He thought that ethnophilosophy,

despite its flourishes about restoring African pride, heralded another era of African abasement: 'The same subservience, the same wretchedness, the same tragic abandonment of thinking by ourselves and for ourselves: slavery.'³⁴ Hountondji's broader polemical stance betrays the burden of this shame. His country, Benin, he argued in 1972,

was characterized politically by the loss of all meaningful sovereignty, by its international mendacity, servility in its relations with great or middle-level powers, its inability to keep to its internal and external financial commitments, and its 'creepy-crawliness' and obsequiousness.³⁵

Thus, Hountondji's rejection of ethnophilosophy's attribution of African philosophy to a collectivistic *mentalité* is as much prompted by moral scruples as it is an epistemological critique. Philosophical truth is only truth in so far as one can attribute it to individual agency. As he puts it, philosophy is produced

when every thinker, every author, engages in total responsibility: I know that I am responsible for what I say, for the theories I put forward. I am 'responsible' for them in the literal sense of the word, because I must always be prepared to 'answer' for them; I must be ready to justify them, to attest to their validity.³⁶

It is here that his notions of what it means to be an intellectual can be plumbed all the way down to Immanuel Kant. Kant, it will be recalled, defined Enlightenment in forceful terms:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another.... Laziness and cowardice are the reasons why so great a proportion of men, long after nature has released them from alien guidance, nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity, and why it is so easy for others to establish themselves as their guardians.³⁷

Though Hountondji's language is suffused with moral, even moralistic, sentiment, the idiom it speaks in is that of disciplinarity – an idiom, one has to remember, which is embedded in modernity's interpellation of certain classes and functions as 'professionals'. Hountondji's definition of African philosophy takes for granted the disciplinary divisions that are the norm in the modern university. He argues, for example, that

scientific method demands that a sociological document is interpreted first in terms of sociology, a botanical text (written or oral) first in terms of botany, histories first in terms of historiography, etc.

Well then, the same scientific rigor should prevent us from arbitrarily projecting a *philosophical discourse* on to producers of language which expressly offers themselves as something other than philosophy. In effecting this projection, Kagame – and Tempels before him, along with those African ethnophilosophers who followed suit ... committed what Aristotle called ... a *metabasis eis allo genos*, i.e. a confusion of categories.³⁸

The modernist intellectual stance that Hountondji cultivates, to use Michel Foucault's characterization, is that of the 'specific' rather than the 'universal' intellectual. To Foucault, the universal intellectual – for example, Jean-Paul Sartre – should be and has been replaced by the specific universal – exemplified by the American physicist Robert Oppenheimer. The universal intellectual is the 'master of truth and justice', 'the consciousness/conscience of us all'. The specific intellectual, on the other hand, works 'within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family, and sexual relations)'.³⁹

But one drawback to this stance is that its commitment to specialization and division of labour takes for granted or offers little critique of the categories through which it analyses the world. In other words, Hountondji does not seek to explore the manner in which the analytical categories he employs and the spheres (public, private, and so on) emerged historically. Moreover, his analytical categories fail to offer convincing accounts of the connections or articulations among the discrete categories and spheres – what early Marxism referred to as totality. This articulated knowledge is conceived here as, first, a delineation of the relationships among types of knowledge: university knowledge (in the forms of *episteme*, *techne* or *gnosis*), political knowledge (in the forms of *bie*, *metis* or *praxis*), knowledge within civil society (in the forms of *doxa*, *muthos* or *kerdos*); local knowledge (*nomos*); worldly or universal knowledge (*kosmopoliteia*).⁴⁰

The first of these considerations must centre on university knowledge. The ancient distinction between *episteme* (knowledge) and *techne* (craft or art) by no means instituted an absolute separation between these two forms. Plato and Aristotle both speak of a *techne* that may be interanimated by *episteme*, though both, regrettably, privilege *episteme* over *techne*. It was largely the legacy of Descartes – who declared himself certain of no knowledge but the knowledge that he could think (which then serves as a guarantee of 'methodical' or demonstrable knowledge more gen-

erally) – that drove a wedge between the two forms. Hountondji embraces what Pierre Bourdieu in another context termed 'logicism' – an attempt to found science on general *a priori* rules, but that in its idealism and romanticization of scientific practice falls into an idle scholasticism.⁴¹

In any case, the *episteme* versus *techne* divide, even in its ancient forms, may wrongly give the impression that different methodologies are *a priori* mutually exclusive or conflictual.⁴² Even worse, in its claim that one method is superior to another it leads to a pernicious and ultimately destructive 'arms race' for disciplinary cultural capital. Such struggles for cultural capital are not only provincial, but ultimately undermine the autonomy of intellectual practice in so far as they prevent the kind of constitutive practices – for example, disciplinary and cross-disciplinary and multi-perspectival knowledge – necessary for establishing a contextual (and therefore deeper) *rigour*.

Universities are, of course, not the sole spaces for the articulation of knowledge. Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy tends to conflate its 'spontaneous philosophy' with *doxa* and *mythos*. He thereby loses an opportunity not only for a more fine-grained critique of the different strains of *doxa* and *mythos*, but also the extent to which power relations are constitutive of what is legitimized as *episteme* and what is ruled out as *doxa* and *mythos*. As Steven Feierman has shown in his brilliant ethnographic study in the Shambaai, peasant intellectuals articulated a complex discourse that demonstrated a far more thoroughgoing elaboration of democratic theory and practice than the official discourse.⁴³ To be sure, the field of *doxa*, no less than that of *episteme*, ought not be romanticized. What are often described as 'civil societies' in Africa are quite often not so much shoots of 'grassroots community' activism but rather appendages of US State Department policy and fundamentalist evangelical churches' paternalism.⁴⁴

The same critique would apply to *mythos*. Hountondji's secularist commitments must stand, alongside that of the Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka, as one of his finest legacies to African philosophy and intellectual theory. Apart from ethnophilosophy's dissemination of the canard that Africans think as a herd, one of its most pernicious legacies was to legitimize the notion that African people are generally in the sway of religious or supernaturalist thought; indeed, that in their animism they are unable to make any distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The Kenyan theologian John Mbiti would carry on with this ethnophilosophical myth: 'African people do not know

how to exist without religion', he claims: 'religion is their whole system of being'.⁴⁵ Hountondji did more than anyone, in the field of philosophy, to expose such myths for what they were. And yet, here again, it is necessary to make distinctions. It is obvious, for example, that Hountondji's thought is bereft of any sustained engagement with African art, literature, music, film and architecture. Such an engagement might have offered him a far more subtle, more complex understanding of the different varieties of *mythos*, and perhaps even tempered his grammacentrism.⁴⁶

University politics

Hountondji's eidetic bracketing serves not only to valorize the primacy of philosophy, it also functions as a firewall between philosophy and politics. For Hountondji, this was not an entirely abstract discussion. His philosophy was worked out not only within an African philosophical discourse marked by feverish contention among rival schools of thought that had deep ideological divergences, but also within the constraints of living in repressive states that demanded fealty to the ruling ideology. In his intellectual memoir, Hountondji recounts his experience of teaching in universities in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) at the height of the dictatorship of Mobutu. On return to his own country, Benin (formerly Dahomey), he witnessed the seizure of power by a Stalinist junta. These experiences had a lasting effect on Hountondji's view of both politics and philosophy.

The fierce exchanges within African philosophical debate in the 1970s are best understood in light of the convulsions that were occurring in African states. Three schools were broadly discernible. The first were the traditionalists (such as the ethnophilosophers), who advocated for a reactivation of a 'traditional' African *Weltanschauung*. The major proponents of this school included Alexis Kagame and William Abraham. The second school were left-leaning nationalists. This school included Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere. The last school of thought are 'liberal' modernists like Hountondji and Marcien Towa, who advocated for universal Enlightenment thought.⁴⁷

Hountondji took on the rival schools of thought with brio. In his memoir he states that one of his main purposes in the 1970s was to 'put politics in its right place'.⁴⁸ For Hountondji, the materialist thesis, as exemplified by Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, was mistaken because of the different registers in which politics and philosophy operate. He states that 'the uncontested authority of the Russian revolutionary [Lenin], a midwife of history, and henceforth, indis-

pensable in the area of political theory and practice, did not necessarily give him comparable authority in the quite different field of speculative thought'.⁴⁹ If the place of politics was 'unity of action', the place of thought was 'free and responsible thought'.⁵⁰ To that end, and against Lenin's denunciation of idealism as reactionary, Hountondji celebrates 'the intellectual daring of Descartes who, in his quest for apodictic certainty, readily accepted the risk of madness and, through the argument of the dream, provisionally rejected all belief in the existence of bodies including his own'.⁵¹ Hountondji prefers Althusser's early conception of philosophy as the 'theory of science, or the theory of the theoretical science' to his later characterization of philosophy as 'class struggle in the realm of theory'. Oriented by its scientific vocation, 'philosophy does not merge with ideology any more than algebra or linguistics do'.⁵²

He levels the same sort of critique at Kwame Nkrumah's book *Consciencism*.⁵³ Hountondji objects to Nkrumah's notion that politics presupposed a philosophy. He finds Nkrumah's claim that idealism favours oligarchy while materialism favours egalitarianism to be 'arbitrary':

Our political choices stand on their own feet. If they need justification, it must be political justification, belonging to the same level of discourse and not to what is the completely different (*ex hypothesi*) level of metaphysical speculation.⁵⁴

In the context within which he offered his critique, at a time when regimes such as the one he had to contend with in Benin imposed 'ideological correctness' tests on intellectuals, Hountondji's intervention was bracing and intellectually stimulating. The dogmatism of the Stalinist regime in Benin was such that it prevented an appreciation of the depth of Marx's own texts, let alone those vilified as 'bourgeois'. As Hountondji put it, 'there is a danger that the time may soon come when, in the name of Marxism, we will be forbidden to read Marx'.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, in much the same manner as he does when he reifies disciplinary categories, Hountondji consistently takes for granted the categories within which his analyses proceed. In other words, he fails to offer an account of the *relationship* of philosophy to politics, including all the political oppositions that he establishes. This is true particularly in the case of his idea of 'Africa' and 'the West [*l'Occident*]'. Hountondji's memoir states repeatedly that the main aim of his critique of ethnophilosophy was to end Africa's 'extraversion'. What this extraversion consists

in he never clearly spelt out, but one gleans that it is primarily Africa's orientation towards the West; much of the intellectual work done in Africa is designed to solicit the approval of audiences in the 'West' rather than audiences in Africa. Throughout his discussion, however, Hountondji takes the existence of the 'West' for granted. In other words, he never registers the fact that the 'West' is a *political* rather than simply a natural kind.⁵⁶ It is, moreover, a specifically *modern* creation brought into being by the construction of Africa and the East as its Other.⁵⁷ Such a realization would have complicated Hountondji's sweeping claim that he wanted to 'demystify Africanness by reducing it to a fact – the simple and, in itself, perfectly neutral fact of belonging to Africa; by dissipating the mystical halo of values arbitrarily grafted to this fact by ideologues of African identity'.⁵⁸ But this is to be oblivious of the fact that the emergence of African identity only came about for political reasons. African identity only gains coherence when understood politically – it is certainly not because of any similarity in genes, culture, or even geography. In any case, it seems perplexing that Hountondji thinks of 'geography' as a value-neutral signifier. The designation of continental boundaries has always been decided by political configurations and the markers said to cut off one continent from another have not been so much 'natural' as 'naturalizing'.⁵⁹ Why should a geographical criterion be in any sense less arbitrary a foundation of identity than other criteria?

If the problem with Stalinism is its vulgar reduction of theory to politics, therefore, the problem with Hountondji's idealism is that he assumes that politics is in and of itself 'vulgar' by definition. After Kant and Husserl, Hountondji acknowledges a transcendental subject, the universal 'I think' of scientific conscious-

ness; after Althusser, however, he dismisses the *political* subject as nothing more than an effect of structure, an obedience 'interpellated' by ideology. The account of politics it paints is monolithic, given that ideology is conceived of as singular, and, ultimately, disabling of agency.⁶⁰ It is, in other words, a mechanistic and instrumental conception of politics.⁶¹ To be sure, Hountondji is rightly suspicious of reductive accounts of intellectual work as politics by other means, and was right to dismiss Stalinist suggestions that his Parisian *agrégation* proved he was an ally of the imperialist enemy. By taking his Stalinist opponents as representatives of philosophical materialism, however, he fails to engage a much richer and more complex Marxist corpus. As Raymond Williams argues, the notion of determination bears at least two senses: 'There is, on the one hand, from its theological inheritance, the notion of an external cause which totally predicts or prefigures, indeed totally controls a subsequent activity. But there is also, from the experience of social practice, a notion of determination as setting limits, exerting pressures.'⁶²

Of the *institutional* determinations that set limits, exerted pressures on his intellectual work, Hountondji again has little to say. And yet his work through the 1970s to the 1990s in universities across Africa, in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Cotonou, was a witness to some of the most wrenching changes in African intellectual history. These changes were spurred by the perfect storm of 'internal' and 'external' explosions that tore through African politics during these years. In the 1960s, immediately following independence from colonial rule, many African universities were geared towards the training of civil servants for the bureaucratic behemoth that would become the African state. This period saw the growth of some of the most acclaimed universities in the African continent such as Uganda's Makerere University and Tanzania's University of Dar es Salaam.⁶³ It was followed in the 1970s by massive contractions and convulsions of the world economy just as the African universities experienced an unprecedented influx of second-generation students. As the edifices of their institutions crumbled and they began to face rapidly diminishing prospects in the patronage machinery of the state, students and faculty in the African university system were increasingly radicalized. Universities exploded into open revolt and African states cracked down brutally on faculty and students. The 1980s and 1990s saw an even greater hollowing of the African university as the world powers imposed structural adjustment programmes on virtually every African nation.



The external pressures on ‘development’ were clear enough. African states that wrested political independence from colonial rule in the early to mid-1960s were even more completely absorbed into the circuits of global capitalism as the reach of the market now affected the furthest encampments of the rural populace. By and large this development initially fuelled economic growth as African economies found ready markets for what remained largely primary products (agriculture, minerals, oil), and as capital – packaged as ‘loans’ – flowed to African countries. This then changed dramatically due to two factors. Politically, the strife among the world powers led to the funding of proxy wars and *coups d’état*; in so far as narrow and exclusive African elites often had little broad-based support, they relied on ethnic and religious appeals to mobilize opinion, further exacerbating political upheaval. Economically, the global recession of the 1970s compounded the impact of internal developments. As Giovanni Arrighi noted, early economic growth in many African countries was ‘perverse’ in so far as it rested on ‘surplus absorption’ of labour into bureaucratic employment, the ‘primitive accumulation’ of ‘labour aristocracies’ and their transfer of this wealth abroad; the conspicuous mass consumption of these new labour aristocracies; and the continued reliance of African economies on foreign export markets for agricultural products.⁶⁴ After a decade of growth in many African economies, the mid-1970s witnessed a precipitous decline. The aggressive promotion of the Washington Consensus, which called for the rolling back of the state, led to the almost complete collapse of many economies in Africa in the 1980s.

It is in light of these developments that the sheer ferocity with which the ethnophilosophy debate was waged ought to be seen. Neither theoretical confusions (as Hountondji would have it) nor ideological divergences (as his rivals would have it) fully explain the stakes of the debate. The African university was being buffeted by the shrinking of its resources just as a new generation of students, its expectations now stratospheric, reached an all-time high. Hountondji’s critique was increasingly received in the atmosphere of a widespread ‘legitimation’ crisis that was as much epistemological as institutional and political.

The first ‘legitimation’ crisis was of a dominant analytical paradigm that can be described as the ‘modernization’ school. As African countries achieved nominal independence from colonial rule, this school of thought emerged touting an array of politically liberal reforms and programmes designed to help ‘developing’ nations ‘catch up’ with North American and European coun-

tries. For example, what was little acknowledged by Hountondji was the extent to which his assumption that ‘writing’ was superior to orality was resonant with the salvational role then being attributed to ‘literacy’ programmes and modern communications technology. Daniel Learner, whose *Passing of a Traditional Society* served as useful propaganda for the US projection of power in imperialized formations, was one of the most prominent promoters of these views.⁶⁵ According to Learner, ‘the media teach people participation ... With the spread of curiosity and imagination among a previously quietistic population come the human skills needed for social growth and economic development.’⁶⁶ Hountondji’s *African Philosophy* – which echoed some assumptions of this school – was published at a time when the modernization school was on the defensive. Its core thesis was not only under attack by a rival school of thought – the Dependency School⁶⁷ – but also as the Chicago school fought to replace the state with the multinational corporation.

The second legitimation crisis was more narrowly ‘disciplinary’. The emergence of the sciences to a position of dominance in the twentieth century had severely undercut the cultural capital that philosophy had enjoyed ever since the *philosophes* toppled theology during the Enlightenment. It is telling that Althusser and Hountondji’s claim for a privileged role for philosophy tethers itself to this hegemony by proclaiming philosophy’s role as an adjunct of science. Hountondji’s fetishization of methodological ‘rigour’, hand-waving about objectivity, and voluntarist equation of ‘consciousness’ with liberation are of a piece with this reigning scientism. It is notable, however, that Hountondji’s intervention was a rearguard struggle not against science – its hegemony was secure, hence their attempt to find a niche within it – but against the social sciences: principally, economics and sociology.⁶⁸

The third legitimation crisis was political. Hountondji’s pan-African claims were made in a context in which the African state’s legitimacy was under ‘external’ attack from neoliberal institutions demanding privatization and ‘internal’ attack from within by a variety of groups calling on citizens to pledge allegiance to ethnic and religious associations rather than to the state. *African Philosophy* was thus widely disseminated just as there were renewed calls – often by African elites seeking to mobilize support – for a return to ‘ethnic roots’. The World Bank’s demands that the African states cut back on their funding of universities in the 1980s was so devastating that George Caffentzis talked of it as a policy of ‘academic exterminism’⁶⁹ while Silvia Federici described it as

the intellectual recolonization of Africa.⁷⁰ The result was a severe curtailment of access to institutions that were already open only to a minority; the sporadic payment of faculty wages; untenable faculty loads with overflowing classes; a mass exodus of faculty to non-governmental organizations, industries and, sometimes, universities abroad; nonexistent support for research.⁷¹ The dominant ideology of neoliberalism was no less disastrous: a vulgar utilitarianism transformed the universities into factory floors of credentialing and little else.

The upshot is that Hountondji's own philosophical theory cuts deeply against his professed desires. Hountondji is right to want to seek autonomy for intellectual practice. And yet such autonomy cannot be secured through individualism and methodological fetishization. Engagement with history should be a dimension of any inquiry. Moreover, the autonomy of an intellectual field must begin from a radically self-reflexive critique of the *institutional deep structure* that is the condition of possibility of specialized knowledge.

African philosophy after Hountondji

Hountondji set many of the terms upon which the discourse on African philosophy now turns. In particular, it was Hountondji's achievement to raise the question of the relationship between *episteme* and *doxa* and to tie it to the question of agency. There are broadly two streams of thought that have emerged in the wake of Hountondji's pathbreaking work (though it is perhaps striking that such is the cliquishness of contemporary Africanist discourse that Hountondji has rarely been credited for anticipating many of the current debates within the field). The first, dominated by African philosophers primarily from the 'anglophone' countries, such as Kwasi Wiredu, Odera Oruka and Kwame Anthony Appiah, has attempted a nuanced recuperation of African *doxa* in order to help transform it into a genuine *episteme*. The second, represented mainly by 'francophone' African philosophers, such as V.Y. Mudimbe and Achille Mbembe, declare any African *doxa* lost or nonexistent.

In his book *In My Father's House* (1992) Appiah is concerned to articulate a pan-African identity that is not based on a mythical racial foundation. Instead, he argues for a cosmopolitan notion of identity based on rational solving of Africa's problems. By rational problem-solving, he is referring to the abandonment in Africa of a belief in the 'ontology of invisible things', by which he means beliefs in spirits, for what he takes to be a belief in science. Appiah, like Hountondji,

believes that the absence of an scientific conception of reality in Africa can be attributed to the lack of literacy on the continent. Noting the progress of literacy rates on the continent, Appiah urges what he calls the new 'generations of literate African intellectuals' to examine and analyse African traditions and produce 'new, unpredictable, fusions' of knowledge.⁷²

Even in this early book, many of the limitations that have attended much of Appiah's intellectual work are fully apparent. There are, to begin with, Appiah's Whiggish historiographical assumptions that posit literacy as a sleek vehicle towards the sunlit uplands of scientific and moral progress. He patronizingly urges African intellectuals to be tutored in the ways of the modern world: 'we [Africans] have the great advantage of having before us the European and American – and the Asian and Latin America – experiments with modernity to ponder as we make our choices.'⁷³ The implication is, of course, that other continents are modern while Africa remains 'traditional'. But what is most telling about Appiah's book lies in his conception of the political as essentially consisting of technical problems, as a matter for suitably educated technocrats to puzzle over and solve. Thus, there is little engagement with the historical gravity within which particular problems emerge and are contested, little understanding of the fact that many of the deep conflicts in Africa are powered by radically different *interests*, far more than by a lack of education or a simple matter of conceptual confusions.

If Appiah's vision represents a naive Whiggish view of progress, that of Achille Mbembe offers a radically different historiography of death, decay and decadence. Mbembe, in his widely acclaimed book *On the Postcolony* (2001), launches a series of bitter broadsides against, on the one hand, Western epistemes for their reductionist portrayals of African identities, and, on the other, nativist and traditionalist attempts at counter-discourses. He rails against various European constructions of Africa as a timeless essence, a paradoxically 'negative non-identity', a sign of the strange and the grotesque. Against these, Mbembe aims to 'rethink the theme of the African subject emerging, focusing on him/herself, withdrawing, in the act and context of displacement and entanglement'.⁷⁴ At the same time, he underscores the extent to which African *doxa* is entangled in power and corruption:

In the postcolony an intimate tyranny links the rulers with the ruled, just as obscenity is only another aspect of munificence and vulgarity a normal condition of state power. If subjection appears more intense than it might be, it is because

the subjects of the *commandement* have internalised the authoritarian epistemology to the point where they reproduce it themselves in all the minor circumstances of daily life, such as social networks, cults and secret societies, culinary practices, leisure activities, modes of consumption, dress styles, rhetorical devices, and the whole political economy of the body. It is also because, were they to detach themselves from these ludic resources, they would, as subjects, lose the possibility of multiplying their identities.⁷⁵

Two problems have confounded Mbembe's project. The first is that for all his railing against the reductionisms of Western and nativist discourse, he himself engages in a vicious caricature of Africa and Africans. For example, he claims that his book *On the Postcolony* aims to do

justice to what J.F. Bayart describes as 'the true historicity of African societies' – that is, the foundations of what might be called their 'true lawfulness,' 'true raisons d'être' and 'relation to nothing other than themselves'⁷⁶

as if there is only one history of Africa, one reason for its being, one Africa that could be apprehended as a thing in itself. Mbembe's reductionisms run systemically throughout his œuvre. He speaks of a 'postcolony', reducing vastly differing regions and discourses to one logic; and he sprinkles his book with categorical statements about a 'postcolonized subject'. Thus, for all his claims to historicity, Mbembe's project remains rooted in an abstract Africa and an equally abstract 'African subject', oblivious to both history and geography.

Second, Mbembe subsumes agency to a gestural and quietist politics. In a gesture that is now *de rigueur* in the academy, Mbembe avers that he has 'tried to "write Africa," not as a fiction, but in the harshness of its destiny, its power, and its eccentricities, without laying claim to speak in the name of anyone at all'.⁷⁷ Like many a postmodernist, therefore, he thinks it sufficient to disavow any attempt to speak for any group. What Mbembe is blind to, however, is an account of the groups, institutions and socialities that speak through *him*. It may well be, in other words, that he does not speak for any group, but by failing to offer a rigorous accounting of the institutions and socio-political fields that speak through him he ends up re-enacting the myth of the absolutely autonomous, self-standing subject.

Mbembe writes very much in the apocalyptic post-structuralist mode. His sentences bristle with rhetorical flourishes, spooling out in clause after clause of often

cryptic, sometimes histrionic oracular declarations. What this conceals, however, is the extent to which his writing is almost uniformly derivative. He denounces Marxist and neo-Gramscian talk of 'resistance' and 'counter-hegemony' in favour of a thoroughly Foucauldian project of documenting African subjects as engaged in the play, pleasure and enjoyment of an 'economy of death'.⁷⁸ So intent, however, is he on rejecting binaries about 'resistance' and 'passivity' that all he succeeds in doing is substituting a new vocabulary for the old – the approved words now being 'play' counterposed to 'resistance', 'displacement' favoured against 'location', and 'entanglement' valorized instead of 'domination'.

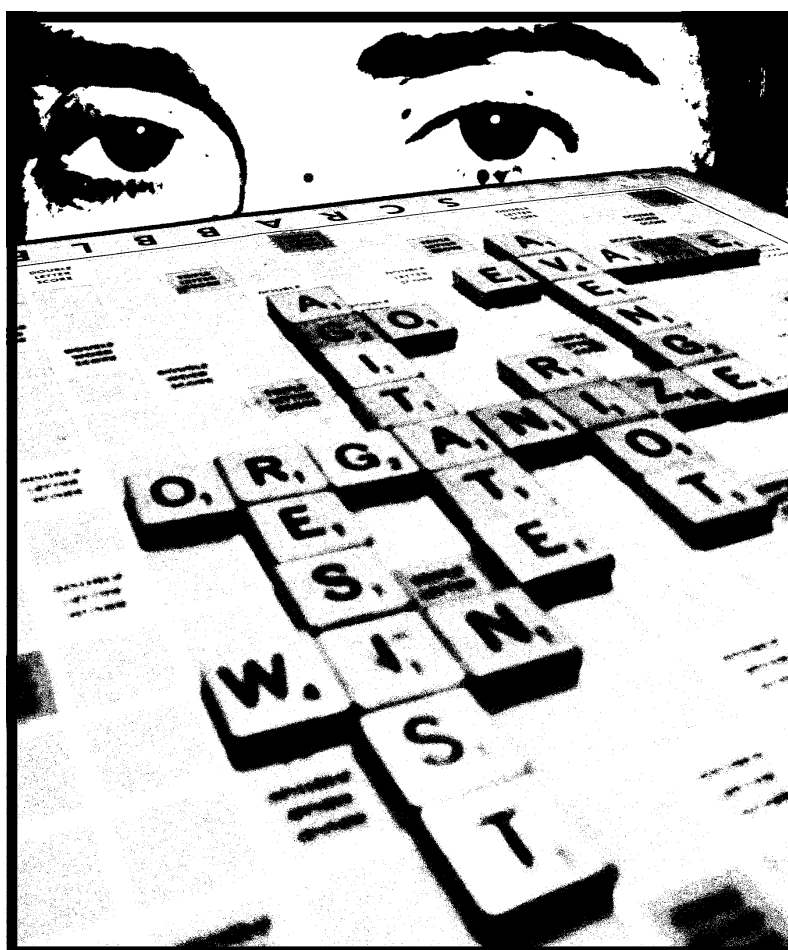
As an articulation of an intellectual habitus, therefore, Hountondji's enlightened modernism represents perhaps one of the most attractive and influential intellectual characteristics and styles in the African context. Considered alongside its most prominent alternatives, the 'traditionalism' of a Mbiti, or the Whiggish liberalism of an Appiah, or the postmodern existentialism of a Mbembe, Hountondji's intellectual power and brilliance are without compare. And yet thanks to his uncritical belief in several fetishes of the modern intellectual – rigour, objectivity, compartmentalization, specialization – Hountondji loses an opportunity to re-examine how the documents of civilization he has rightly championed are nonetheless also documents of barbarism.

Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.' Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1990, p. 53.
2. Antonio Gramsci, 'Intellectuals and Education', in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs, New York University Press, New York, 2000, p. 304.
3. Paulin Hountondji, *Sur la 'philosophie africaine'*, Maspéro, Paris, 1976; translated by Henri Evans as *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1983; hereafter abbreviated as *AP*.
4. Paulin Hountondji, *Combats pour le sens: un itinéraire africain*, Editions du Flamboyant, Cotonou, 1997; translated by John Conteh-Morgan as *The Struggle for Meaning: Reflections on Philosophy, Culture and Democracy in Africa*, Ohio University Press, Athens OH, 2002; hereafter abbreviated as *TSM*.
5. Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Foreword' in *TSM*, p. xi.
6. *AP*, p. 33.

7. Ibid., pp. 103–4.
8. Ibid., p. 104.
9. Ibid., p. 189.
10. *TSM*, p. 24.
11. Ibid., p. 47.
12. Ibid., p. 33.
13. *AP*, p. vii.
14. Ibid., p. 72.
15. Ibid., p. 104.
16. *TSM*, p. xvii.
17. Ibid., p. 31.
18. Ibid., p. 39.
19. Ibid., pp. xvii–xviii.
20. Ibid., p. 53.
21. Ibid., p. 53.
22. *AP*, p. 42.
23. Ibid., p. 34.
24. See, for example, T.J. Clark, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review* 2, March–April 2000, pp. 85–96.
25. *TSM*, p. 49.
26. Ibid., p. 46.
27. Ibid., p. 7.
28. Ibid., p. 194.
29. For more on distinction, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Routledge, London: 1984, p. 6.
30. *TSM*, p. 97.
31. Ibid., p. 71.
32. Ibid., pp. 189–90. In his memoir, Hountondji makes no bones about it: 'It was clear: I was a Kantian' (*TSM*, p. 90).
33. *TSM*, p. 101.
34. Ibid., p. 102.
35. Ibid., p. 115.
36. *AP*, p. 72.
37. Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?' trans. and ed. James Schmidt, in *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 1996, p. 58.
38. *AP*, p. 43.
39. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, Pantheon, New York, 1980, p. 126.
40. The literature on these varying forms of knowledge is deep and varied. On *episteme* and *doxa*, see for example Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*. On *metis*, see Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981; and James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 1999. On cosmopolitanism, see Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, W.W. Norton, New York, 2007.
41. Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. Richard Nice, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004, p. 104.
42. See John Guillory for a good critique of this view: 'Realism and antirealism espoused at the highest level of epistemological generality do not seem to me very useful positions to take in advance of specifying some way of talking about categories of objects, along with some particular object about which we would like to know. Consider what it would mean to establish in advance a realism or antirealism that would be equally adequate for all of the following objects: igneous rocks, God, adolescents, the color red, dementia praecox, poverty, a Sidney sonnet, desire, chaos, algorithms, dinosaurs, freedom, disability, status, C sharp minor, capitalism, gamma rays, honor, the Renaissance, democracy, race, menopause, beauty, foreigners, the culture industry, nations, grammar, mitochondria, alienation, global warming, disciplines...' John Guillory, 'The Name of Science, The Name of Politics', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 29, no. 3, Spring 2003, pp. 526–41.
43. Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison WI, 1990.
44. See, for example, James Fergusson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2006, p. 101.
45. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1992, pp. 2–3.
46. Hountondji's anti-mythological commitments imply not just an affirmation of science but a full-fledged scientism. In *African Philosophy*, he argues: 'If philosophy can also be of use, it is only by helping to liberate a genuine theoretical tradition on this continent, an open scientific tradition, master of its problems and of its themes, and also to the extent that it proves capable, once this tradition is established, of contributing in one way or another to its enrichment. That philosophy – that theoretical quest strictly hinged on science – will carry us a thousand miles away from the preoccupations which have inspired and shaped the myth of a so-called traditional African philosophy. It will get us far away from the metaphysical problems of the origins of the world, the meaning of life, the wherefore of death, human destiny, the reality of the beyond, the existence of God and all those insoluble problems which really belong to mythology, yet are the usual fodder of philosophical rumination' (*AP*, pp. 98–9).
47. I do not propose these categories as mutually exclusive. They often overlapped. Many nationalists, for example, invented and advocated for 'traditional African values' in the service of their nationalist goals.
48. *TSM*, p. 144.
49. Ibid., p. 145.
50. Ibid., p. 146.
51. Ibid., p. 145.
52. *AP*, p. 214.
53. Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, Heinemann, London, 1964.
54. *AP*, p. 154.
55. *TSM*, p. 148.
56. Silvia Federici, ed., *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Civilization and Its 'Others'*, Praeger, Westport CT, 1995.
57. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ, 1987.
58. *TSM*, p. 126.
59. Martin W. Lewis and Karen E. Wigen, eds, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 1997.
60. 'The whole existence of the structure consists of its effects, in short, that the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements is nothing outside its effects' (Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, New Left Books, London, 1970, p. 189).

61. Valentino Gerratano notes 'the strange indulgence initially shown by Althusser to the historical-materialist content of Stalin's "political science"' (Valentino Gerratana, 'Althusser and Stalinism', *New Left Review*, January-April 1977, 1/101-102, pp. 110-21).
62. Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*, Verso, London, 1980, p. 32.
63. The University of Dar es Salaam was the locus for the articulation of some of the most imaginative and critical thinking on African historiography and history and historiography, not least because of its interdisciplinary and internationalist orientation. Among the celebrated international thinkers at Dar es Salaam were Terence Ranger, John Iliffe and Walter Rodney.
64. Giovanni Arrighi, 'The African Crisis', *New Left Review* 15, May-June 2002, pp. 5-36.
65. Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1994, p. 10.
66. Daniel Learner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, The Free Press, New York, 1965, p. 412.
67. See, for example, Penelope Hetherington, 'Explaining the Crisis of Capitalism in Kenya', *African Affairs*, 1993, pp. 89-103.
68. Note, for example, Pierre Bourdieu: 'But I was no less strongly opposed to philosophy, whether it was the institutional philosophers who clung to the defence of the *agrégation* and its archaic syllabi, and especially the aristocratic philosophy of philosophy as a caste of higher essence, or all the philosophers who, in spite of their anti-institutional mood and, in some cases, their flaunted break with "philosophies of the subject", continued to profess the statutory contempt for the social sciences that was one of the pillars of the traditional philosophical credo – I am thinking of Althusser referring to the "so-called social sciences", or Foucault placing the social sciences in the lower order of "knowledge". I could not fail to feel a certain irritation at what seemed to me to be a double-game played by these philosophers, who would take over the object of the social sciences, while seeking to undermine their foundation.' Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. Richard Nice, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004, p. 104.
69. George Caffentzis, 'The World Bank and Education in Africa', in Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis and Ousseina Alidou, eds, *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities*, Africa World Press, Trenton NJ, 2000, p. 9.
70. Silvia Federici, 'The Recolonization of African Education', in Federici et al., *A Thousand Flowers*, p. 19.
71. See, for example, Megan Lindow, 'African Universities Face a Looming Shortage of PhDs', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 May 2008; also Silvia Federici, 'The Recolonization of African Education', p. 19.
72. Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 134.
73. Ibid., p. 134.
74. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley CA, 2002, p. 15.
75. Ibid., p. 128.
76. Ibid., p. 5.
77. Ibid., p. 17.
78. Ibid., p. 115.



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