



## Decolonization and Philosophy

Not so long ago, Nazism transformed the whole of Europe into a veritable colony. The governments of the different European nations insisted on reparations and demanded the restitution in cash and in kind of the wealth that had been stolen from them: cultural works, paintings, sculptures, stained glass, have been returned to their owners. In the mouths of Europeans on the morrow of V-day 1945 only one phrase: “Germany will pay.”

—Frantz Fanon<sup>1</sup>

When the axe came into the forest, the trees said: the handle is one of us.

—Turkish proverb<sup>2</sup>

### I

What has been, to date, the character of African decolonization, and how is it related to the practice of philosophy? In engaging this double question, what I hope to do is to look at the actuality of decolonization—our postcolonial condition—and the way in which the obdurate residue of the colonial past still controls our present. Concurrently, I will also look at how the contemporary practice of African philosophy can contribute toward changing this situation.<sup>3</sup> In this double task, my efforts will be focused on exploring the reality of our postcolonial condition and the responsibility this

imposes on those of us engaged in the practice of African philosophy. But first let us begin by looking at philosophy's own lived self-understanding.

## II

In *Vocazione e responsabilità del filosofo*, Gianni Vattimo points out that arguments in philosophy are discourses aimed at "persuasion" and situated in the shared views of "a collectivity."<sup>4</sup> And so, he observes, "It becomes clear that it [philosophy] essentially concerns proposals for interpreting our common situation according to a certain line and starting from shared presuppositions."<sup>5</sup> In such "proposals" and deliberations we try to persuade each other by presenting arguments and citing authors we value and our counterparts in dialogue also value and appreciate. The authors we cite, furthermore, are not concerned with demonstrating that such-and-so is or is not the case based on indisputable facts,<sup>6</sup> but are themselves engaged in persuading each other and searching for shared interpretations of a "common situation,"<sup>7</sup> which has become—in view of lived exigencies—problematic and worthy of questioning. Our persuasiveness is, therefore, not merely a rhetorical ploy directed at others, but a self-reflexive and self-reflective critical exploration of our situation—the situation at hand—directed not only, or primarily, at others but more importantly at ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, to validate our respective interpretations of the "common situation," we cite to each other interpreters and interpretations with whose esteem or appreciation we agree. From this it follows that the truth we try to maintain, and the way in which we maintain it, is along the lines of arguing for a stance, or a perspective, in view of certain accepted reference points in terms of which we can then pose the critical question, "how can you still say this?"<sup>9</sup> In other words, asks Vattimo, "Is it not perhaps true that the experience procured for you by a reading of Nietzsche (or of Kant, or of Hegel) impedes you from saying things that perhaps at one time you might have said and sustained?"<sup>10</sup> That is, don't the insights secured in reading such and similar authors compel us to rethink the presuppositions, or prejudices,<sup>11</sup> that ground our outlook?

The affirmative response to this rhetorical question takes for granted accord in our words and deeds and assumes rigor and consistency as indispensable for the practice of philosophy; a kind of reflection that incessantly assesses and re-assesses itself in light of "all that which happens in human reality."<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, the "how can you still say this?" of philosophy, as Socrates patiently explains to Crito, would be "in truth play and nonsense."<sup>13</sup> In all of this, our efforts aim at validating and/or discarding our lived prejudices, our "shared presuppositions," by calibrating and synchronizing, accordingly, the line of sight that they make possible.

Philosophy is, therefore, focused on sifting our presuppositions or prejudices—the prejudice we live by—in view of the shared possibilities of our lived present. Consequently, it stands in very close proximity to history; it is the reflexive and reflective critical self-validation of its time, its historicity.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, the historicity in which a philosophic discourse finds itself furnishes the problems of concern and the context-background within which a philosophic discourse foregrounds its interpretations.<sup>15</sup> As Hans-Georg Gadamer tells us, the function of “temporal distance,” the role of history, is to allow “those prejudices that are of a particular and limited nature [to] die away” while making possible “those that bring about genuine understanding.”<sup>16</sup> Philosophy is thus a historically situated and saturated interpretative querying, sifting, and sieving of lived existence focused on, and open to, the possible in that which is.

This conception of philosophy, furthermore, is not a view that is idiosyncratic to Vattimo. It is the basic self-understanding of the practice of philosophy. In other words, as Hegel points out, “philosophy . . . is its own time apprehended in thoughts.”<sup>17</sup> It is the critical-reflective and persuasive exploration of the viable conceptions and ideas (prejudices?) of its lived moment in time. Kant, referring to his own era as “the age of criticism,” notes that, “everything must submit” to critical scrutiny and be “able to sustain the test of a free and open examination,”<sup>18</sup> which is, properly speaking, the practice of philosophy. This too, *grosso modo*, is what Nietzsche means when he states that “this art of transfiguration is philosophy.”<sup>19</sup>

In sum, philosophy is the practice of reflectively exploring grounding concerns that originate in specific cultures/regions.<sup>20</sup> To speak of “European” or “African” philosophy is to indicate the particular culture/region in and out of which “a specific type of intellectual activity (the critical examination [interpretative exploring] of fundamental problems)” is being actuated.<sup>21</sup> In like manner, the qualifiers “contemporary,” “modern,” “ancient,” and so on, indicate the time period or history (i.e., the historicity) in which this “specific type of intellectual activity” is being undertaken, in confronting and/or exploring the exigencies or concerns of its time.

With this understanding in mind, let us now turn to the historicity in which European philosophy served colonialism and indicate how it did so.<sup>22</sup> We will then examine the way the central and underlying assumptions and justifications of the colonial project were directly and indirectly or tacitly—and thus, that much more effectively—imparted to Westernized Africa. In this, colonial rule is seen and presented as a benevolent process of molding, or forming, which “justifies” itself retroactively, that is, by the civilizing effect it has on the colonized. In conclusion, given the character of this intellectual-historical context and horizon, I will articulate what I take to be the critical task of the contemporary practice of African philosophy. I

will specify, in other words, what has been abstractly stated in the preceding paragraph.

### III

Philosophy, in premodern Europe, as the handmaid of theology was focused on otherworldly concerns. With the coming of modernity, having secured employment with science, it became the attendant of conquest. In keeping with Europe's progressive and scientific understanding of itself, in contrast to the medieval past and the "backwardness" of the rest of the globe, philosophy mapped out the metaphysical (i.e., the grounding) presuppositions of this stance. The practice of philosophy, the most sublime realm of European culture, thus served as the theoretic buttress of colonial expansion. As Anne Hugon points out,

In 1788 [i.e., the heyday of the Enlightenment] a booklet was issued in London by the newly formed Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior parts of Africa (or the African Association). It stated [at its founding] that at least one third of the inhabited surface of the earth was unknown, notably Africa, virtually in its entirety. For the first time this ignorance was seen as a shameful gap in human knowledge that must immediately be filled.<sup>23</sup>

"But," as Hugon further points out, "geographic curiosity was not the only motive"<sup>24</sup> that inspired the efforts of the ascending intellectual-political classes of European Modernity.

The European elite—stirred by the discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton, the writings of René Descartes and Francis Bacon, and Denis Diderot's publication in 1751 of the first encyclopedia—was becoming increasingly fascinated by science and in particular by ethnography . . . Interest in the facts of the natural world was not, however, an end in itself. Toward the end of the 18th century, it was believed to be *the mission of human reason to achieve perfect mastery of the world by discovering the laws of the universe*. Thus the African Association, resolutely up-to-date in its optimism, proclaimed its conviction in the usefulness . . . of enlarging human knowledge through the exploration of Africa.<sup>25</sup>

It was in light of this newly noticed "shameful gap" and to remedy this shortfall in "human knowledge" that the Association advocated for "the

exploration of Africa.” There is here, it should be noted, a seamless confluence in the pursuit of knowledge and the conquest of Africa. Internal to this pursuit, furthermore, there is a *vicious* circular self-validating interplay between the way the “Interior parts of Africa” show themselves to be and that which the enlightened “European elite” projects, expects, and *finds* in these supposed remote regions.<sup>26</sup>

This gratuitous self-validation was anchored in the view that Europe or, more accurately, its intellectual-political elite had of itself: the view that “the mission of human reason,” which it saw as synonymous with its own historical calling, was to “achieve perfect mastery of the world by discovering the laws of the universe.” This mindset, as Sir Isaiah Berlin tells us, arose out of the belief that “human omniscience was . . . an attainable goal.”<sup>27</sup> The hubris of this stance encouraged a rather aggressive demeanor. Inebriated by the majesty of this grandiose undertaking, Europe objectified the globe as the terrain—the virgin soil—on which to inseminate and actualize true human existence. It saw itself as the incarnation of this truth and its worldwide escapades as the propitious process of spreading out, globally, this same truth.

In this manner, cocksure of itself and spurred on, enveloped, and encouraged by the grandeur of “the mission of human reason,” as Romano Guardini tells us,

For the new man of the modern age the unexplored regions of his world were a challenge to meet and conquer. Within himself he heard the call to venture over what seemed an endless earth, to make himself its master.<sup>28</sup>

Europe’s expansion, fueled by the economic dynamism of an ascendant capitalism, found scientific authorization in the enlightened effort to “master” “the unexplored regions of his world.” It mattered little that these regions were already inhabited by diverse populations slightly different, in physical features and complexion, than modern Europeans. Indeed, this very difference fueled “interest in knowing other men and other societies.”<sup>29</sup> It aggressively prodded and encouraged the development of new sciences and fields of study.

It has to be emphasized that “mastery” and “knowledge” were elements of an incessant, self-propelling, and self-augmenting discourse of and on learning. Within this frame, the more one knows, the more one knows how little one knows, and this calls for further mastery and, in turn, this calls for more knowledge. Each inter-implicative cycle—of knowledge and mastery—authorizes further expansion by reference to the need to keep on striving toward *the truth*. Not, any more, the truth of revelation but that of

science and “human reason,” focused on this-worldly concerns (i.e., mastery), encyclopedic in scope, and answerable only to itself.

“Enlightenment” after all, as Kant reminds us, “is man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage.”<sup>30</sup> And this “tutelage” is the lack of courage in using and following the guidance of human reason independently. The contrast here is between an incipient rationality (scientific reason) self-assured by the boldness of novel developments and discoveries, and the lethargic inherited prejudices of a religious past, now felt as oppressive, being discarded if not completely surpassed. In conjunction with this audacity, Enlightenment thinkers, in contrast to classical authors, had also a progressive/optimistic historical orientation. From their critique of the mediaeval past, they had appropriated a noncyclical notion of history as the progressive improvement of humankind. This concept, a secularized version of the Christian narrative of “fall” and “redemption,”<sup>31</sup> bestowed, on those who wielded it, a felt sense of superiority and concretely encouraged expansion. As Heinz Kimmerle puts it,

In the period of the Enlightenment Western culture began to regard itself as the climax of all histories which have happened on earth from the beginning of mankind up to the 18th century. The different lines of what had happened in the various parts of the world led to Western history and finally ended in the presence of Western Europe in the 18th century. In fact philosophers [such] as Voltaire and Turgot, Lessing and Kant spoke of one history only, and that was the history and prehistory of Western culture. The main idea of the conception of one world history was the idea of progress. History was conceptualized as [a totalizing unilinear] progress from an early beginning on a primitive stage to the climax of culture and humanism in the period of the Enlightenment.

In this linear hierarchal frame of things, as Kimmerle further points out,

Other cultures did not exist . . . other cultures just formed stages on the way to the presence of this period. For the conception of world history, which thus became possible, the price had to be paid [which was] that the different histories and cultures [i.e., other peoples] were reduced to the prehistory of one culture.<sup>32</sup>

In this way, the Enlightenment masterfully masked the mastery of humankind under the exacting mantel of the progressive advancement of a *singular* humanity.

Unlike the otherworldly orientation of the medieval past, the Enlightenment's stance of learning and progress was a motivating factor of conquest, in seeking knowledge. Within this frame, "what seemed an endless earth" called for endless undertakings. And the dark natives that inhabited this "endless earth" were depicted and seen as residues of a surpassed humanity to be conquered and studied, relics of earlier forms of *anthrōpos*—"native societies" to be utilized "for imperial purposes."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the "new man of the modern age" obliquely prompted by the economic energies and enticements of an ascendant—and thus vigorous—capitalism and snugly cloaked by gratifying and learned ethnic-political myths,<sup>34</sup> embraced his superior destiny.

All of this, to be sure, occurred as if it was meant to be.<sup>35</sup> For Europe, or its dominant intellectual-political elite, was mesmerized by the majesty of the *idea* of the "mission of human reason." In this context, oriented by this "mission," the philosophers of the modern West articulated differing perspectives with one core point in common: the absolute preeminence of Europe and the legitimacy of its globalization. Thus they laid out the metaphysical scaffolding on which the primitive past was to be dispatched. Their metaphysical pronouncements—in keeping with the ideological aroma of their day—were seen, and presented, as the most advanced thinking of the time, alert to the atemporal transcendent truth of humanity.

And so Hume, the great skeptic, was of the opinion that "white" was the only color of civilization and that humanity was constituted by differing types, or gradations, with the white race at the top.<sup>36</sup> Locke, who had direct economic interests in plantations and slaves, held the view that the divinely sanctioned improvement of the earth necessitated its conquest by those heedful of this authorization.<sup>37</sup> Kant affirmed that the "unsocial sociability" of human nature was such that progress occurred only through conflict and Europe was destined to establish "the law" for humanity as a whole.<sup>38</sup> In this regard, as Thomas McCarthy points out,

[I]n trying to make moral sense of history, he [Kant] ironically constructed an early version of the very rationale—biological and cultural—that would serve as the dominant proslavery ideology later in the following century.<sup>39</sup>

In keeping with the above, Hegel saw slavery as needed to civilize the African, and colonization was, for him, the globalization of *Weltgeist*.<sup>40</sup> Along similar lines, Marx's *Communist Manifesto* welcomes the colonial globalization of Europe. In various places in the first volume of *Capital*, he affirms the immature and/or underdeveloped nature of premodern humanity. In sync with this, in his numerous, detailed, and meticulously written articles on India—a placeholder for the non-European world as a whole—Marx

endorses British colonialism as a necessary civilizing project, in view of the anticipated communist future of humankind.<sup>41</sup>

It is imperative to keep in mind that the great minds of the West, in formulating their differing metaphysical views, relied heavily on the dubious literature of travelogues. To be sure, there was awareness at the time—as Kant tells us, for example—that based on such literature one could argue the equal validity of contrary positions.<sup>42</sup> And yet, the great minds of the West, Kant included, formulated their views in categorical terms and circuitously validated these same questionable narratives—the very narratives they utilized to confirm their speculations.

In this regard, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's outlook is a bit more circumspect, in contrast to Kant or the other great thinkers mentioned above. On the rather myopic information to be found in travelogues, at the end of a long note on those who report on their travels, Rousseau writes,

I say that when such Observers assert about a given animal that it is a man and about another that it is a beast, they will have to be believed; but it would be most simple-minded to rely in this matter on coarse travelers about whom one might sometimes be tempted to ask the same question they pretend to answer about other animals.<sup>43</sup>

With all his sarcasm, even for Rousseau, the champion of the “noble savage,” it is in the state of society—European society, properly speaking—that the humanity of the human is rightly established, by the acquisition of “moral liberty,”<sup>44</sup> which is superior to the “natural” condition of human beings in the non-European world. This felt sense of superiority, shared even by Rousseau, is thus the benchmark of Europe's colonial stance. It is the linchpin of the *social imaginary*<sup>45</sup> in and through which European modernity violently globalized itself.

Now, as Cornelius Castoriadis has observed, “there is . . . no superiority, nor inferiority to the West. There is simply a fact: namely that the Earth has been unified by means of Western violence.”<sup>46</sup> To themselves and—more important—to the age engaged in implementing it, the great minds of the West embellished this violent unification and made it appear as a necessity inscribed in the inherent “superiority . . . [of] the West” and sanctioned by the very nature of things human, historical, and/or divine. They thus served the function, or played the role, of intellectual—moral and metaphysical—sanctifiers of violence (i.e., normalizers of brutality).<sup>47</sup>

Explorers, missionaries, adventurers, and the “scientific expectation[s] of an educated public”<sup>48</sup> were all under the spell of this mindset. What captivated equally ordinary Europeans, missionaries, philosophers, adventurers,



and so on was the *idea* that their civilization was destined to rule, just as darker peoples were destined to be ruled. Their God was the true God, the God of Israel, just as everybody else worshiped idols and falsehoods. In this regard, it ought to be noted, at least in passing, that starting with “Gregory VII (Pope from 1073 to 1085),”<sup>49</sup> key internal changes in Catholic theology and the later and more radical transmutations that led to the establishment of Protestantism made it possible for Western Christianity to bypass Augustinian otherworldliness and focus on “Human work” as an “expression and revelation of the divine ideal directing it”<sup>50</sup> toward preparing the world for the second coming, “so that it would be worthy of Christ’s return.”<sup>51</sup> As Philippe Nemo further points out,

In the eyes of the Eastern Christian, the enterprising effort to organize the world is proof that God has been forgotten; for the Western Christian, it is the most sincere expression of our [i.e., the Western Christian’s] adoration of God.<sup>52</sup>

This restructuring in the thinking of Western Christianity was an opportune mutation that was interior to and, with the advent of modernity, nicely fit Europe’s colonialist proclivity. It concretely manifested itself in the fervor and zeal of missionary work, focused on converting heathens—a crucial aspect of Europe’s self-imposed task of civilizing the world<sup>53</sup>—in view of “Christ’s return.” All of this, it has to be noted, must have been felt as a heavy burden, but also as very gratifying. How could it not be? It is gratifying indeed—heavy as the burden may be—to think and to believe and to be confirmed in this belief, by science and religion, that the actuality of one’s cultural-historical existence is the proper measure of all that is truly human.

In this regard, the sharp cutting edge of Hume’s skepticism, or Kant’s or Marx’s critical bent of mind, for example, did not avail these great thinkers a detachment from the conventional prejudices of their day. Indeed, and ironically, it made it possible for them to see themselves as the “objective” enunciators of the grounding truth that made sense of the tumultuous “surface” political eventuations of their age. To give but one example, Marx, writing on India, states that “England . . . in causing a social revolution in Hindustan, was actuated . . . by the vilest interests, and was stupid”<sup>54</sup> in its manner of enforcement. But, all of this surface tumultuousness is of little consequence. What matters is the question, “can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia?”<sup>55</sup> In other words, vile and “stupid” as they may be, these actions are justified by the *telos* of a higher purpose (i.e., mankind’s “destiny”). Violent conquest—and all that goes with it—is thus made palatable by the workings of the dialectic internal to the self-actuation of “mankind fulfill[ing] its destiny.” It should

be noted in this regard that “mankind,” be it in Marx as in all the other great thinkers of the West, is an abstraction that is always thought of (i.e., specified/concretized) by reference to the West.

In all of this, to be sure, there was also at work a cynical and demonic orientation keenly focused on wealth and plunder. As J. H. Parry points out, for example, “Bernal Díaz, frankest of *conquistadores*, wrote that he and his like went to the Indies ‘to serve God and His Majesty, to give light to those who were in darkness, and to grow rich, as all men desire to do.’”<sup>56</sup> But, even in the blunt words of Díaz, “grow[ing] rich” is placed within the larger, more generous and pious context of serving God and giving “light to those . . . in darkness.” Indeed, plunder always takes place under wraps! As James Baldwin has pointedly remarked,

So that . . . when I talk about colonialism—which is also a word that can be defined—it refers to European domination of what we now call underdeveloped countries. It also refers, no matter what the previous colonial powers may say, to the fact that these people entered those continents not to save them, not, no not, to bring the Cross of Christ or the Bible—though they did; that was a detail. And still less to inculcate into them a notion of political democracy. The truth is that they walked in and they stayed in, and they recklessly destroyed whatever was in their way, in order to make money. And this is what we call the rise of capitalism, which is a *pre-phase* covering an eternity of crimes.<sup>57</sup>

Or, as A. J. Baker tells us, “The young conscript soldiers who sailed from [Fascist] Italy [to invade Ethiopia] in 1935 sincerely believed” in part that “they were going on a civilizing mission to a country oppressed by a feudal regime.”<sup>58</sup> To be sure, land for poor peasants, profits for industrialists, and the greater glory of Italy, its “place in the sun,” were all important motivating factors in Fascist war propaganda, but always cloaked by lofty and disinterested ideals.<sup>59</sup> As Father Placide Tempels, a missionary priest, put it in 1945, “It has been said that our civilizing mission alone can justify our occupation of the lands of uncivilized peoples.”<sup>60</sup> It is to this cover, and all that it conceals, that the great minds of the West render effective metaphysical-moral service. It should be noted, in passing, that there is here at work the obliquely self-deceiving mechanism of “bad faith,” a duplicitous fraudulence, in “good faith” about itself.<sup>61</sup>

This duplicitous frame of mind, furthermore, is not merely a relic from the remote past. In textbooks, novels, movies (*Out of Africa*, 1985), and in the commonsensical understanding of ordinary Westerners, the colo-

nial project—on balance—is viewed as having benefited the colonized. The exploitation of colonies, as D. K. Fieldhouse maintains, for example, in a textbook published in 1966, is a myth.<sup>62</sup> And “although ‘pacifying’ armies were often barbarous in their methods . . . conquest was quickly followed by civilized methods of government.”<sup>63</sup> The effect of these remarks—intended or not—is to suggest that only ingrates, when all is said and done, could possibly fail to notice the beneficial effects of colonial rule. Indeed, as Chinua Achebe tells us, he was chided as “an ungrateful upstart of a native”<sup>64</sup> by an English reviewer when *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. Achebe is, without a doubt, an ingrate. We shall soon meet others who in gratitude perpetuate—as our postcolonial condition—the odious colonial past.

#### IV

Thus far, we have been looking at how Europe, in actuating its modernity, enthralled by its own self-image, subjected the globe. This it did in “good faith,” that is, in the ardent belief that its conquest of the world was a vital service to humankind. As Edward W. Said puts it,

[W]hat distinguishes earlier empires, like the Roman or the Spanish or the Arabs, from the modern [colonial] empires, of which the British and French were the great ones in the nineteenth century, is the fact that the latter ones are systematic enterprises, constantly reinvested. They’re not simply arriving in a country, looting it and then leaving when the loot is exhausted . . . modern empire requires, as Conrad said, an *idea of service*, an *idea of sacrifice*, an *idea of redemption*. Out of this you get these great, massively reinforced notions of, for example, in the case of France, the “*mission civilisatrice*.” That we’re not there to benefit ourselves, we’re there for the sake of the natives.<sup>65</sup>

Mantled by the *idea*, the end of the nineteenth century witnessed Europe’s global ascendancy and the balkanized subjection of Africa.<sup>66</sup> In shouldering its “heavy” responsibility to the rest of us, “The White Man’s Burden,”<sup>67</sup> in Rudyard Kipling’s memorable words, Europe generously used force “but much more important . . . than force,” as Said further points out, “was the *idea* inculcated in the minds of the people being colonized that it was their *destiny* to be ruled by the West.”<sup>68</sup> Colonial rule utilizing a violent pedagogy—the strenuous hard work of missionaries and benevolent educators<sup>69</sup>—firmly ingrained in the colonized this *destiny*. It chiseled into their heads the *idea* of Western supremacy. In doing so it molded/originated a stratum, or layer of people, Westernized Africans<sup>70</sup> who—having been

formed by Europe's imperious gaze—see themselves and their place in the world in these terms. Europe converted those sections of the subjugated it Westernized to the view that their subjection was a necessity if their territories were to progress and develop and become places of civilized human habitation.

It hammered into their heads the providential and beneficial nature of their subjection. It firmly inscribed in their consciousness—subliminally and explicitly—the civilized/uncivilized dichotomy and persuaded them of their appalling default within the scope of this all-engulfing distinction. And so, in this circuitous manner, violent *de facto* dominance secured *de jure* hegemonic acceptability and legitimation.<sup>71</sup> As Basil Davidson points out,

[M]ost Africans in Western-educated groups . . . held to the liberal Victorian vision of civilization kindling its light from one new nation to the next, drawing each within its blessed fold, long after the local facts depicted a very different prospect.<sup>72</sup>

Having accepted the self-proclaimed European civilizing idea, in 1901 for example, Angolans living in Lisbon published a protest against Portuguese misrule of their country. They noted that “Portugal had conquered Angola centuries earlier . . . but [had] done nothing for the people’s welfare.” To this day “‘the people remain brutalized, as in their former state,’ and such neglect was an ‘outrage against civilization.’”<sup>73</sup> What we have here, ironically enough, is an immanent critique, by Westernized Africans, of the colonial idea in its failure to implement the destiny it, itself, prescribes. The categories of this internal critique are the desirability of civilization—in the singular—and the necessity of surpassing African backwardness.<sup>74</sup> In this, it is implicitly understood and explicitly conceded that precolonial Africa was immersed in “darkness.”

It should be obvious, by now, that the effectiveness of this critique depends on the internalization—as an “objective fact”—of the colonial perspective. As we saw in section III above, this originates in modern Europe’s social imaginary, grounded in the impossible claim of the Enlightenment that it is possible to “achieve perfect mastery of the world” (note 25). The Westernized African reared and educated in mission schools—and even more, the African who lives in urban centers, domestic servants, chauffeurs, conscript soldiers, shoeshine boys, the African “schooled” by his/her close proximity to white settlers, “learned” by proxy, by “osmosis”—is in awe of this conceited *image*. S/he takes it to be the unvarnished truth.

Colonial or mission school rearing and, even more, the “education” of the white urban centers (i.e., the education of the “streets”) inculcates, cultivates, and nurtures in the taste, common sense, and the quotidian prac-

tical judgment of the subjected an appreciation for all things Western, in tandem with weeding out any sense of the value of things African and/or local. Such education positively directs the subjugated toward all things foreign while aptly reinforcing its “lessons” by the violence at its command. As Tempels tells us,

The technological skill of the white man impressed the Bantu [i.e., the African]. The white man *seemed* to be the master of great natural forces. It had, therefore, to be admitted that the white man was an elder, a superior human force, surpassing the *vital force* of all Africans.<sup>75</sup>

Colonial education mystifies. It nurtures this *seeming*. It presents the workings and achievements of science as effects of the superiority of “the white man.” It presents—implicitly and explicitly, directly and indirectly, and thus tacitly and more effectively—science, European religions and languages, European ways, and so on as occult qualities that emanate from “whiteness”: indicators of the intrinsic superiority of the West. It convinces its pupils that “whiteness rubs off,” that they can become—if not white—like the whites. And “the vital force”—the effectiveness—of the colonizer’s military hardware (e.g., the Maxim gun) concretely ensures that this mystified acclaim does not waver in its deference. In this way, the normative claims of colonial rule—the imposed order of life—are firmly ingrained in and through the ordinary interactions of daily life, in the subjected psyche and imagination of the “native.” As Ngugi wa Thiong’o points out,

The coming of Christianity . . . set in motion a process of social change, involving the rapid disintegration of the . . . frame-work of social norms and values by which people formerly ordered their lives . . . The evidence that you were saved was not whether you were a believer in and follower of Christ, and accepted all men as equal: the measure of your Christian love and charity was in preserving the outer signs and symbols of a European way of life; whether you dressed as Europeans did, whether you had acquired European good manners, liked European hymns and tunes, and of course whether you had refused to have your daughter circumcised.<sup>76</sup>

The Westernized African is indeed an extrovert. His/her categories of thought are controlled, from within, by that which is exterior and foreign to the local setting. S/he enacts and lives the life of a “half-caste” who intuitively/tacitly and incessantly regrets the half of his/her “caste” that is

the indigent-indigenous society and is grateful for the Other, which forms and indeed validates—in his/her own eyes—her/his own proper humanity. Such a person is a being formed by incessant and ongoing self-scorn, that is, an interiorized servile deferential awe of the Other—the true template of what it means to be human. Such a person is a *replicant*.<sup>77</sup>

This, then, is what constitutes the operative internalized “pretext”<sup>78</sup> (i.e., the disappointed expectation of beneficial effects to be secured from European rule by the rightly conquered primitive society) that explicitly condones and excuses conquest. This consenting to, or accepting of the “pretext” of the *idea*, is the “ideological pacification”<sup>79</sup> of the colonized. It is the concrete intellectual-cultural subjection, correlate to the violent-military pacification,<sup>80</sup> which inaugurates the presence of Europe in Africa. It is, in plain language, as we shall soon see, the creation of grateful natives, replicants, who unlike the ingrate Achebe, affirm—as an “objective truth”—the colonial formation/molding that constitutes their insalubrious being.<sup>81</sup>

As Fanon points out, “In the colonial context, the colonist’s work of breaking-in the colonized is not finished until the latter recognizes in a loud and intelligible voice the supremacy of white values.”<sup>82</sup> The colonial project fulfills itself by breaking the indigenous allegiance to aboriginal values and by enforcing a willing acceptance of its claimed superiority.<sup>83</sup> What is broken is the internal cohesion of a culture-history, the adherence of the subjective incarnations of a culture (i.e., human beings) to the objectified-institutional forms of said culture. From the objectified forms of Spirit, to use Hegelian language, is divorced the living substance (i.e., human beings) in whose flesh and bones a culture-history (i.e., Spirit) institutes and sustains itself. Once broken, this culture-history is reduced to a deracinated existence: to being nothing more than the discarded relic—the empty husk—of a defeated heritage.

This is what is achieved by the forming or molding effect of colonial rule—the enduring psychic/cultural damaging of the subjected: actuated by undermining their sense of self and history; undermining the ethos of the indigenous culture-history; stagnating and tangibly mummifying<sup>84</sup> its once living forms of ek-sistence.<sup>85</sup> Long after the end of formal colonial rule, this “breaking-in” goes on paying handsome dividends to the West. As if ordained by nature, it institutes the ongoing and self-effacing perpetual replication of the *periphery*; that segment of the world referenced—always—in view of the *center*. In other words, that segment concretely constituted, in its lived self-awareness, by the heritage of its defeats.

## V

To date, the most enduring legacy of colonialism has been this broken replicant segment of African society, which has internalized the colonial

*idea* of human existence and history. This is the segment that rules postcolonial Africa. Not grounded in local histories but in the residue of colonial Europe, it has as the touchstone of its existence what lies beyond its shores. This is what Fanon refers to as the defense of the “Greco-Latin pedestal.”<sup>86</sup> But what exactly does this mean? Let us, by way of an example, look at a prominent case of such a defense.

Léopold Sédar Senghor, writing in 1960—the year of Africa—ardently affirms, “Let us stop denouncing colonialism and Europe. . . . To be sure, conquerors sow ruin in their wake, but they also sow ideas and techniques that germinate and blossom into new harvests.”<sup>87</sup> But what exactly does this mean? Senghor explains at length and in detail:

When placed again in context, colonization will appear to us as a necessary evil, a historical necessity whence good will emerge, but on the sole condition that we, the colonized of yesterday, become conscious and that we will it. Slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and colonialism are the successive parturitions of History, painful like all parturitions. With the difference that here the child suffers more than the mother. That does not matter. If we are fully conscious of the scope of the *Advent*, we shall cease to inveigh against it; we shall be more attentive to contributions than defects, to possibilities of rebirth rather than to death and destruction. Without the deaths, without the Arab and European depredations, no doubt the Negro Africans and Berbers would by now have created more ripe and more succulent fruits. I doubt that they would have caught up so soon with the advances caused in Europe by the Renaissance. The evil of colonization is less these ruptures than that we were deprived of the freedom to choose those European contributions most appropriate to our spirit.<sup>88</sup>

Having colonized Africa, Europe dislocates the symmetry of its existence and re-forms it in and through the hegemony of the *idea*. What speaks in and through Senghor is thus the educational cultural formation (i.e., *Bildung*) of the colonial period (i.e., modern Europe’s global projection). To borrow Said’s words, “we’re not there to benefit ourselves, we’re there for the sake of the natives.” This is the view that is here presented, by a grateful *évolué*—a replicant—as the condition of the possibility for future favorable advances, “whence good will emerge.” Provided that “we, the colonized of yesterday, become conscious and that we will it,” that *we accept*, in other words, the *truth* that in order to secure “the advances caused in Europe by the Renaissance” such “death and destruction” was necessary. Indeed! To the contrary, as the founding father of Tanzania, President Julius K. Nyerere, informs us,

At independence, Tanzania or as it was then called, Tanganyika (a country four times the size of Great Britain) had approximately 200 miles of tarmac road, and its 'industrial sector' consisted of six factories—including one which employed 50 persons. The countries which had sizeable Settler or mineral extraction communities (such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia or Congo) had strong links with the world economy, but their own development was entirely concentrated on servicing the needs of the settlers or the miners in one way or another. Again, despite the Education and Health services provided by some Christian Missionaries and later begun by colonial governments, at independence less than 50% of Tanzanian children went to school—and then for only four years or less; [and] 85% of its adults were illiterate in any language. The country had only two African engineers, 12 Doctors, and perhaps 30 Arts graduates, I was one of them.<sup>89</sup>

This can hardly be considered as catching up with "the advances caused in Europe by the Renaissance." Besides, in view of the massiveness of the devastation precipitated by colonial conquest, one could respond to Senghor by repeating Albert Memmi's rhetorical question:

How can one dare compare the advantages and disadvantages of colonization? What advantages, even if a thousand times more important, could make such internal and external catastrophes acceptable?<sup>90</sup>

But beyond Memmi's rhetorical question, and Nyerere's marshaling of evidence, it is necessary to emphasize that Senghor's way of "seeing" falls squarely within the confines of the idea which informs and directs colonial subjection. He is, in effect, the evidence of the proof.

In his use of the childhood metaphor, in his endorsement of suffering in order to secure future benefits, in his view that colonialism is "a historical necessity whence good will emerge," in advising attentiveness to colonial contributions without ever decrying all that Africa lost in being enslaved and colonized, in his singular and totalizing conception of history implicit in the notion of catching up "with the . . . Renaissance," in his eagerness to "choose" from "European contributions," in all of this, Senghor faithfully replicates the language of "the idea," he defends the "Greco-Latin pedestal." He dotingly parrots, as his own, the self-image of the idea. This is what makes him a replicant—in contradistinction to Achebe, Nyerere, or Cabral, for example.



His thinking is inscribed within the confines of “la mission civilisatrice,” the conceited self-image of modern Europe—globally projected—that it is the destiny of non-Europeans “to be ruled by the West” (note 68). He is focused on “European contributions” and not the devastations Baldwin refers to as, “a pre-phase covering an eternity of crimes” (note 57). Nor is Senghor concerned with “reparations,” as Europe was, soon after its own experience of being colonized.<sup>91</sup> His sole concern is with choosing “those European contributions most appropriate to our spirit.” But “our spirit,” does it not have its own contributions to make?

With most of the founding fathers of independent Africa—memorialized by Afework Tekle’s mural in Africa Hall, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)—Senghor is an excellent example of what Fanon means when he says that colonialism completes its “work of breaking-in” the colonized only when the latter extols “white values.” Senghor is not sparing in his praise, so long as “colonization” is “placed . . . in context.” But, isn’t this the logic of the idea? Isn’t this “la mission civilisatrice”? The idea and the destiny it prescribes structure—from within—the mindset of replicant Africa. In Senghor, our prime example, it directs the logic of his thinking. This, then, is what Said refers to as “the epistemology of imperialism.”<sup>92</sup>

Western philosophy, in its service to colonialism (section III), establishes the grounding core of this epistemology. In conjunction with colorful travelogues—both on the level of common sense and learned opinion—it institutes the centrality of Europe. It constitutes, verifies, and fabricates a “knowledge” of Africa that confirms the socioeconomic and political setup of its framing. In the guise of describing and narrating it authorizes and validates. This it does with a “clear and clean conscience” for it is, itself, beguiled by its own self-deluding image of itself.

As Achebe has noted, there is “a four-hundred-year period from the sixteenth century to the twentieth” of abusive writing on Africa which has “developed into a tradition with a vast storehouse of lurid images to which writers went again and again through the centuries to draw ‘material’ for their books.”<sup>93</sup> The contents of this “storehouse” sedimented in the *Bildung* of Westernized Africa, and reinforced by ongoing metaphysical backing, is at the core of the “alienated discourse and self-identity”<sup>94</sup> of this broken/replicant segment of African society. This “storehouse of lurid images,” which finds its ultimate anchorage and/or justification in the metaphysical fabrications of the great minds of the West, institutes the “normal discourse,”<sup>95</sup> the presuppositions and grounding prejudices, of the “epistemology of imperialism.”

In Senghor and the Westernized stratum of African society he belongs to, we have a sector of society that thinks of Africa, and itself, in colonial

terms. Indeed, as Kwasi Wiredu has noted, we are in dire need of “conceptual decolonization.” But this cannot mean that we merely revert to thinking in our “own African languages.”<sup>96</sup> The present reality of Africa is hybrid. It is, therefore, the content and composition of this hybridity that we must challenge, explore, and concretely sift through. This we can do by critically engaging and de-structuring on the level of ideas the colonial project, “the epistemology of imperialism,” that controls us from within.

As we saw earlier with Vattimo (section II), philosophy is a critically focused exploring of ideas (i.e., of prejudices and presuppositions) in light of the exigencies of our lived “common situation.” In this, as Gadamer tells us, “philosophical thinking . . . consists in making what we already know another step more conscious.”<sup>97</sup> In what remains of this chapter, we will do just that: explore further what we “know” to be the obdurate residual source of the debilitating predicament of our postcolonial condition.

## VI

By 1960, most of Africa had attained independence. The 1970s witnessed the end of Portuguese-NATO colonialism.<sup>98</sup> And the early 1990s—with the demise of apartheid South Africa and the victorious consummation of the Eritrean Independence Struggle<sup>99</sup>—finally saw the fulfillment of Africa’s age-old struggle for political sovereignty. It is imperative to remember that, at the time, as it was occurring, this was not something that was given universal acclaim.

In 1960, a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly calling for the independence of all colonies was opposed by every European colonial power—Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium and Spain—plus the U.S. and South Africa.<sup>100</sup>

It was, therefore, against tremendous odds that independence was secured. This, however, should not be understood to mean that, at independence, radical agendas were established at the constituting centers of the newly independent states. Quite to the contrary, in more cases than not, this was a process through which—directly and/or indirectly—the substantive core of independence was effectively eroded. Formal sovereignty was secured and concurrently diluted (i.e., emptied of anything beyond form). As Claude Ake accurately points out,

With a few exceptions, the gaining of independence was not a matter of the nationalists’ marshaling forces to defeat colonial regimes. More often than not, it was a matter of the colonizers’

accepting the inevitable and orchestrating a handover of government to their chosen African [replicant] successors, successors who could be trusted to share their values and be attentive to their interests. This approach did not succeed in all places where decolonization was peaceful, much less where it was occasioned by revolutionary struggle. But on the whole . . . independence in Africa was rarely the heroic achievement it was made out to be; it was often a convenience of deradicalization [sic] by accommodation, a mere racial integration of the [replicant] political elite.<sup>101</sup>

In this manner, Africa, along with the rest of the formerly colonized world, that up to then had been expunged from history, reinserted itself into the actuality of human historical existence. And the formerly colonizing world, the West, best it could, relinquished to the newly independent states, the absolute bare minimum in all aspects of international economics and politics which, to this day, it firmly controls. Grudgingly under duress the West assented, while simultaneously maneuvering to maintain its claimed cultural-spiritual dominance. Its hegemony, to this day, is held in place by those it “trusted to share” its “values” and guard its “interests”: the Westernized segments of African society and their replicant political elites.

In this way, *grosso modo*, the stage was set and the odious colonial past reinstated as our postcolonial condition, the actuality of independence. As Said has noted, “the history of post-colonial states in Africa . . . is a very sad history,” which begins in a “period of independence and liberation with a lot of hopes”<sup>102</sup> and which—in more cases than not—has ended in neo-colonial marginalized despair. For, indeed, Africa has reclaimed sovereignty over its territory. In large measure however, it has failed to reclaim *itself*. It has not extricated itself from the forming or molding (i.e., deforming) effects of the colonial past. More than in Asia or Latin America, this is the case in postcolonial Africa. As one of Ousmane Sembène’s tragicomic characters confesses, in a rather lucid moment of angst,

We are nothing better than *crabs in a basket*. We want the ex-occupiers place? We have it. . . . Yet what change is there really in general or in particular? The colonialist is stronger, more powerful than ever before, hidden *inside us*, here in this very place.<sup>103</sup>

This is our postcolonial condition: How, then, do we purge the colonial residue that controls, from within, the actuality of the present? As we noted earlier, using Senghor as an example, this is the internalized echo of colonial

Europe's sense of history and human existence. But what exactly does this mean? In this regard, as Castoriadis explains, what the West asserts is

not that it had discovered the trick of producing more cheaply and more quickly . . . but that it had discovered *the* way of life appropriate to all human society. Fortunately for the Western ideologues, the unease they could have felt on this score was allayed by the haste with which the “developing” nations [or, more accurately, the replicant ruling strata of these nations] try to adopt the Western “model” of society.<sup>104</sup>

Again, as Castoriadis further points out,

Factually speaking, the West has been and remains victorious—and not only through the force of its weapons: it remains so through its ideas, through its “models” of growth and development, through the statist and other structures which, having been created by it, are today adopted [or more accurately, aped, mimicked, etc.] everywhere.<sup>105</sup>

Within the symmetry of these “‘models’ of growth and development,” within this framework of concepts, ideas, in short, interpretations (i.e., prejudices and presuppositions) that constitute the paradigms of knowledge and of common sense that sustain Western global hegemony, Africa plays the part of a willing victim. In servile mimicry its ruling strata perpetuates its subjection. And so, beyond direct colonialism, the project of domination—which effectively constitutes its practice—endures in the imitative rule of Westernized Africa (i.e., the replicant segment of contemporary African society), bereft of imagination.<sup>106</sup>

Indeed, at the dawn of independence, Fanon had prophetically observed that, without eradicating the debilitating effects of colonialism and restructuring the actuality of independence to the measure of what it names, “independence,” in and of itself, could be nothing more than

A minimum of readaptation, some reforms at the summit [of power], a flag and, all down below, the undivided mass always [la mass indivise toujours] “medievalized” [moyenâgeuse], which continues its perpetual [restless-nervous] movement.<sup>107</sup>

In this context, to the “vast storehouse of lurid images” (note 93) has been added the picture of an innately incapacitated continent. Within this