SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Interview

PHILOSOPHY OF AFRICAN DECOLONIZATION

Interview with Professor Franklin Nyamsi,
President of the Africa Institute of Freedoms (Bamako, Mali)

Born on March 31, 1972 in Cameroon, Professor Franklin Nyamsi is a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Lille 3 and has successively taught in Cameroon, Ivory Coast, France, Turkey and now in Mali, where he founded the Institute of African Freedom. He has notably taught at the Universities of Lille, Rouen, and now at the Catholic University of West Africa. He is a member of the Orientation Council of the Institute of Black Peoples (*L'Institut des Peuples Noirs*) of Burkina Faso. Author of around fifty works of philosophy, literature, and political analysis, Franklin Nyamsi is an international speaker recognized for his commitment against neocolonialism, imperialism, and despotism in Africa.

His works are focused on the emergence and evolution of African philosophy; the political development of Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire; theological issues and animism; Western metaphysics; the phenomenology of the German scholar E. Husserl; the ethics of the French philosopher E. Levinas; and a critique of the approaches of the German existentialist M. Heidegger. In recent years, he has devoted considerable attention to the problems of social development in the member countries of the Alliance of Sahel States, including the challenges of international terrorism in the region and countering extremist ideology in the context of nation-building. In his interview, F. Nyamsi analyzes the main African intellectual movements, placing particular emphasis on the evolution of Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism. Characterizing the particular political development of African civilization, he cites the concept of Maât, which includes a unique perception of truth, justice, and solidarity. He provides a critical analysis of the prospects of capitalism and socialism in the African context.

Keywords: African philosophy, decolonization, Pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism, Maat, capitalism, socialism

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– Dear Professor, when we talk about African intellectual movements, Pan-Africanism is the first thing that comes to mind. How influential is this movement, and what does it entail?

– In the definition of its concept, Pan-Africanism is a political ideology developed in the 19th century by African intellectuals, activists, and political leaders in the United States, then in Europe, and finally, on the African continent from the first half of the 20th century [Adi 2022]. I am thinking here of figures like Henry Sylvester Williams, Marcus Garvey, Edward W. Blyden, George Padmore, W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Bob Marley, Kwame Touré (Stokely Carmichael), Aimé Césaire, Kwame Nkrumah, Alioune Diop, Amy Jacques Garvey, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Queen Mother Audley Moore, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Angela Davis, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Antenor Firmin, Benito Sylvain, Lamine Senghor, Garan Kouyaté, Jeanne et Paulette Nardal, Elsie Duncan, Aidi Bastian, among others.

This concept, a true symbol of rallying and liberation struggle, was originally produced in reaction to the condition imposed on Black people around the world by Western and Middle Eastern powers, in search of their first capitalistic accumulation to enter into force into the great global geopolitical duel. In the word Pan-Africanism, the term “Pan,” a Greek and Latin prefix, refers to this ambition of totality, universality, and globality. As for the noun “Africanism”, it emphasizes the global unity of black African civilization as a particularity signaling the black presence in the world, a particularity that is accentuated through the suffix “ism”, in a singularity that must be identified to understand the contribution of Africa to the current concert of civilizations of this world.

– In your opinion, who played a key role in the development of African self-consciousness?

– Unquestionably, it is the Senegalese philosopher, historian, and scholar Cheikh Anta Diop who is the master thinker of the current Pan-African renaissance. Through his work, which unearthed the great Negro-Pharaonic civilization of antiquity and which established an endogenous connection between this great African past and contemporary African civilizations, Professor Cheikh Anta Diop has endowed the African human, social, natural, and speculative sciences with a depth of meaning, space, and time unequaled before him. He showed that the self-understanding of the contemporary African cannot be reduced to specular dialogue with the East and the West but requires an older and more original re-rooting in the African civilizational paradigm itself.

It is in the wake of his work that that of professors Théophile Obenga [1990], Jean-Marc Ela [1994], Kalala Omotunde [2007], Mbog Bassong [2008], and many other researchers is registered and understood. My own reconceptualization of Pan-Africanism as an African metaphysics of the multipolar world is part of the same historical-theoretical dynamic.

– Is there a difference between the Pan-African concepts of the 19th–20th centuries and those of the 21st century? In an era of 54 independent African states, many contemporary African thinkers favor Afrocentrism rather than Pan-Africanism. What is the difference between these two approaches?

– In this first quarter of the 21st century, pan-Africanist thought is being renewed in contact with three almost concomitant phenomena: the end of the Cold War between the capitalist and socialist blocs, the disillusionment with the democratic model of Western origin that resulted in the triumph of ultraliberalism, and imperial terrorism [Nyamsi 2025].

Numerous works, at the end of the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s, revisited the long social, economic, cultural, and political history of Africa, with the aim of either rooting democracy in the African tradition or finding a new model connected to the African political genius itself, as the work of the Diopian school has unearthed it. The research of Molefi Kete Asante, Augustin Dibi Kouadio, Eboussi Boulaga, Théophile Obenga, Achille Mbembé, and Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, to name but a few, reveals this tireless quest for rooting the rule of law in the African critical tradition itself. This paradigmatic research renews the pan-African idea in several directions: identity withdrawal/African cosmopolitanism.

Afrocentrism is more continental than Pan-Africanism, which is more global. Afrocentrist thinkers focus on particularities of their singular cultures, while Pan-Africanism focuses on the African condition in the global world. But the two approaches are not necessarily contradictory; they can be complementary.

– What is the key feature of African civilization and African worldview?

– The profound singularity of African civilization is expressed, in its oldest version expressed in texts, through the ontological, ethical, and political concept of Maât [Assmann 1989], which means Truth–Justice–Solidarity. Kaulana Maurenga in his book below extensively studies the depth of this concept [Maurenga 2004].

Africa owes a proud debt to the great scholar Cheikh Anta Diop, who devoted his life and work, until his death in 1987, to resurrecting the paradigm of black African civilization asleep in the violent night of centuries [Diop 1954; Diop 1967; Diop 1981; Sadovaskaya 2024].

Cheikh Anta Diop is undeniably recognized as the renovator of classical African humanities, and, as such, his entire work deserves to be included in the fundamental corpus of pupils, college students, teachers, associative and political leaders, entrepreneurs, and thinkers from all disciplines in Africa [Diop 2007]. Fought but never defeated by racist, colonialist, neocolonialist, and imperialist thinking in the West and the Middle East, it was Cheikh Anta Diop who unearthed for us the three pillars of Maât to reintroduce them into the African scientific, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual debate. He restored Pan-Africanism to its true, immemorial consciousness.

Truth, the first pillar of Maât, is the notion that any human civilization must be based on the permanent quest for knowledge, the archetypal form of which is called “tradition” in all African languages. By tradition we mean here the transmission of the original creative Light from generation to generation through social, economic, political, and cultural works that precisely reflect the supremacy of spirit over matter, the animation of all that exists by the absolute divine soul. By asserting itself as a political ideology of African cultural singularity, Pan-Africanism therefore assumes itself as a metaphysics, a transcendent vision of the world, based on the project of reflecting the qualities of absolute being in all works of the human form. The root of Pan-Africanist thought is therefore absolute animism [Nyamsi 2018].

From this follows the idea that human existence must be devoted to the manifestation of the Good, the True, the Beautiful, and the Just in all things and people, in order to be, at the end of numerous reincarnations necessary for its perfection, renewed in the ancestral-angelic form in the divine pleroma, in order to participate, without relapse in space-time or matter, in the beneficial work of the continued creation of worlds, of which God is the concept.

– What about Justice and Solidarity in the concept of Maât?

– As a concept of Justice, Maât establishes the principle that the coexistence of the human species with all other living species and with nature in general must be done in a harmonious manner so that the necessary balance of the living is maintained, which allows human souls to cross existence towards the world of supernatural realization with the greatest chance of success. Cosmic justice, therefore, the foundation of the African animist ecology, the justice of Maât, is also socio-economic and political. It presupposes the establishment of the rule of law through the erection of just laws—adjusted to the need for socio-cosmic balance—which elevate humans to the dignity of the triple duty towards the Absolute, the World, the Earthly Community, and themselves, in an absolutely implacable hierarchical logic. Under these conditions, no human can evade their duties as humanity without fatal consequences, whether on the supernatural, physical, or socio-political levels.

For example, in Pan-Africanist metaphysics, I cannot decree that I prefer to be male when metaphysical nature caused me to be born in a woman's body, nor that I have decided to be without sex, when nature has clearly sexed me as a woman or as a man. Yet another example, I cannot decide that the human family is founded by sexuality between men or by sexuality between women solely on the grounds that this is materially possible. Even in the work of founding the nuclear family, the spiritual order, which has sexed humans into male and female, takes precedence over my mimetic fantasies. Finally, in its socio-political and economic vocation, justice requires a firm struggle by the individual and the community organized in the State against injustices of all kinds and forms, because it is only through this permanent struggle that the moral and spiritual legitimacy of the State is constantly strengthened. Pan-African political theory therefore draws on the Maât, the solemn obligation that traditionally founds the entire Black African civilization.

Maât also means Solidarity, which implies an African conception of values different from that of materialist civilizations. Values as good, as beautiful, as just and true, which promotes the sustainability of the We and its primacy over the I, the anteriority of otherness, and its moral superiority over subjectivity. And not the selfish and individualistic withdrawal into the ego, our animal functioning as a defender of territory. Solidarity supposes that I overcome the animal reflex of pulling the blanket towards myself and me alone in all circumstances. Solidarity is the concern for the other as the basis of the morality of the ego which thus becomes a Self. The Self is the self invested by otherness, obligated for the other. We become human by contracting sacred duties. Hence the importance of generational initiatory societies in traditional Africa. This point was particularly studied by Amadou Hampâté Ba in his work "Aspects of African Civilization" [Ba 1972].

– Leftist ideas have traditionally been popular in Africa, and a number of countries on the continent have attempted to build socialism. And although more than 30 years have passed since the collapse of the socialist system, these views remain popular.

– You are right, these ideas strongly influenced many Pan-Africanist thinkers and political leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba, Ruben Um Nyobè, Thomas Sankara, Nelson Mandela, Marien Ngouabi, Agostinho Neto, Samora Machel, Felix Moumié, Ernest Ouandié, Modibo Kéita, Ahmed Sékou Touré, Mouammar El Gaddafi, etc. It is that which embodies productivist

revolutionary internationalism, inspired by the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism. This ideological grouping, inspired by the historical and dialectical materialism of K. Marx and F. Engels and expressed in succinct form in the famous Manifesto of the Communist Party, advocates class struggle against the hegemony of capitalism over the working and peasant masses of the planet, with a view to establishing a classless society of cooperative workers who will pool their productive force in order to equitably distribute the fruit of their collective labor. Communism, also aiming at productivism as the condition of its survival, paradoxically joins through this objective hegemonic capitalism in a standardization of the planet in the three essential economic activities of production, distribution, and exponential consumption of goods and services produced by humans.

However, both capitalist and socialist productivism come up against the principle of cosmic ecological justice, as expressed in the African civilizational concept of Maât, because the infinite production of supernumerary wealth is not the foundation of African life but rather the realization of the values of Truth, Justice and Solidarity previously mentioned. It is undoubtedly, among other reasons, this profound metaphysical incompatibility, which generated the different so-called versions of African socialism throughout the 20th century.

Thus, Pan-Africanism, founded in the metaphysics of Maât, resists the two sides of capitalist and socialist political liberalism, which dominated the 20th century through their duel, even though they were deeply attached, in an admittedly different way, to the affirmation of the primacy of matter over spirit, typical of what René Guénon described as the “Reign of Quantity,” the foundation of contemporary materialist and consumerist drift.

The pervasive threat of world war in the contemporary era is only the obvious sign of the enormous influence of this metaphysical materialism and the productivism, which is its essential driving force. Ultraliberalism, an exacerbated form of productivism, is the triumph of a degeneration of human consciousness, which reduces being to appearance, respect to fear, wisdom to force, power to violence, and beauty to magnified chaos.

– Many African intellectuals are integrated into either English-speaking (USA, UK) or French-speaking (France) academia. Furthermore, often as a result of the brain drain, African researchers leave the continent almost permanently. How can this be overcome? How could the effective dialogue between African intellectuals be established?

– African intellectual activity clearly suffers from all the after-effects of the slave trade, colonial, and postcolonial alienation of the continent. African thinkers are still largely obliged to borrow from foreign languages, the colonial library, and the Western doctrinal corpus, the essential references from which they attempt to produce endogenous African thought. It is a real vicious circle that can only be broken by the reactivation of African languages as academic working languages, the criticism of the paradigms received from the colonial library, and the creation of a critical tradition internal to the African continent through academic networking, research institutes, and theoretical production events.

In this sense, the global digital revolution can help Africa of thought to make up for its lag in the integration and valorization of its endogenous scientific research. Finally, nothing could be sustainably envisaged without political revolutions, which make leaders

accountable to their people and allow the implementation of effective and efficient civilization policies.

– Is it possible to create influential network of social scholars in Africa in the 21st century? What role should the Institute of African Liberties in Bamako, which you founded, play in this process?

– The Institute of African Freedom works in the field of the endogenous transformation of Africa, for the well-being, sovereignty, and efficiency of African people. I think this will only be possible in the revolutionary space of the African States Alliance in West Africa or in a new Central African States Alliance based on the Pan-Africanist philosophy. This is easier where politics is also on the same path of freedom than elsewhere.

There must be a deep alliance between the scientific and the political African revolutions. I think the networks of cooperation between all African Universities are now the best spaces for this ambition. Only by confronting our works, we will open the path of a new African enlightenment. But this clearly depends on the union, one more time, of political and scientific Pan-Africanist revolutions.

Interviewed by Denis A. Degterev

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Интервью

ФИЛОСОФИЯ ДЕКОЛОНИЗАЦИИ АФРИКИ

Интервью с профессором Франклином Ньямси, президентом Африканского института свобод (Бамако, Мали)

Профессор Франклин Ньямси родился 31 марта 1972 г. в Камеруне. Он получил докторскую степень философии в Университете Лилль-3. Профессор Ф. Ньямси преподавал в учебных заведениях различных стран, включая Камерун, Кот-д'Ивуар, Францию, Турцию и, с недавних пор, в Мали, где он основал Институт африканской свободы. Его опыт включает преподавание в университетах Лилля и Руана, а в настоящее время он занимает должность профессора в Католическом университете Западной Африки. Кроме того, он является членом Экспертного совета Института чернокожих народов (*L'Institut des Peuples Noirs*) Буркина-Фасо. Автор около пятидесяти работ по философии, литературе и политическому анализу, профессор Франклин Ньямси – международный оратор, известный своей борьбой против неоколониализма, империализма и деспотизма в Африке.

Его работы посвящены формированию и эволюции африканской философии, политическому развитию Камеруна и Кот-д'Ивуара, теологическим вопросам и анимизму, западной метафизике, феноменологии немецкого ученого Э. Гуссерля, этике французского философа Э. Левинаса, а также критике подходов немецкого экзистенциалиста М. Хайдеггера. В последние годы его внимание сосредоточено на проблемах социального развития в странах-членах Альянса государств Сахеля, включая вызовы международного терроризма в регионе и противодействие экстремистской идеологии в контексте государственного строительства.

В своем интервью Ф. Ньямси анализирует основные африканские интеллектуальные движения, уделяя особое внимание развитию панафриканизма и афроцентризма. Он описывает уникальные особенности политического развития африканской цивилизации, представляя концепцию Маат, которая включает в себя особое понимание истины, справедливости и солидарности. Кроме того, Ф. Ньямси критически осмысливает перспективы капитализма и социализма в африканском контексте.

Ключевые слова: африканская философия, деколонизация, панафриканизм, афроцентризм, «Маат», капитализм, социализм

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