FROM THE EUROPEAN S**O**UTH

africa's planetary futures

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Editorial

Africa is experiencing a momentous technological turn and undergoing vast spatial and temporal reconfigurations, which have to do with the acceleration of the dynamics of mobility and circulation, structural demographic shifts and attendant issues of social health, the emergence of new urban forms and life styles, as well as innovative artistic and cultural practices. Furthermore, and contrary to long-held representations, it is increasingly assumed that the continent is the last frontier of capitalism, a key laboratory of the world in the making, and a place where the future of life itself, of the Earth and of the human and other species might be played out (Mbembe 2016).

This issue of *From the European South* intends to foreground and discuss some of these transformations from a variety of viewpoints, both continental and diasporic. It observes in particular what increasingly appears as "the planetary turn of the African predicament" and assesses the latter in relation to broader issues facing the earth at large.

'Planetarity' seems to offer an alternative way of regarding large-scale social, cultural and artistic phenomena. In the final chapter of her *Death of a Discipline* (2003) titled "Planetarity," critical theorist Gayatri Spivak calls for an end to the division of the planet through a cartographer's eyes. She argues that, as humans, we are transfixed with viewing our planet with a 'one-world' mindset. By shrinking our field of vision, we allow a mixture of colonization, globalization and consumerism to create political boundaries and divide humankind. Spivak suggests an alternative to this ideology, for which she coins the term "planetarity." She asks us to consider ourselves first and foremost as planetary beings, and embrace the many differences that have the potential to separate us (Spivak 2003, 77). Spivak uses planetarity as a way of returning small-scale lived experience to the domain of large-scale thinking:

I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere. In the gridwork of electronic capital, we achieve that abstract ball covered in latitudes and longitudes, cut by virtual lines, once the equator and the tropics and so on, now drawn by the requirements of the Geographical Information Systems. To talk planet-talk by way of an unexamined environmentalism, referring to an undivided "natural" space rather than a differentiated political space, can work in the interest of this globalization in the mode of the abstract as such. [...] The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit on loan. (2003, 72)

Responding to Spivak's 'overwriting' proposal, Emily Apter comments that she seems intent on forging a model that will impede globalization's spread, its financialization of the globe and

proselytism of orthodoxies of likeness and self-same. "Planetarity engages with world politics and an ethical vigilance against environmental catastrophism in an age of remote responsibility; it understands the subject as a provisional place-holder on this earth" (Apter 2005, 203).

With Spivak, Black British sociologist Paul Gilroy also prefers the term "planetarity" to globalization, because it "suggests both contingency and movement" and "specifies a smaller scale than the global, which transmits all the triumphalism and complacency of ever-expanding imperial universals" (2005, xv). Planetarity thus indicates an emphasis on local ways of imagining and navigating world space.

To the scholars in this volume, it offers an approach that resists 'erasing the African', and helps to ask if and how, from the vantage point of the continent and its diasporas, we can extend our conceptual and theoretical imagination and produce alternative images of thought and representations that can hopefully help us live a different life in common. Conceived as a 'forum' of voices sparkled by the visionary work of Cameroonian philosopher, historian and social scientist Achille Mbembe, *FES 4* collects, around and against Mbembe's own voice, contributions from the humanities and the social sciences, with forays into the science and technology sectors that further extend the journal's transdisciplinary approach to embrace the complexity of the topic at hand.

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Bodies as borders

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ABSTRACT

In this intervention Achille Mbembe reflects on the modalities of planetary living, interlacing what he calls three mega processes: early 21st-century corporate sovereignty, the computational speed regime, and the dialectics of entanglement and separation. In contrast to a certain fluidity of our contemporary age, Mbembe sees a logic of contraction, containment, incarceration and enclosure, whose result is the worldwide erection of all kinds of walls and fortifications, gates and enclaves as a way to manage risk, grant security, and safeguard 'identity'. Such practices of partitioning of space, of offshoring and fencing off wealth, of splintering territories, of fragmenting spaces, are 'borderizing' bodies. As a result, borders are no longer merely lines of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the name we should use to describe the organised violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general. The border is no longer just a particular point in space, but both a technology and the moving body of undesired masses of population. Africa and Europe urgently need to confront each other over the issue of human mobility, a key dimension of the planetary shifts that are under way.

Keywords

corporate sovereignty, computational, mobility, security, bodies, technology, borders

My intervention is a set of urgent, fragmentary, and unfinished reflections on our global present. When I say 'our global present', what I truly have in mind is the sustainability and durability of our planet. As a matter of fact, this is an almost existential preoccupation, which is increasingly expressed in many different voices and shared by various people all over the world.

Indeed, many are wondering how we should *inhabit anew and share* as equitably as possible a planet whose life-support system has been so severely damaged by human activities and that is in dire need of repair. In view of the deep state of fragmentation the planet finds itself in, they are asking: how should we *re-member* it, that is, put back together its different parts, reassemble it and reconstitute it as an integrated system in which humans and non-humans, physical, chemical and biological components, oceans, atmosphere and land-surface are all interlinked in a grand gesture of mutuality?

These questions of inhabitation and interconnection, of mutuality, sustainability and durability, of the interlacing of human history and Earth's history are far from abstract concerns. In fact, the ongoing long-term planetary environmental changes have only further dramatized

them, and there is little doubt that they will be at the centre of any debate on the future of life and the future of reason in this century. To properly attend to them forces us to refocus our attention on three mega processes that have an almost overwhelming bearing on what humanity and the planet we live on (the only one, so far, where life is known to exist) might become.

Early 21ˢᵗ-century corporate sovereignty

The first mega process is the unprecedented consolidation of power and knowledge (political, financial, and technological) in the hands of private high-tech corporate entities whose sphere of action is not one country or one region, but the globe. 'Corporate sovereignty' has taken various forms throughout history. Take, for instance, the English East India Company and its political dominance in some parts of the Indian subcontinent in the 18ᵗʰ century. A composite, diffuse and hybrid entity, it exercised powers customarily associated with formal state institutions. It could acquire territories and exercise authority over people. It could engage in wide ranging operations such as tax collection and war making. In competition with the monarchical and national state, it was a key part of the different institutional and constitutional forms that shaped imperial expansion (see Stein 2011).

The conditions that have enabled the expansion of privatized government in the first half of the 21ˢᵗ century are well known. Many of these have to do with the various legal frameworks behind international trade agreements, foreign investment treaties and other mechanisms that have turned markets into the single most undisputed forces of our times. Others have to do with the computational transformations of financial markets and the possibilities afforded by media technologies (see Beverungen and Lange 2018). Furthermore, whether the old distinction between the economic power of corporations and the political sovereignty of states still holds is more and more open to debate (read Barkan 2013). Most global corporations aspire to secede from everybody else while exercising surveillance on everybody else. Their big dream is to be exempt from taxes and to be free from accountability; in short, to enjoy the kind of immunity and state of exceptionality we used to recognize only to truly sovereign powers.

In a recent book about what she terms "surveillance capitalism," Shohana Zuboff argues that a global architecture of behaviour modification is under way. Driven by powerful states, high-tech corporations and military apparatuses, surveillance capitalism threatens what she calls "human nature" in the 21ˢᵗ century, just as industrial capitalism disfigured the natural world in the 20ᵗʰ. She shows the extent to which vast wealth is accumulated in what she terms new "behavioural futures markets," that is, markets where predictions about our behaviour are bought and sold, and the production of goods and services is subordinated to new means of behavioural modification. Indeed, capital, especially finance capital, has become our *shared infrastructure*, our nervous system, the transcendental maw that nowadays maps out our world and its psycho-physical limits (Zuboff 2018). Around us, it looks as if nothing escapes its con-

trol. Affects, emotions and feelings, manifestations of desire, dreams or thoughts – no sphere of contemporary life has been left untouched by the spread of capital. Capital now extends its grasp deep into the underbelly of the world. In its wake, it leaves vast fields of debris and toxins, waste heaps of humans ravaged by sores and boils. Now that everything is a potential source of capitalization, it has made a world of itself: a hallucinatory phenomenon of planetary dimensions.

Early 21st-century corporate sovereignty is therefore an unprecedented form of power, whose main aspiration is to free itself from democratic oversight. As a result, we might no longer live in an epoch when sovereignty was exercised by the *demos*. The *demos* properly understood might no longer be the sovereign. Finance capital in the guise of a ubiquitous digital architecture might have definitely become the new Leviathan. We are witnessing the historical bifurcation between liberal democracy and finance capitalism, and the emergence of a new form of sovereignty – corporate sovereignty – which claims for itself the law of immunity and the powers of exception.

The computational speed regime

The second mega process I would like to invoke is technological escalation and the ways in which it has totally redefined the nature of speed, unshackled markets and the economy, and the way it constantly monitors our behaviour in an attempt at revealing how it could be modified and optimized. As a matter of fact, some of the fastest expanding markets in the world today are 'markets for future behaviour'. They rely on better understanding incipient future intent. This "could be future voting intentions, the intent to commit fraud, the intent to buy life insurance, or the intent to stream a specific video," argues Louise Amoore (2019, 4). These markets also rely on the extraction and mining of new forms of raw material, mostly consisting of information and details about individuals' behaviour taken, as Zuboff writes, from the distant corners of our unconscious. It is raw material "plumbed from intimate patterns of the self" – "our personality, our moods, our emotions, our lies, our vulnerabilities, every level of our intimacy" (2018, 201). The purpose is not only to heighten the predictability of our behaviour. It is also to make life itself amenable to 'datafication'.

A key feature of our times is therefore the extent to which all societies are organized according to the same principle – *the computational*. We are surrounded with ubiquitous computing, technologies that weave themselves into the fabric of our everyday lives, devices, sensors, things we interact with and which have become part of our presence in the world all the time. How the boundary between us and these devices is enacted is a matter of open debate (Matzner 2019).

But, what is the computational? The computational is generally understood as a technical system whose function is to capture, extract, and automatically process data that must be identified, selected, sorted, classified, recombined, codified and activated. Yet we shouldn't

forget that the computational is also a force and energy of a special kind, a *speed regime* with its own qualities and infrastructures. It is a force and energy that produces and serializes subjects, objects, phenomena; that splits reason from consciousness and memory, codes and stores data that can be used to manufacture new types of services and devices sold for profit. Whether operating on bodies, nerves, material, blood, cellular tissues, the brain or energy, the aim is the same, *i.e.* the conversion of all substances into *quantities*; the conversion of organic and vital ends into technical means; the capture of forces and possibilities and their annexation by the language of a machine-brain transformed into an autonomous and automated system.

But the computational is also the institution through which a common world, a new common sense and new configurations of power, of perception and of reality are nowadays brought into being. The globalization of corporate sovereignty, the extension of capital into every sphere of life and technological escalation in the form of the computational are all part of one and the same process.

The dialectics of entanglement and separation

The third mega process is what we should call the dialectics of entanglement and separation. All over the world, the combination of fossil capital, soft-power warfare, and the saturation of the everyday by digital and computational technologies has led to the acceleration of speed and the intensification of connections, creating a new redistribution of the Earth and of population movements. To be alive, or to remain alive, is increasingly tantamount to being able to move speedily.

In the process, the human race has come up against terrestrial limits. Such limits are not only the consequence of the sphericality of the planet. They are also limitations on the expansion of life as such. As the planet increasingly seems bound to burn, it is not only the individuated bodies that are imperilled. It is earthly existence, the fate of everything on earth, the fluidity of life which is at stake (Pyne 1997; Parisi and Terranova 2000).

Meanwhile, we are, more than ever before at any other time in human history, not only in close proximity to each other but also exposed to each other. This close proximity and exposure is experienced less and less as opportunity and possibility and, more and more, as heightened risk. But entanglement and exposure to each other are not all that characterize the now. Wherever we look, the drive is simultaneously and decisively towards contraction, towards containment, towards enclosure and various forms of encampment, detention, and incarceration.

Typical of this logic of contraction, containment, incarceration and enclosure is the worldwide erection of all kinds of walls and fortifications, gates and enclaves. In other words, various practices of partitioning space, of offshoring and fencing off wealth, of splintering territories, of fragmenting spaces, saddling them with various kinds of borders whose function is to decelerate movement, to stop it in some instances, for certain classes of populations, in order to man-

age risks. Various reasons are mobilized to account for this renewed infatuation with borders taken as the best way to manage risks. Security and the preservation of one's identity are some of these reasons. And as it happens, physical and virtual barriers of separation, digitalisation of databases, filing systems, the development of new tracking devices, sensors, drones, satellites and sentinel robots, infrared detectors and various other cameras, biometric controls, and new microchips containing personal details – everything is put in place to transform the very nature of the border in the name of security. Borders are increasingly turned into mobile, portable, omnipresent and ubiquitous realities. The goal is to better control movement and speed, accelerating it here, decelerating it there and, in the process, sorting, recategorizing, reclassifying people with the goal of better selecting anew who is whom, who should be where and who shouldn't, in the name of security.

As a result, borders are no longer merely lines of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the name we should use to describe the organised violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general. But perhaps, to be exact, we should not speak of borders in general but, instead, of 'borderization', that is, the process by which certain spaces are transformed into uncrossable places for certain classes of populations, who thereby undergo a process of racialization; places where speed must be disabled and the lives of a multitude of people judged to be undesirable are meant to be immobilized if not shattered. Whatever the case, the technological transformation of borders is in full swing. In a sense, one of the major consequences of the acceleration of technological innovations has been the creation of a segmented planet of multiple speed regimes.

A key development, of late, is the extent to which border security practices have taken a keen interest in the connection between the human body and identity, as a means to achieve detailed control over movement and speed. This being the case, the question we must ask is the following: what precisely is at stake in the extension of the biometric border into multiple realms of social life and, in particular, the human body? In other words, what explains the migration from the border understood as a particular point in space to the border as the moving body of the undesired masses of populations? The answer is a new global partitioning between potentially risky bodies vs. bodies that are not.

It is in the nature of risk to be hidden from view. That which is hidden from view is generally unknown. For it to be known, it must be visualized. The screening of bodies at border checkpoints aims at making visible "that which is hidden from view, opening up new visualizations of the unknown, potentially risky body" (Amoore and Hall 2009, 444). In such a context, biometric technologies are supposed to fragment the human body in order to recompose it for the purpose of securitization, of elimination and neutralization of the risk. This happens because the human body is seen as an indisputable anchor from which data can be safely harnessed or extracted. As a result, we are witnessing a gradually extending intertwinement of individual physical characteristics with information systems – a process that has served to

deepen faith in data as a means of risk management and faith in the body as a source of absolute identification. In this sense, biometric technologies should perhaps be best understood as techniques that govern both the mobility and enclosure of bodies (see van der Ploeg 2003). They are perceived as infallible and unchallengeable verifiers of the truth about a person – the ultimate guarantors of identity. They are supposed to produce the identification of a person beyond question, and lend authenticity and credibility to all of the data that are connected to that identity. According to this logic, the world would be safer if only ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty could be controlled. These technologies are assumed to provide a complete picture of who someone is, to fix and secure identity as a basis for prediction and prevention, leaving people to dispute their own identity.

The three mega processes I have briefly sketched are driving the movement towards what I have called 'planetary entanglement', as well as its opposite, that is, enclosure, contraction, containment, encampment, and incarceration. Once again, they are shaped by the alliance between military power, the industries that surround it (contractors), and tech giants. They are also driven by corporate elites increasingly detached from their countries of origin and who store most of their capital in tax heavens (see Davis 2019). These elites can no longer be 'forced to account' through traditional means such as elections or protests. They defeat citizens' scrutiny via complexity and secrecy, often under the pretext of national security or via an economic rationale that puts capital first, before people. This movement is erratic, uneven. But everywhere it heightens uncertainty and insecurity. Everywhere it institutionalizes the risks inherent in the misfortunes of reality.

Life and mobility

Part of what we are witnessing as a result is a novel imbrication, a symbiotic merging of life and mobility. To be alive, or to survive, is more and more co-terminus with the capacity to move. Just as living, movement, in turn, involves continual doublings, the incessant crossing of multiple lines and thresholds, multiple transitions across layers. Life itself is more and more taken as something that can be calculated and recombined rather than merely represented. Furthermore, we are witnessing a bifurcation between life on the one hand and bodies on the other hand. Nowadays, not every body is thought of as containing life. *Discounted bodies* are believed to contain no life as such. They are, strictly speaking, bodies at the limits of life, trapped in uninhabitable worlds and inhospitable places. The kind of life they bear or contain is not insured or is *uninsurable,* folded as it is in extreme and thin envelopes.

Such bodies on the precipice are the most exposed to droughts, storms and famines, toxic waste and various experiences of effacement. Their livelihoods made impossible, they are the most likely to sustain the most crippling wounds and injuries. Trapped human subjects often without escape, they bear the brunt of terrestrial life on a damaged planet (Tsing et al. 2017). At the same time, they exceed all attempts to contain them. These bodies are not simply

in motion. Interactive and generative, they are *movements and events*. The inside of such bodies is not separated from their outward environments. From the perspective of discounted bodies, to be alive is always and already to breach boundaries or to be exposed to the risk of the outside entering the inside (read Litvintseva 2019).

This disentanglement of life from discounted bodies, this redistribution of life on differential scales of insurability and non-insurability, is a key dimension of contemporary migration regimes. The latter aim either at slowing down the dynamics of people's interactions, at creating distance or at shattering the chains of relations between them, so as to institute new patterns of separation. Contemporary movement restrictions are not limited to national boundaries. They are at work on a global scale. They are deepening the space and time asymmetries between different categories of humanity while leading to the progressive ghettoization of entire regions of the world. To a large extent, this is akin to a universalization of the Israeli model. In this model, the restriction of movement does not necessarily aim "to confine unwanted people territorially or to dissociate their movements from those of citizens, but to inscribe them into temporalities and spatialities that are disjointed to the point of giving these populations the illusion of being territorially separated" (Parizot 2018, 38).

Furthermore, at a time when the material components and biological organization of the body can be reengineered and redesigned, the latter are more than ever based on the ideas of repressive selection, reproduction and the rejuvenation of species. Only what can potentially generate value counts as life. In this context, borders are meant to concretize the principle of dissimilarity rather than that of affinity. They are not only obstacles to free movement. They are boundaries between species and varieties of the human. As such, they play a crucial role in contemporary modes of production of human difference and relatedness. Human bodies are increasingly divided between those that matter and those that do not, those who can move and those who cannot or should not, or should only move under very strict conditions. Bodies that should not move are those that are uninsured. They must be tracked, captured, and dispensed of. Such bodies are kept shifting between invisibility, waiting and effacement. They are trapped in fragmented spaces, stretched time and indefinite waiting (Peteet 2018). As for the dream of perfect security, it requires not only complete systematic surveillance, but also a cleansing policy. This dream is symptomatic of the structural tensions that, for decades, have accompanied our transition into a new technical system of increased automation – one that is increasingly complex yet also increasingly abstract.

One of the major contradictions of the liberal order has always been the tension between freedom and security. Today, this question seems to have been cut in two. Security now matters more that freedom. A society of security is not necessarily a society of freedom. A society of security is a society dominated by the irrepressible need for adhesion to a collection of certainties. It is one fearful of the type of interrogation that delves into the unknown, unearthing the risks that must surely be contained within. This is why in a society of security, the priority

is, at all cost, to identify what lurks behind each new arrival – who is who, who lives where, with whom and since when, who does what, who comes from where, who is going where, when, how, why, and so on and so forth. Moreover, who plans to carry out which acts, either consciously or unconsciously. The aim of a society of security is not to affirm freedom, but to control and govern the modes of arrival.

The current myth claims that technology constitutes the best tool for governing these arrivals; that technology alone allows for the resolution of this problem – a problem of order, but also of awareness, of identifiers, of anticipation and predictions. It is feared that the dream of a humanity transparent to herself, stripped of mystery, might prove to be a catastrophic illusion. For the time being, migrants and refugees are bearing the brunt of it. In the long run, it is by no means certain that they will be the only ones.

The mega processes highlighted above leave us with foundational questions that will haunt us for most of this century. The first foundational question is related to what I called 'borderization', or the logics of containment, enclosure, and contraction. Perhaps more than at any other moment in our recent past, we are increasingly faced with the question of what to do with those whose very existence does not seem to be necessary for our reproduction; those whose mere existence or proximity is deemed to represent a physical or biological threat to our own life. Throughout history, and in response to this foundational question, various paradigms of rules have been designed for human bodies deemed either in excess, unwanted, illegal, dispensable, or superfluous. One historical response has consisted in putting in place spatial exclusionary arrangements. Such was, for instance, the case during the early phases of modern settler or genocidal colonialism in relation to Native American reservations in the United States, island prisons, penal colonies such as Australia, camps and Bantustans in South Africa. A late modern example is Gaza, and Gaza might well prefigure what is yet to come. Here, control of vulnerable, unwanted, surplus or racialized people is exercised through a combination of tactics, chief among which is 'modulated blockade'. A blockade prohibits, obstructs, and limits who and what can enter and leave the Strip. The goal might not be to cut the Strip off entirely from supply lines, infrastructural grids or trade routes. It is nevertheless relatively sealed off in a way that effectively turns it into an imprisoned territory. Comprehensive or relative closure is accompanied by periodic military escalations and the generalized use of extra-judicial assassinations. Spatial violence, humanitarian strategies, and a peculiar biopolitics of punishment all combine to produce, in turn, a peculiar detention space in which people deemed surplus, unwanted, or illegal are governed through abdication of any responsibility for their lives and their welfare.

But there is another, early 21st-century example, which consists in waging new forms of wars, which can be called wars on speed and mobility. Wars on mobility are wars whose aim is to *turn into dust* the means of existence and survival of vulnerable people taken as enemies. These kinds of wars of attrition, methodically calculated and programmed, and implemented

with new methods, are wars against the very ideas of mobility, circulation, and speed, whilst the age we live in is precisely one of velocity, acceleration, and increasing abstraction and algorithms. Moreover, the targets of this kind of warfare are not by any means singular bodies, but rather great swathes of humanity judged worthless and superfluous.

All of the above belongs to the current practice of remote borderization, carried out from afar, in the name of freedom and security. This battle, waged against certain undesirables and reducing them to mounds of human flesh, is rolled out on a global scale. It is on the verge of defining the times in which we live. Wars on mobility are peculiar wars on bodies. They have to do with two broad questions that confront us today and will haunt us for most of this century: on the one hand *the question of life futures*, that is, of the self-organization of being and matter; on the other hand, that of the *future of reason*.

The future of life and the future of reason

For a long time, the human race has been concerned with how life emerges and the conditions of its evolution. The key question today is how it can be reproduced, sustained, made durable, preserved and universally shared, and under what conditions it ends. Overall, these debates about how life on Earth can be reproduced and sustained, and under what conditions it ends, are forced upon us by the epoch itself, characterized as it is by the impending ecological catastrophe and by technological escalation.

It is a fact that, today, unprecedented numbers of human beings are embedded in increasingly complex technostructures. The latter are increasingly intervening in the dynamics of the Earth system on a planetary scale. This has led to the transgression of planetary boundaries such as those related to anthropogenic climate change, degenerative land-use change, accelerated biodiversity loss, perturbation of the global biogeochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus, and the creation and release of novel entities such as nanoparticles and genetically engineered organisms (see Donges et al.).

Furthermore, both metabolically (for example in terms of their energy needs) and reproductively, technologies are becoming more and more tied in complex networks of extraction and predation, manufacturing and innovation. An example is recent developments in the domain of genes and molecules. As Margarida Mendes shows, the heyday of DNA study has allowed the cracking and public dissemination of the genetic codes of humans, plants, and animals. This, in turn, has given way to an exponential rise of biological patents, as currently nearly 20% of the human genome is now privately owned, in a context of a market logic that addresses *life as a commodity* to be manipulated and replicated under the volatility of market consumption. Studies after studies have shown for instance that corporations are intervening directly in the natural cycles of life and ecosystems through the widespread genetic modification of key elements in the food chain (see Mendes 2017). As patented GMO genes are absorbed into our bodies in a proprietary relationship of biological subjugation, *the body itself*

becomes an expanded, multiple infrastructure, where intervention can happen at many different scales. It is therefore correct to argue that there is a shifting distribution of powers between the human and the technological, in the sense that technologies are moving towards 'general intelligence' and self-replication. They are being granted the powers of reproduction and independent teleonomic purpose rather than having them taken away.

Over the last decades, we have witnessed the development of algorithmic forms of intelligence. They have been growing in parallel with genetic research, and often in its alliance. The integration of algorithms and big data analysis in the biological sphere does not only bring with it an increasingly greater belief in techno-positivism and modes of statistical thought. It also paves the way for regimes of assessment of the natural world, and modes of prediction and analysis that treat *life itself as a computable object*. Concomitantly, algorithms inspired by the natural world, and ideas of natural selection and evolution are on the rise. Such is the case with genetic algorithms – a subset of evolutionary algorithms that mimic actions inspired in biological operators, such as cells, seeking to optimize the responses to the problems of their environments by self-generating, and encompassing processes of mutation and natural selection. The latter are designed to evolve and further adapt to the environment, in a process of self-generation. The belief today is that everything is *potentially computable and predictable*. In the process, what is rejected is the fact that life itself is an open system, non-linear, and exponentially chaotic.

These are also times when many are gradually coming to the realization that *reason may well have reached its limits*. Or, in any case, it is a time when reason is on trial – we are, in other words, in a sort of Dark Enlightenment. Reason is a faculty we used to recognize in humans and in humans alone. In the Western tradition we have all, willingly or not, become the inheritors of reason, always seen as the highest of all human faculties, the one that opened the doors to knowledge, wisdom, virtue and, most importantly, freedom. Although unequally redistributed among them, it was the prerogative of humans alone. It distinguished the latter from other living species. Thanks to their superior capacity to exercise this faculty, humans could claim to be exceptional.

Today, reason is on trial in two ways. First, reason is increasingly replaced and subsumed by instrumental rationality, when it is not simply reduced to procedural or algorithmic processing of information. In other words, the logic of reason is morphing from within machines and computers and algorithms. The human brain is no longer the privileged location of reason. The human brain is being "downloaded" into nano-machines. An inordinate amount of power is gradually being ceded to abstractions of all kinds. Old modes of reasoning are being challenged by new ones that originate through and within technology in general and digital technologies in particular, as well as through the top-down models of artificial intelligence. As a result, *techne* is becoming the quintessential language of reason.

Furthermore, instrumental reason, or reason in the guise of *techne* is increasingly

weaponized. Time itself is becoming enveloped in the doing of machines. Machines them-selves do not simply execute instructions or programs. They start generating complex behav-iour. The computational reproduction of reason has made it such that reason is no longer, or is a bit more than, just the domain of human species. We now share it with various other agents. Reality itself is increasingly construed via statistics, metadata, modelling, mathematics. Second, many are turning their back to reason in favour of other faculties and other modes of expression and cognition. They are calling for a rehabilitation of affect and emotions for in-stance. In many of the ongoing political struggles of our times, passion is clearly trumping reason. Confronted with complex issues, feeling and acting with one's guts, viscerally rather than reasoning, is fast becoming the new norm.

Africa in the global regime of mobility

We see this in relation to African migrations to Europe in particular, and I will end with com-ments on this issue. It is an issue that is clouded in myths and phantasms, some of which are of a racist nature. In fact, as far as the question of borders and migration is concerned, facts unfortunately no longer seem to matter. And yet facts exist.

I am worried about Europe's anti-immigration policies because their ultimate goal is to turn Africa into a huge Bantustan. It is true that of all the regions of the world, Africa is one that has not entirely completed its demographic transition. There are objective reasons for this, and they are known by any serious historical demographers. We lost millions of people during the centuries of the Atlantic and Arab slave trades. Colonialism, its endless wars, its political econ-omy and its epidemiological and ecological consequences killed many. By the end of the twenty-first century, Africa will have finally compensated for what it lost during those early cen-turies. It will have more young people than any other region of the planet. Not all of them will be running away to Europe. I believe we urgently need to open the continent to itself and engineer a new historical cycle of re-peopling it. The colossal landmass of 30 million square kilometres that is Africa can still house more people. In fact, it is arguably the last portion of the Earth that can sustain huge human migrations. Most migrants in Africa do not dream about going to Europe. They are moving from one African country to another African country, and the same happens with refugees, those fleeing wars, disasters, and catastrophes. We should stop peddling the myth according to which Europe is besieged by refugees and migrants.

Europe is fast becoming the biggest reservoir of older people on Earth. Many right wing and white supremacist forces in the world are seized by the fear of what they call "the great replacement," a conspiracy theory that might trigger racist and anti-immigration policies at a planetary scale. But such policies are simply not sustainable. Because even if Europe wanted to hermetically close its doors, it is simply too late to do so. Maybe this should have been done long ago and yet, as we know, Europe then was busy colonizing other lands and one cannot really close one's doors while forcefully plundering other people's lands.

Whatever the case, were Europe genuinely determined to close itself off from the rest of the world or from Africa, the consequences would be colossal, of almost a genocidal proportion. Europe would have to implement deadly policies, which by the way are already experimented with in those laboratories that the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert have become. According to various figures, something like 34,000 people have already lost their lives over the last few years trying to cross the Mediterranean; this without counting those who have met their end in the Sahara Desert, or those who are the subject of new forms of enslavement and capture in lawless places such as Libya, where Europe is funding militias and encouraging them to capture would-be African migrants to detain them in makeshift camps or to sell them into slavery.

The choice is therefore clear. It is between cynically embracing the full consequences of a creeping para-genocide, or imagining together different ways of reorganizing the world and redistributing the planet among all its inhabitants, humans and non-humans. As stated above, a key issue of the 21st century will be the management of human mobility. The concept of human mobility is a bit more than what has been dubbed in Europe as the migration crisis, "the migrant-refugee crisis." Human mobility is a key dimension of the big, planetary shifts that are under way. They include migrancy of course, but they are also related to many other factors propelled by the technological acceleration, the speed with which our world is moving, the unleashing of all kinds of predatory forces, the rise of bio- and high-tech racism, the deteriorating conditions of life on Earth, and environmental change.

We cannot speak about migration without addressing the presence and actions of the West in the rest of the world. Europe and North America cannot possibly go about destroying other people's living environments, extracting their oil, gas, timber, diamonds and gold, shipping it all home, leaving nothing behind, turning their cities into rubble, bringing to an end the possibilities of life in faraway places, and expect those affected by such upheavals to survive in the midst of the ruins.

Europe's and America's violence abroad is a key reason why people are forced to run away from places where they were born and raised, but which have become uninhabitable. And I doubt building walls around one's nation-state is the most intelligent way of resolving the many crises we have contributed to fomenting around the world. Instead of marketing fictions and inflaming dark passions and hysteria, we should take seriously the question of the future, reactivate our critical faculties and rehabilitate reason, because if we do not rehabilitate reason, we will not be able to repair the world or learn how to share the planet.

We cannot confuse the debate on African futures with European fears of a great exodus. As far as Africa is concerned, we do not have to attend to anyone's fears. We have to take care of ourselves, and we cannot embrace the "too many people" logic. If, to start with, we believe that there are too many people, what this implies is that there are some people who should not be there in the first instance. If this is the case, then what should we do with "surplus

people," make them "superfluous"? We have to be mindful of the dreadful and necropolitical implications of the discourse about "too many people."

This having been said, there are real questions of uplift from poverty, of wealth creation and redistribution. To address them efficiently, we need to open Africa to herself. Africa is a colossal continent. There is room in it for all, for every single one of her many sons and daughters, including those in the diaspora. We cannot turn this portion of the Earth into a double prison, where people cannot move outside and they cannot move from within. We have to turn Africa into a vast space of circulation for her own people.

If Europe is really keen to contribute positively to resolving the great issue of our century, which is the question of human mobility, the key is not for Europe to spend money building camps and prisons in Libya and in its own midst. Europe should put money into, for instance, the harmonisation of identity registers in the continent, the gradual dismantling of thousands of internal borders in the continent, the rational intensification of movements within the continent, massive investments in upgrading roads, building transcontinental railways and highways, consolidating water and river navigation. That is how the future will be brought back, and no African will want to leave or end up in a place, Europe, where they know nobody, where nobody is waiting for them and where they are not welcome.

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Africa, Venice, and the posthuman

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ABSTRACT

This essay interprets the role of a single painting by Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu in the context of several exhibitions held in Venice to mark the 500th anniversary of Jacopo Tintoretto's birth. I read this artistic celebration as a paradigmatic intervention that honours the European cultural heritage while insulating it from contemporary concerns and their historical matrix. Mutu's *Automatic Hip* offers an alternative, posthuman irruption in this seamless Eurocentric context, with a portrait that represents an enigmatic black woman traversed by and intertwined with many non-human presences. In the second half of the article I analyse short texts by Maaza Mengiste, Igiaba Scego and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who reimagine classic artworks from the Venetian canon to highlight their African and colonial themes and characters. Altogether, the essay offers an example of different ways in which African and Afrodescendant artists can enrich our understanding not only of the many ramifications of African history and culture, but also reconfigure the Western canon from a postcolonial and posthumanistic perspective.

Keywords

art, museums, posthuman, postcolonial, Africa, Venice

In October 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a special report declaring that rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society are required just to limit global warming to a 1.5° Celsius increase, considered unavoidable, compared to 2° Celsius (IPCC 2018). This half-degree difference would make global sea level rise 10 centimetres lower by the end of the century, sparing vast and vulnerable coastal areas. Rapid transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities are imperative to drop carbon dioxide emissions by 45% by 2030 and reach zero in 2050. This is a colossal enterprise, indispensable to avoid a point of no return in the historic and geological period that we have learnt to call the 'anthropocene'.[1]

The report had just been released when I visited the exhibition "Contemporary Dialogues with Tintoretto" at the Giorgio Franchetti Gallery at Ca D'Oro, Venice.[2] As part of a series of events celebrating the 500 years since the birth of the Venetian painter, this show featured 21st-century portraits from all continents that directly or indirectly engage with the style, themes, and techniques of the artist. In the section "Faces," I was drawn to the work titled *Automatic Hip* (2015) by Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu.[3] Arbitrary as it is to generalize on the basis of a small selection of contemporary artworks, I was struck by the fact that nearly all other artists – from Australia, North America, Europe or China – offered portraits of the human face or of the

full body as discrete entities standing out against dark, neutral or abstract backdrops. Maybe this was a tribute of the curator Ludovico Pratesi to the distinct chiaroscuro of Tintoretto's *Portrait of the Procurator Nicolò Priuli* (c. 1549), a black clad aristocrat emerging from – almost merging with – the enveloping darkness of the background, displayed at the show as the benchmark for the contemporary works. Other portraits deconstructed or dissected the body, recuperating old Cubist techniques or ironically playing with art history tropes. Most portraits had a tragic, existential feel to them, and no visitor would conclude that they represent a very optimistic *zeitgeist*. In spite or because of that, many also seemed to resist, if not utterly refuse, any linkage with their broader global context and environment (a Chinese self-portrait of the artist as Napoleon was another clear exception, but the historical-political reference actually corroborates my argument because it reinscribed the subject in a very humanistic tradition). Without any pretence to a proper aesthetic interpretation of the painting, I would like to present a possible cultural reading of Mutu's work that inserts *Automatic Hip* in the conceptual horizon of the Posthuman (Braidotti 2013) and underscores what this specific work arguably does in this specific location, in a form of affective and intellectual response as a spectator and IPCC report reader.

The important premise is that the show was part of a triptych of exhibitions that invited the visitor to the major Venetian museums. *Tintoretto 1519-1594* at Palazzo Ducale and *The Young Tintoretto* at Gallerie dell'Accademia provided a rich overview of this restless painter's life and career but also, I would argue, an experience of consolation to the Western visitor. It makes you feel you are part of an extraordinary heritage; it reminds you of the intimate, if tormented, relationship of the European man with his Christian identity, symbols, and iconography; it communicates the talismanic power of art as a didactic, aesthetic, and spiritual experience and the role of the artist as prophet of his age; it pays tribute to talent even as it documents the network of material practices in which the act of painting was embedded in the early modern era. And while some attention is given to the enigmatic presence of Tintoretto's illegitimate daughter, a painter who was trained and praised by him but cannot claim authorship to any particular work, the two exhibitions shied away from any reference to the theological, political, or social debates of Tintoretto's remarkable time and place. Nothing to suggest how we could make the artist our contemporary, everything to blissfully insulate him from the troubles of the present. We also noticed how the captions elegantly referenced the painters who influenced or were influenced by Tintoretto in *The Abduction of the Body of Saint Mark*, but made no effort to tell the viewer who Saint Mark was, in a city with thirty million tourist visits per year, a growing presence of Chinese, Indian, or Arab visitors who may be as unaware of Christian martirology as your average Italian teenager. An aesthetic and cultural experience such as this, we told ourselves when we left both venues, gives you a temporary reprieve from the painful awareness that the planet is gradually going under water (and Venice sooner than most other cities) or from the challenge of building a more culturally plural society. In that

sense, the museum effectively functioned, in Vincent Normand's definition, as a "global isolator":

it de-animates previously animated entities by uprooting them from their "milieu", and re-animates "dead" objects by over-determining their signification and projecting them in a restricted field of attention. As such, the museum performs a withdrawal that regulates and purifies the relation of the Cartesian subject with the contents of a world consequently defined as the outside. (Normand 2015, 67)

It is in this generalized traditional, conservative framework that I felt the power of the irruption of Wangechi Mutu's work, subscribing to Claire Bishop's view that "museums with a historical collection have become the most fruitful testing ground for a non-presentist, multi-temporal contemporaneity" (2013, 23). Mutu, it should be noted, is a respected Afropolitan artist who divides her time between New York and Nairobi, comfortably inhabiting the field of contemporary art and its global system. So my focus here is not her production as a whole or the genealogy of this specific art text, as much as "the *encounter* with Mutu's art" (Papenburg 2013, 165); what in my perspective *Automatic Hip* does here and now, in a show centred on Tintoretto.

The Gallerie dell'Accademia happen to be the house of one of the most famous global art icons, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, that has long been seen as the model of universal man, the epitome of an autonomous, powerful individual who sets himself as the centre and measure of all things. In her seminal essay *The Posthuman* (2013), Rosi Braidotti uses this ubiquitous image to deconstruct the Western canonical notion of the human (and the humanities), starting from the well-known feminist critique:

the allegedly abstract ideal of Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied; of his sexuality nothing much can be guessed, though plenty of speculation surrounds that of its painter, Leonardo da Vinci. (Braidotti 2013, 24)

The harmonious, symmetrical, englobed, frontal, muscular Vitruvian Man, arguably the most famous representation of the human body in Western art, finds in Mutu's *Automatic Hip* an eccentric countermodel. To preliminarily adopt Western categories, the Apollonian boldness and defiant gaze of Leonardo's figure jars with the disturbing Dionysian force of Mutu's hybrid, faceless creature. To move beyond this superficial first impression, I refer to a passage from Achille Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason*, where he discusses the relationship between Africa, blackness, and the Western concept of identity:

Africa in general and blackness in particular were presented as accomplished symbols of a vegetative, limited state. The black man, sign in excess of all signs and therefore fundamentally unrepresentable, was the ideal example of these other-being, powerfully possessed by emptiness, for whom the negative had ended up penetrating all moments of existence – the death of the day, destruction and peril, the unnameable night of the world. Georg Wilhelm

Friedrich Hegel described such figures as statues without language or awareness of them-
selves, human entities incapable of ridding themselves definitively of the animal presence with
which they were mixed. In fact, their nature was to contain what was already dead [...] a kind
of humanity staggering through life, confusing becoming-human and becoming-animal, and all
along "unconscious of their universality" (2017, 11-12).

I read in Mutu's figure a surprising avatar, an uncanny re-configuration and re-
semantization of Hegel's negative tropes of Africa, one that illustrates Mbembe's argument
and seemingly turns the German philosopher on his head. In this light, as I will try to explain
later, this cosmopolitan (or better Afropolitan) artist appears as the author of the most realistic
portrait in the whole show. The figure in *Automatic Hip* is indeed a statue without a language,
a plastic human figure endowed with all kinds of prostheses, embedded in a complex techno-
structure. It reminds us that the human figure, artistically and biopolitically, is a palimpsest,
always re-inscribed, as the technique of collage perfectly captures. This woman is beautiful
and monstrous, offering the recognizable contour of the human body and indeed the volup-
tuousness of her sinuous female figure as a reassuring framework but denying us the ultimate
sign and locus of individual identity, her face; she is defaced, covered by layers of patriarchal
and racial representations, her body littered with fragments and ruins but still vibrating with life.
Crucially, this portrait shows the human body as fully imbricated in the non-human (the vegetal,
the animal, the technological) world, both as exploited, reified, exoticized, extinct matter, and
as incorporated, vibrant, excessive matter, streaming down in the rainbow of colours of the
lower half and possibly evoking the perpetual flux of information and data we are entangled in.
Adapting Bakthin's category of the grotesque (Bakhtin 1993) to the Western racializing process
of African bodies, Bettina Papenburg has offered a very convincing reading of Mutu's poetics.
While she focuses on previous works, her analysis applies well to *Automatic Hip*. Glossing the
artist's collage technique as a "process of de-assemblage and re-assemblage" (2013, 168),
she argues convincingly that "[t]he fragments clash and crash into each other generating a
contradictory jumble which unsettles viewing conventions" (2013, 163). She then compares
Mutu's engagement with Western stereotypes of Africa to the early example of Josephine
Baker's appropriation of trite clichés for transgressive purposes:

Both Baker and Mutu ironically embrace derogatory representations to confront (neo)colonial structures
of the gaze. They redirect the stigmatising definition back towards the offenders by openly displaying its
violence in public. What was most debased is now rectified by a self-naming that feeds on the original
power of the derisive imagery. (Papenburg 2013, 164)

While Baker's modernist language exaggerated Western neoprimitivist clichés for satirical
purposes, in our postmodern and posthuman age and through a different artistic medium, Mutu
presents her spectators with a far more unsettling and disorienting spectacle:

She focuses on the body's openings and extensions, stressing heterogeneity, excess and incomple-

teness as well as the interwoven-ness of the body with other bodies and with objects of the material world. One evocative trope here is the metaphor of 'devouring'. In Mutu's assemblages one body consumes another body, while being simultaneously engulfed by its counterpart; the body 'cannibalises' and is 'cannibalised', both incorporating alien body parts, animals and objects from the material world and being enveloped by these. (Papenburg 2013, 164)

Papenburg concludes that Mutu successfully "absorbs, digests and assimilates the clichéd representations" (165), but I raise the question whether the risk remains, to adopt the discourse of nutrition, of being intoxicated by these representations. Are Papenburg and I unwittingly reiterating the ancient association of the African body – especially the female one – with the concepts of the wild, the savage, the natural? Am I linking her to a colonial lineage that finds its archetype in the "wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*?

She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. (Conrad 2017, 70)

It seems to me that Mutu's aesthetics is audacious and effective also because she does not shy away from these ancient associations of Africans with their body, and of the African body with the primitive, the wild, the animal, and the vegetative, as I already suggested in reference to Mbembe's quote. Updating Conrad's native woman, Mutu appropriates her transgressive potential, that in the colonial mindset was meant to create a dangerously seductive opposite of the Victorian woman relegated in the domestic sphere and isolated from the brutality of the world, like Kurtz's intended. The already mentioned technique of collage becomes the first material correlate and reminder that this representation of the African woman is unavoidably a cultural construct with ever new layers of meaning literally piled up on her, many of them appearing as inert as archaeological ruins. However, if we place the figure in an additional conceptual horizon, we can find in *Automatic Hip* something more original than the classic denunciation of the imperialism of culture, namely an embodiment of the posthuman direction envisioned by Braidotti: "I define the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable" (2013, 49).

Against the pure isolation and autonomy of the *Vitruvian Man*, we visualize here "the subject as a transversal entity encompassing the human, our genetic neighbours the animals and the earth as a whole, and to do so within an understandable language" (82). We should be wary, however, to cast Mutu's creature as an anti-Leonardo's icon: "Posthuman feminists

look for subversion not in counter-identity formations, but rather in pure dislocations of identities via the perversion of standardized patterns of sexualized, racialized and naturalized interaction" (99). If Conrad's "wild and gorgeous apparition" is the dark, mirror image of the angel in the house that somehow reaffirms the stereotype of the passive, subservient wife; if the various portraits at the Ca' D'Oro exhibit show tormented, alienated, anguished subjects but still reaffirm the unity of the self, Mutu gives us a vision of what Braidotti call a 'becoming-machine':

The 'becoming-machine' understood in this specific sense indicates and actualizes the relational powers of a subject that is no longer cast in a dualistic frame, but bears a privileged bond with multiple others and merges with one's technologically mediated planetary environment. The merger of the human with the technological results in a new transversal compound, a new kind of eco-sophical unity, not unlike the symbiotic relationship between the animal and its planetary habitat. (2013, 92)

While the portrait as an artistic genre (with Tintoretto as one of its acclaimed masters) is traditionally seen as the site of constitution of the individual subject, Mutu seems to deny to us the certainty of unity:

This humbling experience of not-Oneness, which is constitutive of the non-unitary subject, anchors the subject in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others that are constitutive of that entity which, out of laziness and habit, we call the 'self'. Posthuman nomadic vital political theory stresses the productive aspects of the condition of not-One, that is to say a generative notion of complexity. (2013, 100)

The lethal claws that technologically enhance the arm of the creature recall another dimension, inscribing Mutu's figure within the trope of "techno-Eves of multiple temptations, pointing the way to unsettling futures" (107). Braidotti reminds us that "[t]he evolution of gender roles towards a more egalitarian participation by both sexes in the business of killing is one of the most problematic aspects of contemporary gender politics" (114). Against an old-fashioned brand of feminism that pictured the life-giving mother as incapable of administering death, the prosthetic claws in the picture align Mutu's creature with the "the brutal interventionism of the Chechnya war widows, pregnant female suicide-bombers and the growing role of women in the military 'Humanism' of 'humanitarian' wars" (114).

I now return to the Gallerie dell'Accademia, to suggest that another perspective on the tradition of Venetian painting (and more generally about Western art) is possible, that far from representing an impermeable cultural canon, some of its works allow for a more cosmopolitan and posthuman interpretation by African and Afrodescendant writers. Maaza Mengiste's "A Miracle in Venice" and Igiaba Scego's "Rhinomania and More" are two short pieces that appeared in 2018 in the large-circulation magazine *Venice Review*. They both engage with very famous, canonical Venetian paintings to explore the marginal and under-investigated African elements in these rich visual tapestries, ideally following up on African American artist Fred Wilson's pioneering exhibition at the Venice Biennale *Speak of Me as I Am* (2003).

Ethiopian American Maaza Mengiste, who has been researching Italian colonial history for her forthcoming novel *The Shadow King*, focuses on Vittore Carpaccio's *Miracle of the True Cross at the Rialto Bridge* (1494).[4] In this typically crowded painting, "[i]t is almost as if the eye is supposed to miss the miracle," because the event that the painter was commissioned to represent by the confraternity "is lost in the chaos of daily Venetian life" (Mengiste 2018, 17). Not unlike today, Venice thrives on its religious heritage and symbols, but is more proud of its bustling, diverse, and especially industrious civic life, and showcases its ordinary citizens rather than its saints. In this large canvas, where the Rialto bridge is visible in its ancient wooden structure, the pedestrian traffic on the streets and the intersecting trajectories of the numerous gondolas arguably upstage the religious action occurring on the lodge above. And right at the edge between the walkway and the canal we see "a splendidly dressed black gondolier – one of two in the painting – rowing away from the palazzo, his back to the unfolding miracle, his youthful face turned somewhere we cannot see while his patron gazes at us, checking to make sure that we notice his rower" (18). Mengiste is drawing on the ground-breaking work of historians such as Paul Kaplan and Katherine Lowe, who have uncovered a lot of material on the black presence in Venetian society and art, showing that the ubiquitous presence of blacks in Venetian paintings is not merely symbolic, but represents an actual social phenomenon, even though the written records are few and far between. The few individuals whose lives have been pulled out of oblivion are known only by their first names, Bartolomeo, Cristoforo, Zanetto, Giorgio, Marco, Maria... who were clearly Venetian names meant to replace and erase their lost African identities, a well-known historical circumstance. The ultimate paradox is that art has kept some record of their existence: "[a]ll we have are those brief glimpses in paintings" (20). And now, we add, this precious literary commentary. I am intrigued by Mengiste's remark that the gaze of the anonymous black gondolier, whose multi-coloured dress outshines the sober black uniforms of today's colleagues, is "turned somewhere we cannot see," providing an alternative perspective on this world. This is also what the African author herself does for us: she provides an alternative perspective on a recognized masterpiece of European art. Later in the essay she applies the same perspective to another miracle, painted by Gentile Bellini in 1500, also incorporating a more enigmatic black character in an equally overcrowded scene. In *The Miracle of the Cross at the Bridge of S. Lorenzo*,[5] which shares the same room with Carpaccio:

We can go almost full circle without noticing the black man standing on a ledge to the far right. Set so far apart from the circular momentum of the action, he is invisible. But there he is, nearly naked, a dark-skinned figure staring reluctantly at the water with what looks like a maid behind him. She is the one who is staring at us, a hand jutting out over the ledge where she stands, perhaps to stop the African's jump or to push him in. Bellini offers a less romantic suggestion of what life might have been like for Africans in Venice. Where Carpaccio's gondoliers are dressed in finery and elegant clothing, the near-nakedness of Bellini's diver is stark, a hard slap against any inclination to romanticize the life of a sub-Saharan African during that time. This man is far from the action, isolated and an outsider: marginal. (Mengiste 2018, 18)

The discourse of Venice as a cosmopolitan city has ancient roots, and the commercial and cultural relations of the Republic with non-Western civilizations has been studied extensively. But Africa has always been conspicuously absent in this analysis (with the exception of Egypt that has a special status and cultural position in the historical relations between Europe and Africa). The black gondolier's marginality however allows us to question the dominant current discourse of migration, which thrives politically by casting the African presence in Europe (and in Italy in particular) as an alien and recent phenomenon. Even a cultural operation such as *Migropolis* (Scheppe 2009), a major exhibition and volume aimed at deconstructing the standard Romantic view of the city and reconfiguring it as a contemporary hub of global migrations, missed out on the much longer history of Venice as a cosmopolitan centre, always absorbing new migrants and creating new international trade networks and routes (Bassi 2011).

Igiaba Scego, an Italian writer of Somali origin, chooses a different museum, a different century, a different painter, and a different angle. In her essay she starts from a seemingly far-flung event, the death of the last remaining male white rhino in the world, Sudan, whose 45-year-old life ended in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya in March 2018. The hopes for the survival of the species now rely on two surviving female examples and on Sudan's frozen semen. Ironically, the near extinction of the animal is coinciding with what Scego calls a veritable "rhino-mania" in the arts, one that she has chronicled and promoted herself by dedicating various texts to Clara. Clara was an Indian rhino who was accustomed to sipping tea at 5 o'clock from the cup offered to her by her eccentric first owner, the Dutch merchant Jan Albert Sichterman. Her second owner shipped her to Europe, where she became the star of the Venice Carnival in 1751 and was immortalized by the Venetian painter Pietro Longhi in a 'true portrait' that one can admire at Ca' Rezzonico Museum in Venice[6] and a copy at the National Gallery in London. A black and white print belonging to the Elisha Whittelsey Collection shows the same subject etched by Alessandro Longhi (Pietro's son) accompanied by a curious rhymed caption that reads "Here you see the great Rhinoceros, / brought from Africa to this circle, / and of the Immeasurable Beast in faith / of his horned nose here is the horn." The Rhino has become African and represented under the typical trope of incommensurability. Scego historicizes the fascination with exotic animal as a colonial affair and presents it as a story of persecution. What she achieves here and in the children's book *Prestami le ali* (Scego 2017), where she fictionalizes the vicissitudes of Clara for a younger audience, is both a plea for animal rights, rescuing this topic from a superficial rhetoric of exoticism, and a metaphor and metonymy of colonial exploitation and slavery. I have seen Igiaba Scego address a group of 4th graders, and what is surprising is that the topic of rhino was an incredibly captivating and less intimidating entry point into issues of colonialism, racism, and tolerance. Like Wangechi Mutu's painting at Tintoretto's exhibit, Scego's intervention in the field of Venetian art opens a necessary window on the interconnectedness

between man and animal and demonstrates how the contemporary debates on multiculturalism have ancient roots and should not be confined to recent cultural material.

That cultural pluralism should be studied in a deep historical perspective is confirmed by the poetic view of another African author, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who, visiting the same museum, is struck by the pitch-black statues that line the luxurious walls of the ballroom, where a party is being organized in honour of Ngũgĩ himself and of other writers by the inviting university:

> Chains still around the slaves' legs and necks.
> I ask:
> Are these sculptures here to celebrate slavery or
> To remind people that
> What they now eat and drink are fruits of those
> Once snatched from the mouth of hungry and thirsty slaves?
> (Ngugi 2019, 42)

Mengiste, Scego, Ngugi were all invited at different times as writers in residence precisely to engage with a city that has been overrepresented in the Western (and increasingly global) imaginary and cast an alternative postcolonial look at it. It has been argued, provokingly, that Venice now amounts to little less than a collection of well-honed, if not jaded, clichés, but in his compelling manifesto, cultural historian Salvatore Settis makes a plea for its paradigmatic value: "A city with a long history of cosmopolitanism, Venice [...] is a thinking machine that allows us to ponder the very idea of the city, citizenship practices, urban life as sediments of history, as the experience of the here and now, as well as a project for a possible future" (2016, 170). I argue that the African and Afrodescendant artists whose works I have addressed here reactivate, in their different modes and languages, that cosmopolitan tradition. The three literary authors perform the now classic gesture of foregrounding past stories of oppression and giving voice to the subaltern and marginal non-Western characters in European culture, reimagining our tangible and intangible heritage and looking for documents of injustice and visions of equality.

And then there is something more. Mengiste's black gondolier and black diver are both connected – the former in the mundane dimension of his trade and the latter in the religious gesture of salvaging a relic – to water. Over the centuries, Venice built its fortune on a very careful equilibrium between its own urban development and the safeguard and management of its natural environment, creating the unique figure of the Water Magistrate. Scego creates a powerful link with the animal world, adopting the rhino as synecdoche and metaphor of the colonial exploitation of other continents. Mutu's portrait acquires a particular significance in the context of the tribute to Tintoretto, coming across as the only artist who articulates the interconnectedness of the human and the non-human. Altogether, they seem to perform that act of transposing that Braidotti ascribes to posthuman art:

By transposing us beyond the confines of bound identities, art becomes necessarily inhuman in the

sense of non-human in that it connects to the animal, the vegetable, earthy and planetary forces that surround us. Art is also, moreover, cosmic in its resonance and hence posthuman by structure, as it carries us to the limits of what our embodied selves can do or endure. (2013, 107)

In conclusion, if I turn to African artists, writers, and intellectuals it is not only to understand Africa; I ask them to help me make sense of a changing Europe. By highlighting African elements they not only expand the canon, giving voice and doing partial justice to marginal and subaltern presences in mainstream culture; they are also reconfiguring the whole world picture.

Notes
[1] See http://anthropoceneprimer.org/. All websites last accessed May 6, 2019.
[2] See http://www.zueccaprojects.org/project/contemporary-dialogues-with-tintoretto/.
[3] See https://www.artribune.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Wangechi-Mutu-automatic-Hip-2015-collage-on-paper-743x584-cm.jpg.
[4] See http://www.gallerieaccademia.it/sale/sala-xx.
[5] See http://www.gallerieaccademia.it/sale/sala-xx.
[6] See http://carezzonico.visitmuve.it/en/il-museo/percorsi-e-collezioni/second-floor/longhi-room/.

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Sculptural eyewear and *Cyberfemmes*: afrofuturist arts

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at forms of art and applied arts that straddle different times and cultural traditions and bring into view processes of African and African diasporic remaking of modes of seeing, looking and living in the continent from a futurist perspective. It shows how a combination of acts of self-representation and creative uses of waste and discarded objects may engender ways of seeing that reconfigure the world of the subject and of the watcher in a high-tech, afropolitan/afrofuturist direction, as in the innovative work of Kenyan artist Cyrus Kabiru. It also points to the creative ability of fashion design to produce imaginings of times ahead by locating the wearers – in this case women – in temporal frames that liberate them from the limitations of colonial/patriarchal traditions while also offering empowering links with the past, as in the productions of Senegalese fashion designer Oumou Sy. Afro-futurism is also the main conceptual framework of the Marvel film *Black Panther* (2018), about a utopian high-tech African kingdom and its super heroes and heroines. I argue that a relevant part of this diasporic production's success rests on fashion and the enabling role of Afrofuturist costumes for African women characters.

Keywords

contemporary African arts, Cyrus Kabiru, African fashion design, Oumou Sy, *Black Panther*, afropolitanism, afrofuturism

The implied method of this issue of *From the European South* is to work on the edges of the present, to see what is new or what is in view, and what forms of representation of Africa are coming to the surface in the 21st century and from a planetary perspective. In my intervention, I would like to start from a point Achille Mbembe makes in his essay "Africa in the new century," and elaborate on socio-cultural innovation and the role of artistic creativity in contemporary Africa. Mbembe states that the continent

is firmly writing itself within a new, de-centered but global, history of the arts […]. More and more, the term "Africa" itself tends to refer to a geo-aesthetic category. Africa being above all the body of a vast diaspora, it is by definition a body in motion, a de-territorialised body constituted in the crucible of various forms of migrancy. Its arts objects too, are above all objects in motion, coming straight out of a fluctuating imaginary. Such too, is African modernity – a migrant form of modernity, born out of overlapping genealogies, at the intersections of multiple encounters with multiple elsewheres. (2016)[1]

What this passage implies is that African art and its imaginary are deeply hybrid, mixed by nature and by history, and that if we observe them closely, our preconceived ideas of Africa

change, particularly if we look at the forms and contents of graphic art, painting, sculpture, cinema, music, etc. Observing, seeing, watching, scanning the horizons in which people live is, at the same time, the endeavour of the sociologist, the philosopher, the politician, the historian, the art critic, and of the artists themselves, who are at the centre of the present survey.

Art that changes how you see

"I don't see trash as junk," Kenyan artist Cyrus Kabiru said in a 2013 TED talk: "I believe in giving trash a second chance" (2017). The American people who attended the show, in which Kabiru spoke about his artistic vision, laughed loudly as if at a joke, but Kabiru was serious. In an early interview, when asked whether in his work he thinks much about the urgent problem of waste and reuse, or whether he sees junk simply as free material for the artist, Kabiru answered that the place where he grew up

faced the Nairobi dump site. All the trash, all the waste of Nairobi, used to be dumped in my neighbour-hood. So whenever I woke up, the first thing I saw was garbage. I used to tell my dad I would like to give trash a second chance. I would like to work with trash. And that's why, up to now, that's what I've done. (Kabiru 2013)

In Africa there is nothing new about young people collecting garbage and fashioning art out of waste. You see them all over the continent, selling their colourful artefacts at street corners and in local markets. What possibly marks a difference between most of them and Cyrus Kabiru is his explicit search for beauty, survival and renewal in chaos, pollution and death – the end of the life of objects, of humans, as well as of our globally endangered environment.
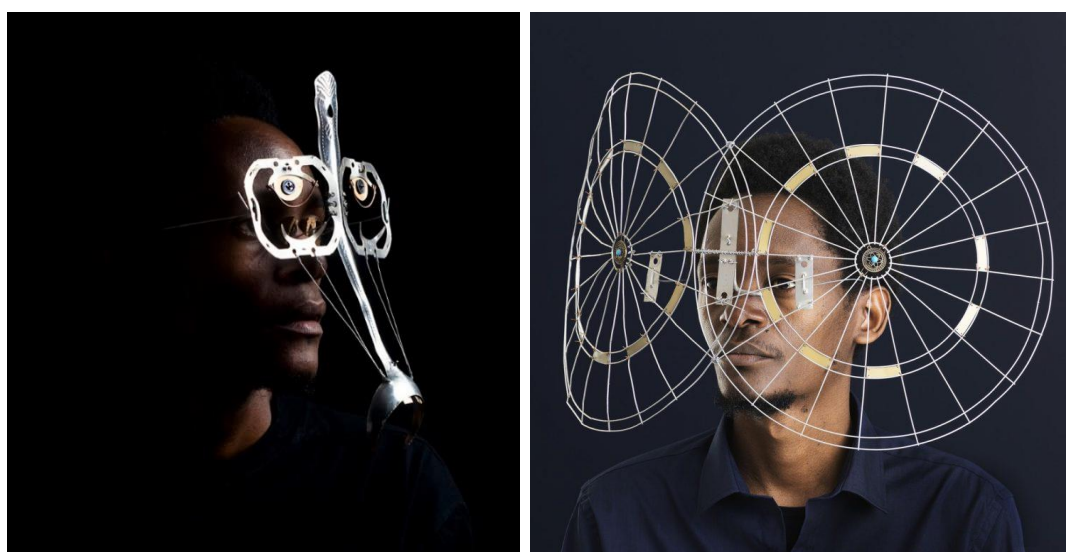
Works from the C-STUNNER Series © Cyrus Kabiru. Courtesy of the artist.

A self-taught painter and sculptor, today Kabiru is an internationally recognised artist, who practices in Nairobi and exhibits all over the world. His sculptural work, in particular, relies on

his role as a 'collector' of Nairobi cast offs. He fashions and refashions waste, recycled and found materials, into futuristic forms, and is perhaps best known for his C-STUNNERS, where (he says) 'C' stands for the artist's name, Cyrus, and 'STUNNERS' signifies "the way you are stunning. It's like 'Wow'. It's like 'C-Wow'" ("i24 News Interview", 2019). His fantastic sculptural eyewear represents an ongoing project, in which he makes and wears bizarre spectacles created with items found in his surroundings, but coming from multiple 'elsewheres', such as discarded pieces of technological waste. The results are original combinations of aesthetic experimentation, fashion design, wearable art, performance and photography, which comment on self-representation through commodity objects.

Each of the C-STUNNERS has a story of its own and is part of a series: the prison series, the mask series, the dictator series, the irreverent 'boobs' series, the wild animal series… They send out timely cultural and political messages (against the widespread practice of poaching, for example; on the state of prisons in Kenya; or the many dictatorships of the continent in postcolonial times) and, more importantly, they counter the current function of Africa as the dumping ground of all sorts of waste coming from the global North: in this sense, Kabiru's retrieval and re-use of garbage becomes a truly political gesture, a rejection of the metonymic assimilation of the continent with trash. So we could think of his work as a form of artistic activism, combined with a special energy and playfulness that, he explains, effectively captures the sensibility and attitude of the youth generation in Nairobi.

Young woman trying on Kabiru's C-STUNNERS during an exhibition at the Kuona Trust in Hurligham, Nairobi. Credit Mutua Matheka.[2]

His C-STUNNERS have thus come to signify the aspirations of popular culture, and to reflect the ingenuity and the resourcefulness of people. More importantly, they portray the resilience, the adaptability and the transformability of the everyday. In sociological terms, 'transformability' is the capacity to create a fundamentally new system when ecological, economic, or social structures make the existing system untenable.[3] Kabiru's bifocals in fact provide a new filter, a fresh perspective onto the world, transforming the wearer not only in appearance but in mind frame as well. If, by giving discarded objects a second chance, he exploits the transformative

power of reuse and turns trash into art, at an abstract level his sculptural eyewear speaks of a different kind of transformation. The use of a pair of C-STUNNERS forces the wearer to see differently, reminding her/him how much a pair of glasses can narrow or focus one's vision, and thus determine one's view of the world.

According to the curators of the *Making Africa* exhibition at the Vitra Design Museum in Germany, the C-STUNNERS series "draws attention to the restrictive perspective from which Africa is usually looked at, tainted by prejudices that are far more difficult to put aside than a pair of glasses" (Making Africa, 2015). But Kabiru's imaginative reassembling of old stuff, coming from local and global places and markets, also sets Africa on the move – culturally, aesthetically, socially and temporally. In my view he performs an Afropolitan artistic practice, in the sense of the term 'Afropolitanism' elaborated in *Sortir de la grande nuit* (Mbembe 2010). Africa has always existed at the crossroads of different worlds, in what Mbembe defines as a slow and sometimes incoherent dance with signs that African people have hardly had the leisure to choose freely, but that they managed, somehow, to domesticate and put at their service.

La conscience de cette imbrication de l'ici et de l'ailleurs, la présence de l'ailleurs dans l'ici et vice versa, cette relativisation des racines et des appartenances primaires et cette manière d'embrasser, en toute connaissance de cause, l'étrange, l'étranger et le lointain, cette capacité de reconnaître sa face dans le visage de l'étranger et de valoriser les traces du lointain dans le proche, de domestiquer l'in-familier, de travailler avec ce qui a tout l'air des contraires – c'est cette sensibilité culturelle, historique et esthétique qu'indique bien le terme "afropolitanisme." (2010, 228-229)

"Afropolitanism," Mbembe writes, expresses "a cultural, historical, and aesthetic sensitivity" (2007, 28) to the complexities of belonging in Africa and in the world. It is well known that the term rose to popularity with Taiye Selasi's 2005 essay "Bye-Bye Babar," which describes 21st-century 'Afropolitans' as affluent, educated, mobile people: "They (read: we) are the Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you" (2005). Selasi's list of Afropolitan spaces points to the key role that space plays in Afropolitanism and suggests links with Afrofuturism, which incorporates jazz aesthetics, technology, and centres of power.

Since then we have come to hear about different 'brands' of Afropolitanisms, not necessarily related to the elitist hip generation of the new African citizens of the world, and in the plural. But the most interesting feature underlining them all is that they claim the world for Africans, creating what Simon Gikandi calls "a new phenomenology of Africanness" (2011, 9). What is also interesting for the present discussion is that all these brands of Afropolitanism express awareness of the power of images and reject a global visual culture saturated with negative representations of blackness. Selasi argues that "[t]he media's portrayals (war, hunger) won't do" (2005), and Mbembe posits the rejection of victimhood as a key feature of this new way of being in the world (2007, 28-29).[4]

The audacious hybridity of the C-STUNNERS articulates this disposition: it speaks of closeness and distance, of the familiar and the alien, of the local and the planetary in the dumps and the streets of Nairobi, traversed and scanned by the collecting/assembling activity of the Kenyan artist. In fact, Kabiru's eyewear is the handicraft of a *bricoleur*, who makes use of whatever is available, working with second-hand materials, as well as with different 'archives' that can be found among the leftovers of various civilizations. This seemingly random endeavour is in part a reclamation of buried histories and in part a creation of forward-looking stories by means of a re-engineering of the discarded materials of the past.

The C-STUNNERS, made of objects that are identified and reclaimed not by their origins but by their potential, function as de-centred, mobile palimpsests of personal and communal narratives, of industrial articles coming from other continents, of poor environmental policies, ecological disasters and local political blindness in the context of the current neoliberal condition. What's more important, however, is that they gesture towards a future that needs to be brought into existence. From this viewpoint, Kabiru's wearable sculptures also represent a mode of artistic production in which the Afropolitan approach joins hands with Afrofuturism, a movement that combines black local cultures and identities with technology and sci-fi, and with the travelling cultures and politics of the African diaspora. His 'bricolaging' is a decidedly Afrofuturistic practice, which asserts the right to use whatever is at hand, to 'repurpose' trash, and to enter the technologically enhanced future without assimilation into a global monoculture. With his C-STUNNERS, Kabiru intercepts in a creative way the Afrofuturist philosophy of the remix: he literally 'sees' huge possibilities in remixing the discarded and the scattered, which gives his artistic creations a futuristic look and, also, a compelling sense of potential and of empowered vision.

Fashion that designs the future

There is a structural similarity between Afropolitanism and the aesthetic field of Afrofuturism. Both, as the award-winning writer and scholar Sofia Samatar notes, are "expressions of entitlement" (2017, 186). Afrofuturism is not a new phenomenon: it is an enduring, audacious cultural, artistic and political African-diasporic and, increasingly, African strategy of claiming the future in and through the arts, as a gesture with consequences for the present. This gesture expresses the intention to develop (self-)representations that may free black people form the subaltern, stereotyped identities imposed on them by the hegemonic logics of modernity. Afrofuturist artists reclaim African traditions as necessary parts of this process of becoming, and in so doing they extend their archives into the imagined, the not-yet. This black cultural experience of expansive freedom achieved through remixing sci-fi, ancient African cosmology, and magical realism has been underway since the middle of the 20th century.[5]

A central feature of Afrofuturism is a focus on the black *body*, and what it means to rearticulate the body that has been dissected, violated and made to perform, in the history of

modernity since the slave trade. The survival tactic of 'shape-shifting', of changing the body, its forms and looks, and of taking on 'alien' features, which can be found in African American cultural narratives and in the work of early African authors such as the Nigerian Amos Tutuola, occupies a key place in Afrofuturist creativity since the 1950s. More recently, a number of African American female artists have presented their pop star personas with uniquely Afrofuturist codes: a mixture of ancient African tradition and space-age technology, through which they have channelled a stylized alter-ego, a self-created shifting identity linked to the shifting shapes of their bodies and outfits. For example, the survival tactic of shape-shifting is central in the work of 'android' pop star Janelle Monáe, and Detroit artist Krista Franklin, whose 2007 collage work *SEED (The Book of Eve)* saw Franklin draw on the cover of Octavia Butler's novel *Wild Seed*, where the young female protagonist takes on powerful identities, such as a white man or a lion, to navigate a hostile world.

In sub-Saharan cultures, the social presentation of the body and the value assigned to clothes and ornaments have always been relevant. As noted by anthropologist Giovanna Parodi da Passano (2016), despite the prejudices about the frivolity of fashion and African immobility, many studies have highlighted the social protagonism of fabrics and the significance of forms and clothing practices to both social action and political systems within African realities. With their 'theatrical' power, clothes are able to express both the characteristics of a person and her belonging to a wider collective subject. The messages entrusted to textiles can be considered creative responses elaborated at key moments in the history of the continent, as when, for example, they convey political messages or exhibit the faces of charismatic leaders. In contemporary urban environments, fashion representations have become a rich form of communication: from formal portraiture to the visual arts, from calendars to photos shared via smartphone, they communicate the place, the heritage and the belonging. But also ex-centricity, hyperreal bodily performance, agency, and forward-looking innovation.

Ytasha Womack – filmmaker, futurist, and author of *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi Fantasy and Fantasy Culture* (2013) – explains that Afrofuturism offers a "highly intersectional" way of looking at possible futures or alternate realities through a black cultural lens. It is non-linear, fluid and feminist; it uses the black imagination to consider mysticism, metaphysics, identity and liberation; and, despite offering black folks a way to see themselves in a better future, it creatively blends the future, the past and the present. As a black woman, Womack states that Afrofuturism makes space for women in unprecedented ways: "Afrofuturism is […] a literal and figurative space for Black women to be themselves" (Womack 2013, 100-101). And Alondra Nelson, a pioneer of Afrofuturism, would call it a feminist movement (Womack 2013, 108).

Though an absolutely innovative gesture in terms of African aesthetic practices and gender politics, it is not surprising that Afrofuturism in Africa expressed itself early on in the work of women fashion designers. Fashion is a very serious matter in the continent, and it has

always provided useful keys to reading both its past and present. Afrofuturist design is adding future-oriented and shape-shifting modes of representation to this continental tradition.

Senegalese fashion designer Oumou Sy, undoubtedly the most famous fashion innovator from western Africa, produces fashion clothes that keep pushing the limits of creative and institutional forms, and can be considered brilliant examples of the fusion and simultaneous valorisation of local culture and cosmopolitanism. From her early days as a self-taught young woman, raised in a conservative Toucouleur Muslim family in St. Louis (an old trading and colonial city of coastal Senegal), in the past three decades Sy has become an internationally celebrated designer who works at the intersection of art, spectacle, and social space. Although her name is immediately associated with costume design and manufacture, her creative activity is marked by her collaborations with other African artists in multiple media, including cinema, theatre, music, and dance. This theatrical, performative inclination has actually become a signature of her designs of costumes, haute couture, jewellery, and accessories.

In the early 2000s, a visit to Oumou Sy's laboratory in Dakar gave me the opportunity not only of seeing how she worked to produce internationally appreciated and futuristic clothes starting from a local situation, but also of hearing about her ground-breaking career in fashion design and production. Growing up, Oumou Sy was denied an education and was expected to follow the traditional life patterns reserved for women. But she began designing and creating her own clothes at the age of five in order to avoid her tribe's custom of early marriage (at the age of nine). Sy recalls the help she got from her mother who, from within their conservative patriarchal environment, used profits from weaving commissions to buy her talented daughter a sewing machine. That was the beginning of an independent life, in which gender occupies a complex place, involving self-affirmation, transgression, and play. "I have always made my own way," she says. "And I have done so with dignity." By which she refers not only to her success in the fashion industry: her work supports internet cafes, clinics for street children, and free workshops where she trains young designers.[6]

A pioneer of Internet culture in Senegal, in the mid-1990s Sy founded the first cyber café in the centre of Dakar, Métissacana, which includes her boutique shop, a cultural centre, and a showroom for her fashion creations. 'Métissacana' is a Bambara French creole word meaning "the mixing of races and cultures (*metissage*) has arrived" – an apt name for a business that sums up Sy's creative project. Her designer creativity in fact makes use of materials from a variety of sources, ranging from urban garbage to highly sophisticated fabrics manufactured abroad. At the intersection of art, spectacle, and social space, Sy crafts Africa through multiple senses, images, textures, light, and shapes that clearly invoke and imagine the past and the future in a fraught dialogue. Her designs have often been photographed in the city streets of Dakar amid trash, wrecked cars, and minivans.

If Sy's creative attention is focused on the fast changing environment of the city, the place where she worked from, at the time of my visit, was on the outskirts of the busy capital

of Senegal: a house in the midst of a dry, sandy area, where everything looked minimal and not quite new.
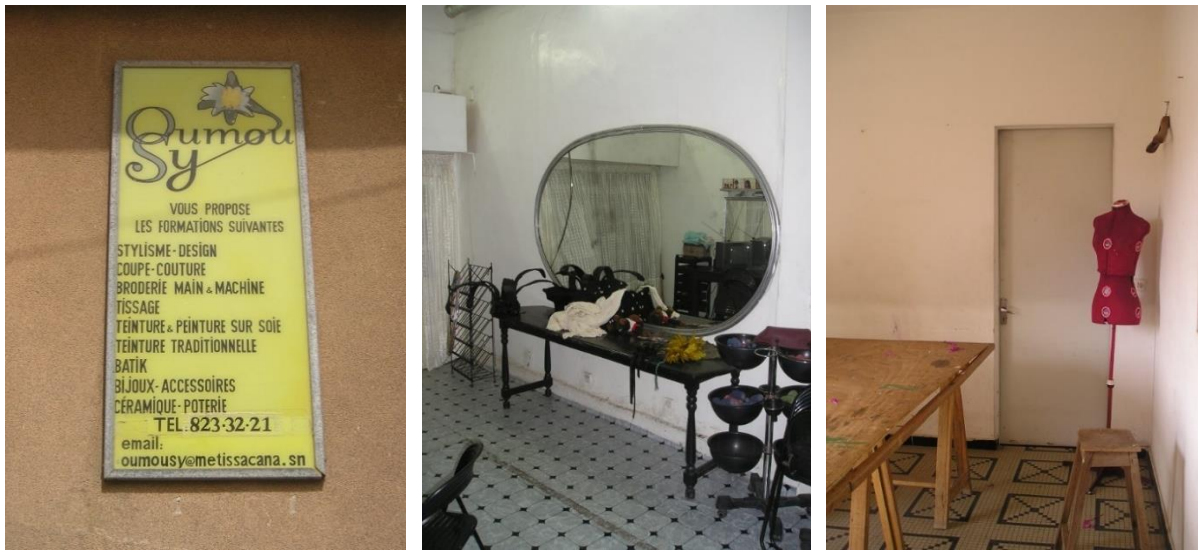
Oumou Sy's quarters on the outskirts of Dakar (my photos).

In her laboratory, weaving was carried out on ancient wooden textile frames, in the open air under a shade, while beadwork and sewing were performed on a table in the garden at the back of the building. The conjugation of ancient tools and techniques and forward-looking design was eerily striking but potent in its outcomes, signalling a conscious imaginative effort at renewing African materials and dressing codes in the continent and, also, internationally, as she increasingly broadened her distribution and reached the catwalk shows of Africa, Europe and beyond.

Weavers at Oumou Sy's quarters on the outskirts of Dakar (my photos).

In the 1990s Sy developed her signature collections of fantastic 'women' where tradition coexisted with new technologies, but also with the Dakar urban landscape of wealth and poverty, of glittering modernity and trash.

Oumou Sy, *Cyberfemme* (Cyber Woman). Dakar, 1996. Photograph by Mamadou Touré. Béhan.

Oumou Sy, Perfume Woman, Dakar, 1997. Photograph by Mamadou Touré. Béhan.

As anthropologist Hudita Mustafa has observed, Sy combines a reclamation of African heritage with "a parodic rendition of modernity as Euro-African encounters, accommodations, and blunders" (2010, 123). Mamadou Touré's photo of *Cyberfemme* shows Sy's model posing next to a *car-rapide*, the cheap transport for popular sectors which rushes through the city streets and neighbourhoods: in the neglected cityscape of Dakar, she cuts a utopian figure of light, speed, and beauty, a sort of "cyber-angel" (123). Her almost magical apparition in the Medina of the 1990s is a reflection of a moment of instability and despair in the African postcolony, which, in Sy's artistic and social project, generates utopias and reinventions through images of subversive, mocking femininity. Cyber Woman is possibly the most famous example of Sy's aesthetic intervention, full of irony and mixed cultural references, which invites viewers to imagine Africa unbound from oppositions of Africa and the West, savage and civilized:

A goddess of modernity, barefoot and surefooted, she is far from the colonial ideal of the modern, civilized African. That was the male, suited bureaucrat, francophone and francophilic. Does she even need to speak French if she speaks Microsoft Word? She can access Paris, New York, and Abidjan via the Net, so does she need to go there? Does she need to be married? Who would dare marry her? (Mustafa 2010, 135)

If Cyber Woman uses iconic technological objects employed to polarize Africa and the West

as ornaments, Sy's Perfume Woman (1997) is a kind of playful but far from naïve historical and fashion palimpsest of Afro/European traces. The model in the picture wears a silk wrap skirt and halter top with small perfume bottles sewn on as if beadwork. Perfume, of course, is a mark of Parisian refinement and distinction, and therefore a symbol of French femininity, which Sy reworks by using imitations sold in local markets, as well as the small, cheap, very sweet perfumes from Mecca that are part of the sensory experience of Dakar. Perfume woman resembles a kind of walking catalogue of these still troubled intercontinental and continental relationships, transformed and possibly overcome by means of a headdress recalling a television antenna or a technological futuristic device.

Cyber Woman and Perfume Woman represent Sy's project of articulation of an Afropolitanism that mines the past and the present to produce a future which is in constant dialogue with origins, acknowledging and deconstructing them at the same time. Together with Kora Woman, Calabash Woman, and Envelope of the Desert (all created in 1998), her figures of femininity use excessive decoration of iconic objects to create human hybrids. Their garments are made of diverse kinds of cloth, mostly industrially produced in Europe and Asia, and adorned with items that include urban waste (as in Cyrus Kabiru's or Wangechi Mutu's work), gourds, baskets, and feathers.[7]

Today Oumou Sy's Afrofuturist refashioning of African clothes and tribal metal jewellery show a decisive turn in her modes of innovation of the past and the local, with an eye to the future and the planetary: her creations no longer signal the ironic desire to dialogue with the West and with western markets, by turning technology into fashionable add-ons. Instead, Sy works freely from within her culture and materials to renew them from the inside: by accommodating futuristic remixing trends, she neither renounces her matrix nor the desire to speak to the international world of fashion from her own Afropolitan environment. The future may still hold racial and neocapitalist tensions, but her creativity channels a new outlook on the self-mutating relationship between African women and their surroundings, blackness and hi-tech modernity.

Sy's fashion design – as well as the decidedly Afrofuturist creations of many younger African women stylists she has inspired – draws, cuts and sews the exciting landscape of an African contemporary time that is imagining its becoming, while still engaging in the long term socio-cultural process of women's empowerment. As such, her work could be thought of as dialoguing with African diasporic styles in the US and, I suggest, it could be seen as an antecedent to one of the most recent artistic achievements in African American arts and culture: Marvel Studios' Afrofuturist Black Panther (Academy Award 2019), where fashion design features as an integral and exciting part of director Ryan Coogler's success.

Black Panther is Marvel Studios' first movie with an almost entirely black cast and a black superhero. Although the story is based in fantasy, it is inspired by an earnest attempt to infuse it with concepts, cultures, and histories of/from Africa, turning the film into a platform for

collaborative work on the continent itself, which might provide some insight into its diversity while also promoting an inclusive sense of identity. As Mbembe noticed in an intervention occasioned by the screening of *Black Panther* in Johannesburg, the film rests on and blends the visionary ideas that in time have supported the Negro struggle for the liberation of black humanity. In his view, the film

est une extraordinaire synthèse de toutes les idées et des concepts qui, depuis au moins la fin du XIXe siècle, auront accompagné les luttes nègres en vue de la montée en humanité. Pour qui sait lire entre les images, pour qui sait écouter les rythmes et épouser le pouls du récit, les fils sont là, manifestes, et derrière l'une ou l'autre séquence planent mille ombres et mille courants de pensée – de Marcus Garvey à Cheikh Anta Diop, de la négritude à l'afrocentrisme, de l'afropolitanisme à l'afrofuturisme. C'est que ce film, sans doute le premier du genre, est d'abord une prouesse intellectuelle, la mise en image et en spectacle des grandes idées et courants de pensée qui auront accompagné nos efforts pour "sortir de la grande nuit." (Mbembe 2018)

The kingdom of Wakanda is a 'civilization' which has grafted a futuristic technological core on ancient traditions; a land that has never been colonized and has hidden from the world's view unfathomable riches and precious minerals, one of which, vibranium, is the key to its thriving society but also to power struggles inside and outside its carefully guarded boundaries. At its centre stands a king who is a new kind of egalitarian superhero, who would be lost if he had to rest on his strength alone: a powerful ruler who needs his family, his community and, particularly, the resourceful women around him. The women of Wakanda not only hold their own but, without their leadership and immense talent, the kingdom itself would be lost. The choice to encircle King T'Challa/Black Panther with so many dynamic women who have voice, political power and social recognition is intentional. Women in Africa are and have always been the heart of their communities: having dazzling black women on screen, respected for their intelligence, physical strength and wisdom in a world of male superheroes, is a forceful gesture in terms of race and gender politics.[8]

Lupita Nyong'o as Nakia and Letitia Wright as Shuri in *Black Panther*.
Credit Matt Kennedy/Marvel and Disney 2018.

I think the women characters in *Black Panther* may easily be seen as the 21st-century heirs of Oumou Sy's *Cyberfemme* – the prototype of an Afropolitan/Afrofuturist way of being woman in the maelstrom of temporal struggles that leads to her own and her community's wellbeing and development. Ruth E. Carter, the costume designer for the film, who is the first African American to have received an Oscar nomination, specifically created for *Black Panther* a combination of traditional African clothing with hi-tech Afropunk influences. She took several trips to Africa and drew inspiration from the Dogon people of West Africa, the Turkana people in East Africa, the Hemba people in Congo, the Suri tribe in Ethiopia, the Tuareg people in Western and Northern Africa, along with several others. The result is a scintillating hybrid attire that takes the trend inaugurated by Oumou Sy in western Africa to its extremes.

Shuri, T'Challa's little sister, has a special place in Carter's versatile fashion design, and rightly so, since she is at the same time a princess, a scientist, a nerd, a skilful advisor and a visionary politician. The sixteen-year-old girl is the smartest person in Wakanda and is responsible for most of the nation's advanced technology, including her brother's superhero outfit and the weapons he uses. Shuri is interested in innovations that directly improve lives beyond her own, and embodies a life project and a lesson in sustainability that men in the film find it difficult to share or absorb. By the end of *Black Panther*, however, T'Challa seems to embrace his smart sister's ethos, which leads to making sure that the Wakandans use their coveted resources responsibly and on a planetary scale. Shuri, the *Cyberfemme*, is the kind of game changer that Africa needs, not only for her technological skills, but for her generous political vision and her ability to envisage an equal society where women can guarantee peace and prosperity. Since its first release in 2018 *Black Panther* has largely been received and praised as a 'moment' towards racial empowerment and inclusivity. However, the most revolutionary statement in the film is that the future of Africa (and of the planet) rests on women. The future really depends on them.

Shuri (Letitia Wright) in *Black Panther*.
Credit Matt Kennedy/Marvel and Disney 2018.

Notes

[1] Mbembe's essay can be read online, in English and in Italian, on the website of *doppiozero*, a non-profit web magazine based in Milan: https://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/why-africa/africa-in-new-century.

[2] For more pictures of the series, see Matheka 2010.

[3] "Its implications for sustainability science include changing the focus from seeking optimal states and the determinants of maximum sustainable yield, to resilience analysis, adaptive resource management, and adaptive governance" (Walker et. al. 2004, 2). See also M.C. Lavagnolo's article in the present issue.

[4] For an enlightening discussion of Afropolitanism and Afrofuturism see Samatar 2017.

[5] The term 'Afrofuturism' was conceived a quarter-century ago by author Mark Dery in his essay "Black to the Future," which looks at speculative fiction within the African diaspora and at the growing number of black artists using modern technology. He points out how blacks themselves were once used as a form of "technology." In slavery, exploitative systems of business and commerce viewed black bodies as machines that fuelled the power of Western modernity. Dery asks the questions driving the philosophy of Afrofuturism: Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures? Furthermore, isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats, futurologists, streamliners, and set designers who have engineered our collective fantasies? What makes Afrofuturism significantly different from standard science fiction and space-art is that it is steeped in ancient African traditions and black identity and celebrates the uniqueness and innovation of black culture. The most famous proponent of this cultural movement was musician Sun Ra, who infused elements of space and jazz fusion in his work as a musical artist. Prolific science fiction author Octavia E. Butler explored black women protagonists in novels set in the context of futuristic technology and interactions with the supernatural.

[6] See "Designer Portrait Oumou SY" (2015).

[7] Spectacular photographs of Oumou Sy's Cyber Woman, Perfume Woman and Calabash Woman by Egyptian photographer Salwa Rashad can be found at "Stories in Costumes - Oumou Sy", visura.co/rashad/projects/stories-in-costumes-oumou-sy?status=Log+in+to+hire+Salwa.

[8] *Black Panther* has sparked a lively debate, particularly on issues of race and gender representation, in blogs, magazines and journals in the USA, Africa and Europe. South African scholar Carli Coetzee appropriately calls this enthusiastic response to the film "Wakanda fever" (2019).

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Tra connessioni e *dis*connessioni: riflessioni a partire dai cinquant'anni del FESPACO

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ABSTRACT

2019 is the year of the fiftieth anniversary of FESPACO, the Panafrican Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Along with the JCC (Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, the Carthage Film Festival of Tunis), FESPACO has been a driving force and the most engaged festival in post-independence Africa. This essay aims at investigating its relevance today, in a globalized world, and measuring its 'connectivity' to the present day, in a century of digital innovation and in these times of the web.

Keywords

FESPACO, African cinema, innovation, digital, Apolline Traoré

> "Dis": prefisso che si trova, con significato peggiorativo, in molti termini soprattutto del linguaggio medico […] o formati modernamente (come *disfunzione*, *disartrìa*, ecc.), nei quali indica alterazione, malformazione, difettoso funzionamento, anomalia e simili.
>
> Vocabolario Treccani

> La rivoluzione digitale in Africa si farà, questo è certo, ma sarà efficace, utile e necessaria solo a condizione che…
>
> Colin Dupré (2013)

FESPACO, non solo cinema…

"Se esiste un festival politico, è senz'altro il FESPACO": così dalle pagine di *Africultures* Olivier Barlet saluta l'edizione del 2019, ventiseiesimo appuntamento che festeggia il cinquantenario della storica manifestazione nata nel 1969 (2019b, 4). Insieme alle JCC (Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, Giornate del cinema di Cartagine, Tunisia), il FESPACO (inizialmente Festival du Cinéma Panafricain de Ouagadougou, oggi Festival Panafricano del cinema e della televisione di Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso) ha costituito infatti il secondo polo di riferimento in un'appropriazione identitaria affidata, quale interlocutore privilegiato, al cinema, in un continente che cinquant'anni fa si affacciava al panorama dischiuso dalle indipendenze, sospeso tra lo slancio e le sfide poste della nuova fase storica, le eredità dei regimi coloniali e il rimodularsi dei rapporti di forza. Sin dalla loro istituzione nel 1966 su iniziativa di Tahar Cheriaa, le JCC si sono poste come un ponte tra il Nord e il Sud del Medi-

terraneo, oltre che tra le geografie e culture del continente, attuabile nella reciprocità di un dialogo franco, lucido e senza pregiudizi. Di qui il respiro 'globale' della prima edizione, con il conferimento del Tanit d'argento a un film cecoslovacco, *Il grido* (*Křik,* 1963) di Jaromil Jireš, tra i maggiori esponenti della *Nová Vlna*, accanto alla massima onorificenza tributata a *La Noire de…* (1966) del senegalese Sembène Ousmane, in un'ospitalità oggi dislocata nella sezione parallela *Cinema du Monde*. Il FESPACO, riservato a opere e autori africani, irradia invece progressivamente, a partire da una precisa spazialità, una dimensione extra-continentale innervata sulla diaspora, prima estromessa, poi inglobata a parte e infine sempre più nevralgica a partire dall'impulso degli anni Ottanta (Barlet 2019b, 2-3).

Lo statuto e l'operatività stessa assegnati al cinema mostrano piani differenziabili, il cui disassamento appare più distinguibile sulla lunga distanza. Ricorrendo a una modalità figurata, si potrebbe dire che per Cartagine il cinema persiste come destinazione e universo in sé. La conquista 'politica' di una visibilità per le opere filmiche assesta la militanza nell'agone dei festival dove guadagnare quell'attrattività per professionisti e produttori internazionali di cui oggi gode. Riassorbito dunque nel movimento della traiettoria è il disappunto di quanti rimproverano alle JCC di essersi allontanate dallo spirito impegnato dei primi tempi verso le derive mondane dei "tappeti rossi srotolati ai piedi degli invitati" introdotti alla ventiduesima edizione del 2008, secondo le parole della giornalista e scrittrice tunisina Fawzia Zouari nelle pagine di *Jeune Afrique* (2008).[1]

Per Ouagadougou l'assetto rimane bifronte e in un ondeggiamento costitutivo – non privo di sbilanciamenti e non esente da contraddizioni – tra una finalità specifica e un portato politico che la trascende, la contiene e se ne alimenta; tra l'essere una manifestazione *di* cinema e *per* il cinema, che vorrebbe quest'ultimo attore unico e protagonista, e un'iniziativa che ha *nel* cinema il suo ospite d'onore, l'invitato speciale, ammantato e gravato di oneri e onori. Da qui la possibilità di accentuare, nel suo definirsi, la valenza di 'piattaforma', 'cornice di dibattiti' e 'incontro', termini che forzano il perimetro designato dalla finalità programmatica indicata nello sviluppo dei cinema africani.[2] Istituito nel 1969, a partire dal 1973 il FESPACO inscrive l'appuntamento biennale che lo cadenza in un tema di discussione specifico, avviando una prassi coerente con la natura militante della manifestazione. Complementare al FESPACO ma da esso distinto è lo spazio del MICA (Marché International du Cinéma Africain), introdotto a partire dal 1983, a cui è affidato il compito di promuovere la vendita e la distribuzione delle opere e la professionalizzazione delle maestranze. Come si legge nella presentazione sul sito ufficiale, i temi scelti sono disgiunti dalla competizione festivaliera; essi non orientano la selezione cinematografica, né offrono criteri di assegnazione del premio. Sono intesi piuttosto come indicazioni di questioni sensibili in una prospettiva panafricana e, al contempo, come una riflessione sulla funzione che il cinema può svolgere in merito. Esemplare a riguardo è la formulazione inaugurale del 1973, "Le rôle du cinéma dans l'éveil d'une conscience de civilisation noire," la quale interroga la funzione del cinema nel risveglio di consapevolezza.

Nel susseguirsi delle edizioni, i temi mostrano quell'oscillazione di cui si parlava poco sopra, ripartendosi tra una canalizzazione dedicata all'audiovisione e alle specifiche tematiche ad essa legate (economia, innovazione, professionalità, spettatorialità, ecc.); e, dall'altro lato, una canalizzazione centrata sulle urgenze politiche e socio-culturali e le loro rispettive implicazioni con il mezzo audiovisivo. Nella prima direttrice rientrano le annualità 1981, settima edizione: "La produzione e la distribuzione"; 1999, sedicesima edizione: "Cinema e circuiti di diffusione in Africa"; 2001, diciassettesima edizione: "Cinema e nuove tecnologie"; 2003, diciottesima edizione: "L'attore nella creazione e promozione del cinema africano"; 2005, diciannovesima edizione: "Formazione e sfide della professionalizzazione"; 2011, ventiduesima edizione: "Cinema africano e Mercati"; 2014, ventiquattresima edizione: "Cinema africano: Produzione e diffusione all'epoca del digitale"; 2017, venticinquesima edizione: "Formazione e mestieri del cinema e dell'audiovisivo."

Nella seconda canalizzazione, marcata dalla congiunzione "cinema e…," sono conteggiabili le proposte del 1985, nona edizione: "Cinema e liberazione dei popoli" – convegno: "Letteratura e cinema africano"; 1987, decima edizione: "Cinema e identità culturale" – convegno: "Tradizione orale e nuovi media"; 1989, undicesima edizione: "Cinema e sviluppo economico" – convegno "Cinema, donne e povertà"; 1991, dodicesima edizione: "Cinema e ambiente" – convegno "Partenariati e cinema africano"; 1993, tredicesima edizione: "Cinema e libertà" – convegno "Cinema e diritti dell'infanzia"; 1995, quattordicesima edizione: "Cinema e storia dell'Africa"; 1997, quindicesima edizione: "Cinema, infanzia e gioventù"; 2007, ventesima edizione: "Cinema e diversità culturali" – panel: "Cinema d'autore e cinema popolare in Africa"; 2009, ventunesima edizione: "Cinema africano: turismo e patrimoni culturali."

Nel profilo appena tratteggiato si intravede una disgiuntura che, come anticipato, colloca il FESPACO su due piani che, pur non sempre vicendevolmente allineati, anche nella sensibilità a recepire le istanze provenienti dall'attualità, sono talora portatori, nell'interazione irrisolta tra le due faglie, di una temporalità sì inattuale, ma al contempo e proprio per questo non priva di aderenze al presente. In questa coesistenza si inserisce il rapporto con l'innovazione e le nuove tecnologie.

Innovazione e tecnologia, merci e dispositivi

> Non soltanto, quindi, le prigioni, i manicomi, il Panopticon, le scuole […] la cui connessione con il potere è in un certo senso evidente, ma anche la penna, la scrittura la letteratura, la filosofia, l'agricoltura, la navigazione, i computers, i telefoni cellulari e – perché no – il linguaggio stesso, che è forse il più antico dei dispositivi.
>
> Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (2006)

> Una matassa, un insieme multilineare composto di linee di natura diversa.
>
> Gilles Deleuze, *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (2007)

La modellazione delle temporalità, intese come narrazioni e rappresentazioni strutturanti sguardi e approcci, è questione che ritorna nel dibattito postcoloniale. Tra i vari autori che ne hanno discusso, Rakam Shome in "When Postcolonial Studies Meets Media Studies" (2016) ne fa la base di appoggio per la sua argomentazione critica alle modalità di lettura universalizzanti delle storie e dei funzionamenti dei media nel mondo. Nel suo keynote "Dal digitale una nuova era per l'Africa," tenuto agli Open Innovation Days (OID) dell'Università di Padova, dedicati nell'edizione 2018 alle reti umane e digitali, all'economia circolare e alle cure del futuro, il filosofo e teorico politico camerunese Achille Mbembe ha ripercorso le storicità dominanti che hanno scandito la temporalità occidentale, dal *furor catalogandi* della stagione evoluzionistica, all'infatuazione per il progresso con il suo respiro linearmente dinamico, all'imperativo dell'innovazione che imperversa nel presente.

In controcampo alle miopie, agli offuscamenti e alle visioni monocole con cui e da cui si continua a guardare al continente africano, Mbembe convoca le prospettive tratteggiate dall'Afropolitismo, una sensibilità estetica e culturale che, come si è scritto, promana da una forma di mondanità legata agli attuali panorami mediali, alle pratiche concrete e localizzate di utilizzo e frequentazione degli apparati tecnologici. Nel delineare questa "nuova era per l'Africa," nelle sue stimolanti e vitali istanze protesiche "che hanno cambiato il modo in cui il nuovo soggetto africano parla, scrive, comunica, immagina chi è o addirittura si relaziona con gli altri e con il mondo in generale" (Oboe 2018), Mbembe richiama due nodi critici: da un lato, l'appiattimento dell'innovazione sulla tecnologia, nello specifico digitale, come se la capacità di scalzare prassi acquisite in termini migliorativi fosse necessariamente appannaggio di quest'ultima; dall'altro, l'interazione stringente tra innovazione e mercato, pensiero quantitativo e statistico.

Questa inerenza balugina nel tema scelto per il cinquantesimo anniversario del FESPACO, "Confronter notre mémoire et forger l'avenir d'un cinéma panafricain dans son essence, son économie et sa diversité," in cui al nesso, atteso, tra memoria e futuro del cinema africano, si affianca la tripartizione che intercala la dialettica fra il polo dell'essenza e quello della diversità in una scansione che, di estrema pertinenza per il cinema, offre ampie possibilità

di diramazione.

Nel contesto attuale il binomio innovazione-tecnologia, nei suoi diversi campi di applicazione, costituisce uno dei volti dell'economia. Tra le discorsività che 'connettono' l'Africa all'innovazione e alla tecnologia esiste però una precisa declinazione dell'economia, quella che inquadra il continente – sottolinea ancora Mbembe – come ultima frontiera del capitalismo, in cui "l'enorme potenziale del mercato"[3] richiede di ingaggiare e vincere la sfida della sua piena attuazione.

Alla vitalità che caratterizza tanto l'ambito creativo (del continente come della diaspora) quanto quello delle pratiche digitali quotidiane fa da contrappeso l'insoddisfazione e lo sforzo, tanto privato quanto pubblico, per colmare i ritardi e il gap di connettività tecnologica (apparecchi e rete) che sconnettono l'Africa, pur nei diversi gradi tra i paesi, dal resto del pianeta, in una spasmodica tensione a saturarne l'intera' superficie: un'attitudine che una rapida incursione nel web è sufficiente ad attestare.[4] Ubique sono le immagini chiamate a rappresentare lo stato delle cose, la cui fascinazione poggia per lo più sull'accostamento di elementi usualmente percepiti come appartenenti a epoche diverse, compresenti nella sospensione anomala, quasi accidentale, di un 'adesso' destinato a riversarsi in un 'domani' che porterà il tramonto degli uni a vantaggio degli altri nell'ineluttabile e sorridente slancio verso il futuro di cui sono emissari gli utilizzatori (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Immagine pubblicata su *Africa Diligence*.[5]

Innovazione e digitale nell'arena del FESPACO

Nel campo estetico, il succedersi di tecnologie ha sempre comportato sacche di resistenza, inneggianti all'autorità dell'*ancien*. Per alcuni cineasti africani, sulla resistenza all'abdicazione al digitale ha pesato la connotazione di economicità e accessibilità delle tecnologie. In una dinamica apparentemente contraddittoria, ma comprensibile nei rapporti di forza che concorrono a orientare la percezione e l'autopercezione dei soggetti, il ricorrere a una tecnologia a buon mercato, soprattutto in una fase in cui la pellicola manteneva un suo statuto simbolico

forte, è stato vissuto non come una risorsa o una sperimentazione, ma come pratica che accentuava il divario di autorevolezza tra le cinematografie del Nord e del Sud del mondo, in un'esternazione dei differenti regimi di percezione dispiegati a partire dall'impiego della medesima strumentazione. Il fenomeno di Nollywood, segnato da un dibattito polarizzato tra estetica e mercato, non infrequentemente è stato invocato a sostegno della posizione dei refrattari.

Sul fronte istituzionale, il FESPACO ha perimetrato la competizione sino all'edizione 2013, malgrado la contrarietà crescente dei cineasti di realtà produttive già approdate al digitale, le cui proteste organizzate hanno concorso ad abbattere la preclusione. Tra i motivi di questa sofferta transizione si adducono le difficoltà concrete e i costi dell'adeguamento delle sale (del resto scontati anche dalla rete distributiva italiana) e il timore di uno tsunami nollywoodiano (Dupré 2013).

La battaglia, ammantata di disquisizioni estetiche, era inevitabilmente destinata alla resa che ha visto anche il FESPACO allineare il proprio regolamento e rimodulare, nel segno della modernità e dell'innovazione, l'accoglienza del digitale. La questione del cinema e delle nuove tecnologie (tema della diciassettesima edizione 2001, che inaugurava l'ingresso nel ventunesimo secolo) è stata rilanciata nel 2014 quando le sfide poste dal digitale vengono monitorate, oltre che dal punto di vista realizzativo, anche da quello, ben più insidioso, della diffusione, in una torsione dall'estetica verso la gestione del mercato e la circolazione delle opere, in linea con preoccupazioni condivise a livello globale (cfr. Re 2017 e il recente caso di *Roma* di Alfonso Cuarón) sulla proliferazione dei canali di circuitazione e dei modi di fruizione (Dupré 2013; Forestier 2012).[6]

All'altezza del cinquantenario si assiste a un'ulteriore torsione che investe piuttosto le infrastrutture e la componente gestionale. Sorvegliato speciale in virtù della ricorrenza, il ventiseiesimo FESPACO è chiamato al riscatto, a fronte dell'edizione 2017 pressoché unanimemente bollata come catastrofica in termini di opere selezionate e, in generale, della deplorata perdita di autorevolezza della storica manifestazione almeno a partire dal 2009, eloquentemente nominato l'anno della *fespagaille*, ovvero del 'fespa-caos'. Rispondono ai due piani di articolazione che attraversano il FESPACO le corpose restituzioni proposte da Olivier Barlet in *Africultures*: "Fespaco 2019: vers la résurrection" e "Colloque du cinquantenaire du Fespaco: panafricanisme et pérennisation," dedicate rispettivamente alla competizione festivaliera e al convegno (25 e 26 febbraio 2019) demandato a Gaston Kaboré, tra i padri fondatori del cinema burkinabé e della sua vocazione panafricana, Etalon d'Or de Yennenga 1997 con *Buud Yam*.

FESPACO: tra competizione e piattaforma

In "Fespaco 2019: vers la résurrection," oltre a una presentazione critico-analitica dei film Barlet traccia un bilancio della rassegna festivaliera nel suo insieme, riconoscendo uno sforzo

per quanto riguarda la qualità della selezione – sebbene esistano ampi margini di recupero per quel che riguarda la rappresentatività delle diverse nazioni e l'esclusiva sui titoli. Attualmente le opere in concorso possono infatti aver partecipato ad altre manifestazioni: il risultato è che una parte consistente di esse è già stata vista, talora ripetutamente, altrove, giungendo all'appuntamento biennale di Ouagadougou depauperata del suo potenziale attrattivo per i distributori e gli operatori di settore.

Altro elemento di criticità è la presenza sovrastante dell'apparato politico, inteso quale carosello di personalità e rappresentanze. È questa una deriva 'patologica', cronicizzatasi negli anni a causa dell'intrecciarsi dei due piani costitutivi del FESPACO, che ha assunto proporzioni massive nel cinquantenario, raggiungendo il suo acme nell'estenuante cerimonia di chiusura totalmente monopolizzata da esponenti politici e con l'estromissione dal palco delle giurie persino nella consegna dei premi – fatto che non ha mancato di sollevare debite reazioni di sdegno da parte degli interessati, degli addetti ai lavori e degli spettatori.

Il respiro politico del FESPACO ha trovato invece ospitalità nel convegno posto sotto l'egida di Gaston Kaboré, alla presenza (o nel ricordo) di figure autorevoli che hanno concorso, con opere e riflessioni, a scandire il 'viaggio' delle cinematografie africane e del progetto panafricano. Pur nella formalità cerimoniale comunque dovuta a un'iniziativa istituzionale, si ritrova in questa sede la vitalità e l'intensità del FESPACO quale piattaforma di dibattito che vede nel cinema al contempo l'oggetto e l'operatore di una mediazione verso questioni storiche, snodi e prospettive trasversali che saldano il festival alla temperie storico-culturale della sua fondazione, in dialogo con le criticità e le esigenze contemporanee. Iniziativa scontata in un anniversario, risulta tuttavia coerente con l'impianto strutturale della manifestazione.

Al cuore dell'incontro, l'attualità – e la perseguibilità – di una progettualità panafricana chiamata a confrontarsi con le declinazioni – e i ripensamenti – odierni del concetto di 'essenza', nella sua interazione con la nozione di 'diversità'. L'articolo di Barlet, "Colloque du cinquantenaire du Fespaco: panafricanisme et pérennisation," offre una puntuale sintesi che opportunamente dipana l'intreccio e la pluralità dei contributi emersi nel contesto animato del dibattito e li integra con un affresco delle principali tendenze storiche. Parte consistente delle giornate, in sintonia con la tripartizione del tema, risulta dedicata alla questione dell'economia, nodo che riconduce alle origini stesse della manifestazione e alle urgenze che l'hanno promossa. Si trattava allora di individuare, se non di creare, una propria via, un'*oikonomia* dell'avvenire 'forgiata' su una volontà di essere nel mondo in un modo altro, funzionale a una progettualità (ideale) e al contempo competitivo nel garantire la tenuta della propria proposta. In tale aspirazione trovava posto il mercato quale componente e strumento di un insieme più articolato. Questa ambizione ritorna in quell'economia 'a misura del proprio quartiere', da rintracciare tra le vie attualmente percorribili senza ridursi a trasporre in 'copia-e-incolla' modelli altrui, di cui si fa portavoce durante il convegno il cineasta e produttore mozambicano Pedro Pimentaetra. In questa ricerca di un'economia 'a propria misura' rientra, nel contesto

attuale, il rapporto con le nuove tecnologie, con la forza d'urto del digitale e della rete in virtù della loro contestuale natura di merci e dispositivi modellanti pratiche e orientamenti. Di qui il monito lanciato nel corso del dibattito da Oulimata Gueye, che mette in guardia da atteggiamenti ingenui nei confronti dell'innovazione tecnologica. Obiettandone il profilo democratico, Gueye denuncia la mistificazione che accompagna le nuove tecnologie, sostenendo che anche se le "si presentano come trans-frontiere, trans-razziali e tran-genere," in realtà "non lo sono" affatto. Non si tratta certo di un invito ad arroccarsi in un'attitudine luddista: Gueye, esponente di spicco nel panorama dell'Afropolitismo, ha fatto dell'impatto delle tecnologie digitali sulle culture popolari urbane in Africa l'ambito privilegiato della sua attività professionale e l'approdo di un percorso di ricerca sperimentale di forme e linguaggi. Animatrice della piattaforma *xamxam.org* e cofondatrice della *Startup Africa Paris* per l'imprenditorialità digitale, Gueye fa interagire prassi e pratiche critico-teoriche in una riflessione volta a dischiudere immaginari e assetti socio politici alternativi in cui ha preso forma il progetto *Africa sf*.

Accanto al confronto sulle grandi linee programmatiche e di indirizzo si trovano anche le sollecitazioni, ricorsive nel succedersi delle edizioni, a un'operatività concreta in grado di favorire maggiori investimenti nella formazione professionale, nella critica cinematografica e nello sviluppo di una cultura dell'audiovisivo nelle giovani generazioni quali obiettivi prioritari per la cinematografia burkinabé e lo stesso stato di salute del festival.

A incombere come 'questione' sul futuro del FESPACO, nella sua funzione tanto cinematografico/imprenditoriale quanto politica, è la componente organizzativa e gestionale, dal momento che il festival si dà, in un certo qual modo, come banco di prova della performatività del paese stesso. Del resto, mutuando la felice espressione di Colin Dupré (2013), il FESPACO è un affare 'di stato'.

Per una gestione 'innovativa': tra connessione e disconnessione

È un assetto virtuoso, improntato a criteri minimi di efficienza, a essere trasversalmente reclamato dai concorrenti, dagli addetti ai lavoratori, dagli osservatori e dai partecipanti: a partire dalla predisposizione in tempo utile del catalogo e dei badge, dalla presenza di autori e ospiti, fino al rafforzamento del comparto comunicativo sia in termini informativi che mediatici, considerati imprescindibili in un'ottica di potenziamento dell'attrattività internazionale verso i professionisti e gli stakeholder (registi, produttori, distributori, finanziatori). Al riguardo, non sono mancate le indicazioni di correttivi immediati, riguardanti per esempio l'esigenza di un servizio adeguato per le traduzioni e il sottotitolaggio, il potenziamento degli spazi e una più efficiente calendarizzazione dei meeting professionali e degli incontri tra autori e pubblico.

Sulla gestione 'innovativa' del FESPACO imperversa il fantasma del digitale, e di internet quale sua espansione privilegiata, fagocitante esperti e festivalieri che lo reclamano come risorsa ineludibile e panacea per la maggior parte delle carenze individuate: dalle gestione delle trasferte degli ospiti, al potenziamento comunicativo da dislocare sul web, all'operatività

mediatica, all'intercettazione e fidelizzazione del pubblico – tutto è delegabile ad apposite e rodate *app* e trasferibile/da trasferirsi nella rete. Anche il recupero della popolarità del festival, altra priorità individuata, passa dalla via maestra delle comunità digitali, su cui incanalare la promozione delle opere per le quali si sollecita anche una più democratica concezione autoriale della forma espressiva.

Tra le principali colpe del FESPACO 2019 c'è dunque la sua scarsa propensione alla 'connessione', al digitale e alla rete: una 'sconnessione' che lo colloca in automatico al di fuori dei requisiti di competitività; una sconnessione che lo pone, in primo luogo, fuori dal mercato dei festival e del cinema; una sottrazione ritenuta deplorevole in considerazione dei finanziamenti di cui l'anniversario ha goduto e della disponibilità di risorse d'appoggio, come la base di dati SudPlanète.

Eppure, nelle carenze additate traspare un 'vuoto' che fa della *dis*connessione e del *décalage* l'orizzonte di un'inattualità critica, potenzialmente feconda, di un fuori-norma – l'anomalia di sistema – che apre lo sguardo oltre il campo di visione predisposto dalla 'matrice'. Non si tratta di mettere in discussione sul piano pragmatico la validità dei correttivi e dei rilievi fatti all'organizzazione del FESPACO, quanto di farne un memento – disorientante in quanto inconciliabile con le urgenze individuate – rispetto alla dimensione catalizzatrice e agglutinante del dispositivo-innovazione permeante i discorsi e gli sguardi.

Vale allora la pena di spostare il campo visivo e ricordare che FESPACO è pervenuto ai festeggiamenti del suo cinquantenario nella versione militarizzata di un assedio incombente e che la continuità della manifestazione è stata messa alla prova proprio nel 2017, quando il festival ha rischiato di saltare per la forte instabilità del paese. Per questo, l'edizione è stata risolutamente rivendicata dai cineasti, nelle giornate della conferenza, quale atto di resistenza tenacemente voluto a palesare, tra le pieghe di bilanci e proposti per il futuro, altre urgenze dolorosamente attuali. Arena e vessillo, oltre che competizione, il FESPACO 2019 vive dunque una duplice (auspicabilmente ricomponibile) temporalità: l'inattualità perdurante del suo declino di competitività dal mercato dei festival e i barlumi di una propria intrinseca e forte attualità che metamorfizza la sua identità originaria militante negli assalti del presente, sul cui scacchiere si dispongono antichi e nuovi assetti di forza e posizionamenti.

Innovazione e cinema: dove e come?

Allargando il campo e gettando uno sguardo retrospettivo, non sono mancate analisi che, a partire da rilievi di carattere trasversale, dalle specificità dei singoli paesi africani e delle realtà plurali all'interno di ciascun paese, hanno messo in discussione, per la filiera cinematografica e audiovisiva, supposte evidenze ed automatismi. Questi studi rilevano un rapporto spesso ancora in bilico, o comunque problematico, tra vantaggi e penalizzazioni di conversioni a ritmi forzati, e spaziano da valutazioni di impatto su specifici segmenti del comparto audiovisivo sino a considerazioni sulle carenze strutturali delle reti elettriche, oltre che internet, di cui soffre

anche il Burkina Faso – carenze nevralgiche nella smaterializzazione della distribuzione e della proiezione connesse al digitale. A fronte di una vulgata (cfr. la voce "cinema digitale" in *Wikipedia*) che indistintamente afferma le "significative economie di scala" e la flessibilità del digitale, casi, fasi e direttrici localizzati 'parlano' altrimenti (Forest 2012, Dupré 2013).

Questi rapidi schizzi permettono all'ubiquità temporale del presente delle immagini sopra evocate di dispiegare non lo slancio di un passaggio, ma la complessità e l'innovatività, seppur punteggiata da problematicità e contraddizioni, di un qui e ora dinamico, di una sfida – più che di una traiettoria inerziale – a supporto delle molteplici percorribilità all'interno della 'matassa' digitale.

Di qui l'interesse partecipato con cui, insieme ad altri osservatori, Colin Dupré nel suo *Les cinémas africains face au chantier du numérique* accompagna i tentativi di rilancio delle sale cinematografiche in Burkina, in una inattuale controtendenza rispetto a una vettorialità dettata dal mutato profilo delle attitudini spettatoriali, ben tratteggiata anche dal pubblico del FESPACO, spesso sorpreso a concentrarsi "sui minuscoli schermi dei propri cellulari" invece che sul film che era venuto a vedere (Frassinelli 2019).[7] Proprio perché "il futuro è su Android," come ammonisce lo studioso di Nollywood Jonathan Haynes, spiccano gli sforzi per la rinascita del cinema Guimbi di Bobo Dioulasso, edificio dal valore monumentale e simbolico ('mitico', nella presentazione), fulcro di una mobilitazione multiscala che va dal mondo del cinema alle realtà del quartiere Koko, alla dimensione regionale e urbana della seconda capitale del Burkina Faso con il suo bacino di un milione di abitanti. Si tratta di un progetto che fa dell'innovazione declinata sui parametri di azione partecipata e sostenibilità la propria bandiera (fig. 2 e fig. 3).[8]

Fig. 2 e 3. Immagini Atelier Lalo.[9]

Di interesse, nella diversità progettuale e nelle implicazioni, anche l'operazione di un grande investitore come Canal+, che a Ouagadougou ha scommesso su due sale, CanalOlympia – aperta nel 2017 a Ouaga2000, quartiere delle nuove élite burkinabé – e, a distanza di un anno, CanalOympia-Pissy – installata nel 'granitico' quartiere omonimo e rinominata Canal Oympia Idrissa Ouedraogo nel febbraio 2019, in concomitanza con gli omaggi resi a 'Le Maestro' (fig. 4). Sarà una cattedrale nel deserto o un avamposto a vocazione ipertecnologica che fa del mix

tra *blockbuster* e vetrina per le nuove generazioni di cineasti burkinabé e africani i cunei per un rilancio della ritualità della sala cinematografica?

Fig. 4. Titolazione della sala Canal Oympia a Idrissa Ouedraogo.
Immagine da *LEFASO.NET*.[10]

A tale tentativo di rilancio si affianca il sodalizio che il FESPACO ha avviato con la flessibile rete del cinema digitale ambulante (Cinéma numérique ambulant – CNA) sin dai primi anni di attività dell'iniziativa in Africa, per proiezioni nei quartieri di Ouagadougou, nel 2019 comprensive di una rassegna sugli Étalon de Yennenga, che si muove, nella forma *en plein air* e itinerante, nella direzione di una valorizzazione della dimensione collettiva della visione (fig. 5).

La scommessa è in corso, ma il suo lancio punta anche sull'inscrizione storica delle spettatorialità burkinabé. Tra i fattori chiamati in causa nelle modellazioni delle spettatorialità esistono infatti, oltre all'impatto delle tecnologie 'globali', inclinazioni stratificate in termini storico-culturali e in base ai contesti materiali dei vissuti – come, per esempio, la percorribilità e la sicurezza dei transiti quotidiani (Forest 2012, Dupré 2013). In questa interazione tra piano locale e piano transnazionale è collocabile l'azione di una recente generazione di cineasti burkinabé che fa convivere l'aspetto realizzativo con quello imprenditoriale, in un approccio orizzontale che prevede il personale controllo della filiera: dalla produzione, con la creazione di proprie strutture, alla ricerca in proprio delle opportunità di far circolare e vendere i film. Questi cineasti attestano una propensione alla pluralizzazione dei canali e delle forme propria di quella dinamica globale cui si deve la conversione della nozione (tradizionale) di distribuzione in quella di circolazione audiovisiva. Al contempo, essi fanno mostra di una particolare prossimità a modi inattuali – se confrontati con le suddette tendenze – di intendere la spettatorialità, i quali sono tuttavia ri-attualizzati e resi competitivi all'interno di una rimodulazione complessiva della strategia produttiva.[11] Sono costoro, come scrive Justin Ouoro nel suo articolo "Acteurs et public du Burkina Faso," i "nuovi attori," i cui film "permettono ai nostri giorni di ridare vita alle sale cinematografiche. Coesistono con altri cineasti che purtroppo non

riescono ad avere una visibilità se non durante il FESPACO" (2012, 214). Pragmatici e al contempo depositari di un certo modo di vivere il cinema, questi cineasti si impongono al box office, deviando il corso della progressiva erosione delle sale cinematografiche che aveva colpito anche il Burkina Faso (diciotto sale nel 2016 contro le cinquantatré del 1990, la maggior parte non funzionanti a pieno regime). Lo slancio e il progetto di questa rinascita hanno trovato nominazione in una *Ouagawood* (Ouoro 2012) a venire, tenacemente inseguita da figure quali Bubakar Diallo Aboubacar Zida "Sidnaba." Se *Ouagawood* rivendica un'idea di cinema che trae la sua forza nell'essere radicato nell'immaginario burkinabé, se non addirittura metro-politano, *Follywood*, termine coniato da Oumar Dagnon e Ibrahim Olukunga e invalso a partire dal 2012, innerva la rinascita nella necessità di osare, di instillare un'energia giovane capace di librarsi e di inventare tanto nel campo creativo quanto in quello produttivo, per giungere a "creare il proprio mondo" per dare vita a un cinema che "sia l'espressione della follia" (da cui la sua denominazione; Ouoro 2012, 214).

Fig. 5. Proiezione di Cinéma numérique ambulant – CNA durante il FESPACO 2017.
Foto Issouf Sanogo. Immagine alla pagina *Libération*.[12]

Nell'indicare chi interpreta un ruolo, il termine *acteur*, similmente all'italiano, si presta a una doppia accezione: l'*acteur* è chi agisce, produce dei cambiamenti, ma anche colui al quale è affidata una parte in una recita, teatrale o cinematografica. In Ouoro i cineasti sono dunque 'attori' in quanto protagonisti di una svolta nel panorama cinematografico nazionale; al contempo, sono le star che assicurano il successo del film. Lo statuto attoriale dei cineasti in Burkina Faso si riversa infatti nella connotazione divistica loro tributata che accomuna tanto i cineasti in questione quanto i cineasti 'portabandiera' durante le giornate del FESPACO, le cui proiezioni vengono sistematicamente prese d'assalto dal pubblico locale (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. All'ingresso del cinema Burkina durante il FESPACO 2019. Per gentile concessione di Stefano Gaiga – Festival Cinema Africano di Verona.

Esponente di spicco di questo fenomeno è la battagliera Apolline Traoré, beniamina del pubblico burkinabé. Il suo *Desrances*, in concorso al FESPACO nel 2019, è stato il film che probabilmente ha sortito il maggior disappunto tra le opere in lizza. In primo luogo il disappunto dell'autrice stessa che, ostentatamente auto-candidatasi come prima donna cineasta a guadagnare l'ambito Étalon de Yennenga (in un'edizione che non ha brillato per sensibilità di genere) ha visto le sue ambizioni infrangersi; in secondo luogo il disappunto della critica che, sollecitata dal regime di aspettativa sollevato, non ha usato clemenza, additando la debolezza della sceneggiatura e la sua mancanza di compattezza, con personaggi che girano a vuoto e motivi che si affastellano. Il premio alla scenografia è stato pertanto accolto dai più – e presumibilmente anche dall'autrice – come consolatorio, fugante per altro le perplessità cui si sarebbe prestata l'attribuzione della massima onorificenza a un concorrente che, oltre che essere donna, giocava pure in casa.

Si tratta di rilievi equilibrati, rispetto ai quali osiamo introdurre in controcampo alcune note strabiche, che propongono un'altra prospettiva di attraversamento del film, che avvalla la pertinenza del riconoscimento assegnato seppur in un'ottica disgiunta dalle gerarchie del palmares. Il premio alla scenografia entra infatti in risonanza con l'importanza data da Apolline Traoré alla messa in scena dello spazio e del paesaggio quale operatore di una riappropriazione significante, in un passaggio di testimone che riporta alle istanze militanti e ai posizionamenti dei cineasti nelle stagioni delle post indipendenze. Tra le figure autorevoli al riguardo, certamente Idrissa Ouédraogo, che ha sostenuto la cineasta nei suoi esordi e a cui il film è dedicato, in un omaggio all'uomo e alla statura internazionale del regista, al quale nei giorni precedenti il FESPACO è stato consacrato un convegno internazionale all'Università Ouaga I – Joseph Ki Zerbo (*Idrissa Ouedraogo, l'homme et ses oeuvres*, 21-13 febbraio 2019).

Qualsiasi sia la personale valutazione sul film, non si può non riconoscere che, scartato

l'ingranaggio consequenziale, gli assi strutturali della sua architettura lavorino sulla dimensione spaziale e temporale, a partire dal respiro tragicamente epico dell'incipit, che sbalza un piccolo uomo sulla sua barca dall'immensità del mare all'entroterra insanguinato di Haiti nel 1994. In una contrazione temporale l'ambientazione si sposta poi in Costa d'Avorio, dove ritroviamo il personaggio, che si appresta a rivestire il ruolo di protagonista (il noto attore e produttore Jimmy Jean-Louis nel ruolo di Francis Desrances), intento a rifarsi una vita cercando di scampare ai fantasmi del passato che continuano, tuttavia, a richiamarlo. Il rimosso inesorabilmente ritorna nella Guerra civile che nel 2010 dilania il paese tra violenze che esacerbano l'intolleranza verso chi proviene d'altrove.

Lavorando su scenari urbani e al contempo su moduli di genere propri della fantascienza apocalittica, Traoré sottopone lo spazio a un trattamento in cui distopia e quotidiano coesistono, in un inquietante dialogo tra finzione e realtà. In questa trappola di cristallo si sospende l'erranza 'abnorme' del protagonista in una traiettoria che mira, più che al raggiungimento dell'obiettivo prefissato, a produrre uno scarto: quello che rivela l'inconsistenza eroica del personaggio a favore della figlioletta, imponendo una rimodulazione delle aspettative. Ma soprattutto, l'acquisizione della consapevolezza da parte di quest'ultima di non potere 'essere un altro', di non poter soggettivarsi sulle aspettative del padre, di non poter che essere se stessa e non il figlio maschio agognato dal genitore. Solo in questa consapevolezza la ragazza potrà finalmente stagliarsi dall'ombra per entrare nel raggio di visibilità, il proprio e quello altrui.

Nelle maglie della narrazione si fa strada un'ambizione che, seppur irrisolta, come i più hanno decretato, ha il merito di inseguire tracciati meno battuti all'interno dei dispositivi stratificati di rappresentazione cinematografica; in questo sfidando i dispositivi e i protocolli di valutazione. Un buon auspicio per i FESPACO a venire.

Note

[1] È 'una prima' nella storia delle Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage (JCC): la ventiduesima edizione ha srotolato i tappeti rossi per i suoi invitati – fatto inconcepibile solo qualche tempo fa per questo festival che, lanciato nel 1966, ha sempre preservato il suo spirito militante e frondaiolo. Ma *voilà*, i tempi cambiano. La direttrice dell'edizione 2008, Dora Bouchoucha, è costretta ad ammetterlo: "La dimensione militante non attira più granché. Era necessario che le JCC si svecchiassero, trovando un equilibrio tra la dimensione impegnata e il glamour" (Zouari 2008). Tutte le traduzioni dal francese, se non diversamente indicato, sono dell'autrice.

[2] Sito ufficiale, sezione dedicata ai temi delle edizioni dei cinquant'anni: "Le FESPACO est un *cadre de rencontres* mis à profit *pour promouvoir* le développement de la cinématographie africaine"; "FESPACO *is a platform* of encounters *to promote* the development of Black cinematography" (corsivi miei). Nello stesso stesso sito, sulla pagina dedicata alla storia del festival, la finalità dello sviluppo del cinema africano è associata alla sua visibilità *per il popolo* in quanto strumento di educazione e consapevolezza oltre che forma espressiva. (Si veda https://fespaco.bf/presentation/. Tutti i siti web citati in nota sono stati visitati il 15 maggio 2019.)

[3] Dalla titolazione dell'intervento scritto da André-Michel Essoungou di *Afrique Renouveau* e pubblicato su *Africa Diligence,* www.africadiligence.com/veille-123-lenorme-potentiel-du-marche-numerique-africain/.

[4] Dell'urgenza di adeguamento e delle potenzialità del continente pullula l'arena discorsiva del web; tra gli altri, a titolo di esempio, si vedano l'editoriale di *Africa Diligence*, "Le numérique permettra-t-il à l'Afrique de rattraper son retard économique?" (https://www.africadiligence.com/le-numerique-permettra-t-il-a-lafrique-de-rattraper-son-retard-economique/, sul contesto burkinabé); la sezione "Construir le marché

digital de l'Afrique" di *africanews.it* (https://fr.africanews.com/2018/07/26/construire-le-marche-digital-de-l-afrique-business-africa/); il comunicato stampa riportato sul sito del gruppo Agence française de développement (AFD) alla pagina https://www.afd.fr/fr/lancement-officiel-digital-africa-initiative-ambi tieuse-au-service-ecosysteme-innovant-africain; e il resoconto sul congresso CyFy Africa 2018 "L'Afrique face aux défis du numérique," pubblicato sul sito di *World Economic Forum* (Dia 2018).

[5] Si veda https://www.africadiligence.com/veille-123-lenorme-potentiel-du-marche-numerique-africain/.

[6] "Come per l'Europa, si deve sottolineare l'eterogeneità delle filiere cinematografiche nazionali; a prevalere è la differenza delle situazioni" (Forest 2012, par. 4).

[7] "[F]orse la sfida maggiore da fronteggiare per il Fespaco è quella dell'attenzione richiesta dalla settima arte. Il festival è stato molto ben frequentato, la sede principale, il Ciné Burkina, era solitamente piena. Parte del pubblico tuttavia sembrava incapace di concentrarsi sul film, che evidentemente era venuto a vedere, invece che sui minuscoli schermi dei propri cellulari, che continuavano a lampeggiare e a volte squillare […]. Forse per sopravvivere e prosperare, il cinema africano deve adattarsi al pubblico di oggi, ai dispositivi digitali e alle forme di distrazione. L'industria nigeriana dell'audiovisivo ha già iniziato a produrre brevi film e clip, più facili e meno costosi da trasmettere in streaming sui cellulari. Come lo studioso di Nollywood Jonathan Haynes ha osservato a un recente seminario: 'il futuro è su Android'" (Frassinelli 2019).

[8] Per la presentazione del progetto e la campagna lanciata dall'Association de soutien du cinéma au Burkina Faso (ASCBF), si veda la pagina http://www.cineguimbi.org/; per una prima idea sulla mobilitazione, si vedano *Sauver le Ciné Guimbi: le rêve de Berni Goldblat*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kW2kvhg3O0I e Zero Cinéma, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1826773100951113; https://it.ulule.com/cineguimbi/. Per il progetto di ricostruzione, si veda la pagina dello studio di architettura Atelier Lalo incaricato, https://www.atelierlalo.com/en/projets/cine-guimbi/.

[9] Si veda https://www.atelierlalo.com/en/projets/cine-guimbi/.

[10] Si veda http://img0.lefaso.net/spip.php?article88321.

[11] Per un'analisi dei tratti distintivi di questa generazione, delle loro realizzazioni e delle strategie imprenditoriali messe a regime, si rinvia a Ouoro 2012.

[12] Si veda https://next.liberation.fr/cinema/2017/03/12/au-burkina-faso-le-cinema-en-salles-renait-apres -des-annees-de-desert_1555153.

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The burden of waste in 21ˢᵗ-century Africa

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that the development of a country rests on the creation of jobs and the distribution of wealth among its population. Today many African countries are facing such an opportunity with enthusiasm, and this is giving a positive impulse to lifestyles and socio-cultural activities. However, as recent history from other parts of the world shows, the downside of this process is the wide-ranging impacts of the increasing demands of water, energy and raw materials to feed the new economy, as well as the huge quantities of waste produced by new activities and new consumers.

   A further concern is the African population growth. Between 2017 and 2050, 1.3 billion people will be located mainly in urban areas, with an expected waste production of 244 million tonnes by 2025, which, if not properly managed, may negatively affect the environment and dramatically downsize the advantages of economic development. In case of inappropriate waste management, the cost to society exceeds the financial cost per capita by a factor of 5-10. The protection of the environment is an urgent issue in Africa, because of the general lack of attention to the impacts human activities have on natural resources. This paper looks at waste management and at the related threats and challenges that the continent is going to face due to its fast economic growth, with the aim of raising awareness on what may be called 'fake' progress.

Keywords

Africa, waste, pollution, environment, sustainable development

Environmental policies in Africa

Sustainable development should promote the economic growth of a country and at the same time avert the negative drawbacks of fast transformations that entail high social and environmental impacts. Africa as a whole is facing a major change, due to the investments of foreign countries in the industrial and agricultural sectors and to land grabbing (Hickel 2017; Hall 2011; Zafar 2007). Besides the need of materials, the role of both water and energy is critical in the development process: daily life benefits from them, but agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, construction, health and social services also depend on the access to water and energy. Water is also necessary for energy production, particularly for renewable energy as in the case of hydropower (Chen and Swain 2014), but it can also be a cause of trans-boundary conflicts (Zeitoun and Warner 2006). The population growth and the urbanization are the other pressures affecting the African environment, particularly because of the huge amount of waste produced and the lack of appropriate solid waste management policies (and strategies).

   Waste management is a public health priority. Different types of environmental policies

have been adopted in many African countries, as suggested by internationally implemented strategies, both at continental and regional level (see table 1), but the great uncertainty is how these policies will be carried out, how the progress will be monitored, and the objectives achieved.

I/C	Policy	Commitment
C	Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (2013)	Building a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, outlining ten aspirations to guide the continent's transformation
C	Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment in Africa (2008)	Protecting human health from environmental degradation
C	Bamako Convention (1991)	Ban on the import of hazardous waste into Africa and control of its transboundary movement within Africa
I	Minamata Convention (2013)	Control on Mercury
I	Stockholm Convention (2001)	Ban and control of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)
I	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate (1992)	Climate change adaptation and mitigation
I	Basel Convention (1992)	Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal
I	Convention on Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (1974)	Preventing indiscriminate disposal at sea of wastes that could be liable for creating hazards to human health, harming living resources and marine life, damaging amenities, or interfering with other legitimate uses of the sea

Table 1. Main international (I) and continental (C) policies adopted
for environmental protection in Africa.

The *Agenda 2063* is a fifty-year-long strategic plan (2013-2063) to guide the socio-economic transformation of the African continent through specific goals, aspiring to build a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. African cities should be recycling at least 50% of the waste they generate by 2023 (African Union Commission, 2015) but that goal is expected to be achieved only by implementing specific policies and investments on energy production and distribution, and on waste recycling industrial development. On the other hand, a proper and reliable baseline data is necessary to monitor the progress against that goal, a factor which is almost missing in Africa.

Policies at regional level (e.g.: *East African Community Development Strategy*, 2011; *Southern African Development Community: Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan,* 2001; *Economic Community of West African States: E-waste regional strategy*, 2012; *Regional strategy on chemicals management and hazardous waste*, 2015; *Plastic Waste Management Strategy*, 2016) have been set to reduce or control specific waste streams as for plastic waste (twenty-nine countries in Africa adopted some sort of regulation against plastics), for E-waste (request of a certificate of conformity for the electronic devices donated from more affluent countries) and for chemicals and hazardous waste.

Despite this, most of the policies adopted so fare are just on paper and no significant improvement on solid waste management has been observed (UNEP 2018): open dumps, waste accumulation on the roads, and open burning are widespread practices for getting rid of garbage. The consequences are huge environmental and health impacts related to waste littering, insufficient quantity and quality of drinking water, rapidly worsening air quality, degradation of the urban environment, impurity of the streets, river pollution and, in general, climate change. Particularly, at uncontrolled dumpsites there is a potential of health hazard to scavengers (usually children), for the spread of infectious diseases, for the highly toxic smoke, and for the odours emanating from decomposing waste (figures 1a and 1b). Impacts on the environment due to air, water, and soil pollutions and associated health risks ultimately concern the economy, too.

Figures 1a and 1b. Impacts of inappropriate waste management in Bissau and Yaoundé (2015).

Factors affecting the effective implementation of proper plans and strategies can be recognised in the followings:

- political instability with failure of long-term Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) management actions;
- MSW management is not always a high priority for local and national policy makers and planners;
- a limited awareness of administrations with regard to the basic needs of the population and a lack of willingness to promote appropriate actions;
- ineffective institutional structures and pervasive corruption;
- inappropriate international and/or local public funding and loans which support projects in the short-term, thus preventing the successful transfer of the project to the local authorities in the long term;
- implementation of technologies of the highest standards, the operations of which are subsequently prevented because of lack of spare parts and/or well-trained personnel.

Above all, Africa is still poorly equipped to provide appropriate technical education at the different levels: universities often have no competences or are not organised to train qualified

technicians (due to shortage of specific courses and research laboratories); insufficient specifically driven courses for operators (management and maintenance); scarce education on environmental issues in the primary and secondary school (people grow up even now without proper awareness of environmental pollution and MSW practices; see Lavagnolo and Grossule 2018).

Population growth, waste production and composition

In order to understand the relevance of the issue of MSW management, it is necessary to discuss the African population growth: of the 2.2 billion of people who may be added globally between 2017 and 2050, 1.3 billion will be located in Africa, mainly in urban areas. When there is increasing urbanization in a country, its economic wealth also increases, due to a higher consumption of goods and more services, which results in the generation of more waste, since solid waste is the result of a consumer-based economic lifestyle. This becomes indeed a source of high concern for the municipalities, since MSW management in Africa usually falls into the local governments' competencies (Lavagnolo 2019). Waste production in Africa is currently lower than in more developed countries, but the forecast of the population growth is expected to be so remarkable that it will increase the burden on already strained waste infrastructure (UNEP 2018).

What is more, reliable data on waste production and composition in Africa are almost not existent, due to limited and/or disorganised waste collection and, when present, the related information is often scattered among different stakeholders (NGOs, WHO, public and private companies, local and national administrations, universities). Rapid unplanned population growth in cities, mainly concentrated in slums and poor neighbourhoods, markedly impact on this situation. In most cases, waste collection does not cover all urban areas and frequently neglects rural areas. Moreover, the various streams of valuable materials are managed by the informal sector, thus resulting in a lack of information in the official data (Lavagnolo 2019).

Data from literature (Hoorweng et al. 2014; UNEP 2018) and from authors' experience suggest to consider, in the low-income countries, a current waste production of 0.6 kg per capita per day, but due to the most developed economies (North African countries and South Africa) and to tourism in some island states, the waste average production in Africa can be evaluated in 0.78 kg per capita per day (*vs* a global production of 1.24 kg per day). However, in the per capita waste generation there are considerable spatial differences passing from 0.09 kg per day in Ghana to 2.98 kg per day in Seychelles. Considering the population growth, the total annual waste production in Africa (particularly due to Sub-Saharan Africa) is expected to grow from 125 million tonnes to 244 million tonnes by 2025, resulting in a considerable contribution to the global impact on the environment (Hoornweg et al. 2014).

Another key factor influencing the management of waste (from collection to final disposal) is its composition. MSW can be defined by the percentages of its different fractions

like organic, paper, plastic, glass, metal, and others (as mixed residues). The uncontrolled management of the putrescible organic fraction is considered to be the major responsible of the impact on climate change, water and soil pollution. The putrescible organic content of MSW is generally higher in DCs than in industrialized countries; conversely, plastic percentage, which is one of main concern of the citizens worldwide, is not so different.

In figure 2, the average composition of waste in major African cities is illustrated, in comparison to the global one (UNEP 2018). Besides the difficulties in obtaining data, important differences in waste composition and quantities may be due to the agriculture sector, climate and its seasonal variations (Lavagnolo 2019).
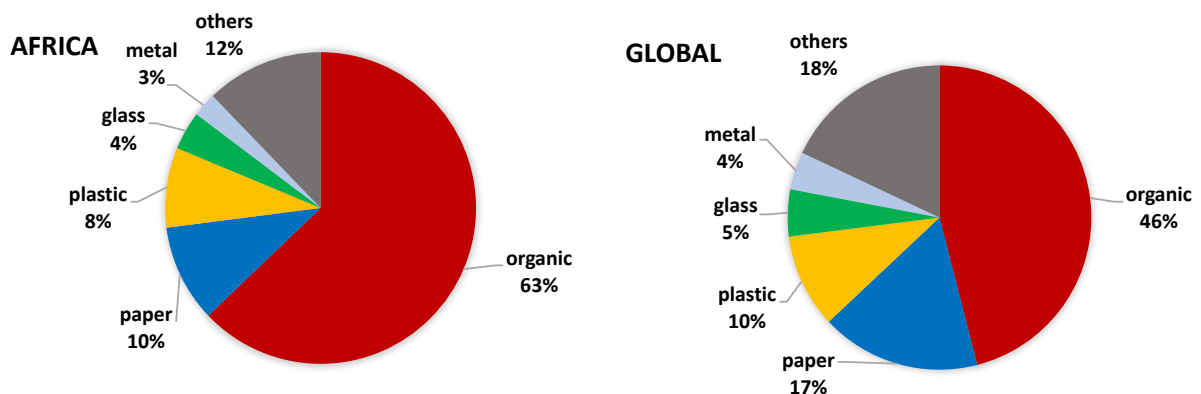

Figure 2. Composition of waste in some African cities and globally.

Impacts of poor waste management

Despite the fact that in developing countries the available budget for waste management is mainly used for waste collection, the most of the waste collection services in Africa are inadequate, with an average waste collection of 45% in Sub-Saharan Africa. More than 90% of the waste generated in Africa is disposed of to land, typically (47%) to uncontrolled dumpsites (UNEP 2018): 19 of the world's 50 biggest dumpsites are in Africa. 9% of the waste generated in Africa is open burned, while only 4% is recycled, often by informal actors (as with reuse). Open burning is the result of a lack of awareness of alternative disposal options, high levels of poverty, and lack of environmental regulation or enforcement.

Another factor to be taken into account is that, in the developing countries, the many actors involved in waste management (local administrations, informal sector, CBOs, different NGOs, private companies) are often working in the same place, implementing different projects in the same sector (collection, transport, or treatment) but with different approaches and criteria (sometimes opposite), resulting in confused and unsuccessful activities. "The undefined roles, mandates and boundaries among the actors can pose challenges, however, resulting in resource duplication and lack of leadership and ownership" (UNEP 2018, 29).

A poor solid waste management strategy causes relevant impacts on the environment, public health, society and economy. Waste abandoned on the road or disposed in open dumps

is critical for the specific ecosystem when leaching into soil and water (causing oxygen depletion, metals dispersion, hazardous chemicals formation), or anaerobically bio-converted into hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide and methane (impacting on climate change), or burned (promoting dioxins, furans, particulate matters and carbon monoxide as main combustion products). Plastic is considered a hazard if it is improperly burned (because of the formation of chlorides, dioxins, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) or abandoned and then transported by the water streams into the ocean, most likely entering the food chain. Due to the high percentage of uncollected waste in Africa, plastic is much present in the marine litter: Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, and Morocco are estimated to be among the top 20 countries contributing to marine litter. The total mismanaged plastic waste in Africa is estimated at 4.4 million tonnes in 2010, out of 32 million tonnes globally (Jambeck et al. 2015).

The informal waste sector is very active in Africa, mainly devoted to recycling activity of valuable fractions (glass, plastic, components of electronic devices, metals) from kerbsides and dumpsites. Scavengers, mainly children, are subjected to chemical, biological, and physical health risks due to toxic gases inhalation, possible infections, cholera, typhoid, and diarrhoea from handling or sorting waste (particularly recovering electric and electronic components).

As already mentioned, MSW management (and environmental protection as a whole) is not a priority for most of the African governments, but the long-term impact of an inappropriate strategy will become a cost to society and its economy. The 'cost of inaction', defined as damage occurred to environment (lost productivity, flood damage, damage to business and tourism, remediation of polluted sites) and to human health is mainly due to health impacts of uncontrolled waste and the environmental impact of open dumps and burning.

To assess the 'cost of inaction', data baseline should be defined and costs must be placed in context – a task particularly difficult in Africa because of the already-mentioned lack of reliable data and information. Few studies explore the cost caused by the poor MSW management in Africa: in North African countries the average annual damage costs of environmental degradation ranges between 0.1-0.5 per cent of the GDP (Gross Domestic Products); in Morocco the groundwater pollution associated to dumpsite pollution was calculated at US$ 25 million per year (Hussein 2018); in Tunisia the damage from inappropriate solid waste management was estimated at 0.15% of the GDP. Generally speaking, the cost to society exceeds the financial cost per capita of proper waste management by a factor of 5-10 (UNEP 2018).

Appropriate waste management strategies

An environmentally-sound waste management strategy is strongly required, with the goal of reducing the production of waste, improving the waste collection and recovery, and minimising the emissions and energy consumption. Alongside environmental sustainability, economic, social, and geographical aspects should be strongly integrated in any choice. Therefore, ap-

propriate solutions should be purposely designed taking into consideration all these different local situations, which in Africa are considerably different from industrialised countries. In most of the cases, the direct transfer of strategies and technologies from industrialised countries to developing countries results in an inevitable failure. In the affluent countries several approaches have found a global consensus and broad application, such as the waste management hierarchy, zero-waste and the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), which are an integral part of the Circular Economy concept (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2013). In particular, these strategies are based on a hierarchy of alternatives for managing the waste, from the most favourite to the least favourite ones (for example, from reuse to landfilling). The aim is to minimise the waste disposal and the use of raw materials, maximising the recovery of valuable material from waste. Although circular economy represents a promising future paradigm, the circumstances are often premature for the application of the 3R strategy in Africa.

The 3S strategy (Sanitisation, Subsistence economy, and Sustainable landfilling) may represent a more appropriate solution (Lavagnolo and Grossule 2018). The 3S approach is conceived as an integrated concept, which highlights the need to combine three inseparable requirements: the improvement of the standards of living by assuring safe collection and management of the waste (Sanitation); the use of appropriate technologies, designed to provide new business opportunities (Subsistence economy); the safe disposal of residues (Sustainable landfill).

Figure 3. Graphical scheme of the 3S model proposed as a strategic tool to address the actual requirements of waste management in areas with economic constraints (Lavagnolo and Grossule 2018)

The choice of the appropriate technologies represents a crucial aspect for the successful operation of the waste management system. In the context of African countries, the appropriateness of any technology is measured by the following requirements:

- low cost to meet the economical budget;
- simple technology, for an effective management and maintenance;
- cost-efficiency;

- low energy demand and possible energy recovery;
- integration of the informal sector, formalising and up-scaling the informal collection and recycling;
- opportunity for new businesses.

Many treatment technologies are available worldwide, generally classified into thermal, biological, and physical treatment technologies. However, only some of them are technically or economically viable in Africa in the short- or medium-term.

As already mentioned, the choice of the most suitable solutions is particularly influenced by the waste composition, and the main waste fraction in Africa is typically represented by the organic waste. The high generated quantity and the exclusion from the informal recycling due to its no-market value make of biowaste the most critical aspect. Food waste recycling regulations are generally absent or, if present, they are inefficiently implemented (Thi et al. 2015), also because separate collection is absent in most African countries.

The typical low calorific value and high moisture content of the waste in these contests, jointly with the high investment costs and lack of proper skilled technician, make thermal treatments the least preferable option (Aleluia and Ferrão 2017, 2016). Among the physical methods, the processing of waste into refuse-derived fuel (RDF) is quite limited in DCs. Lohri et al. (2016) recognize char fuel production from biowaste as a promising option; however, the high investment cost reduces the accessibility of such technology. Among the others, biological treatment methods represent the least costly and most suitable approach when dealing with developing countries (Aleluia and Ferrão 2017). According to the generated product, they can be classified in processes producing fertilizer and soil amendment such as composting, protein-rich animal food in the case of Black Soldier Flies treatments (BSF), and energy carrier, associated to the anaerobic digestion (Lohri et al. 2017).

The reuse and recycling practices of valuable inorganic waste (such as glass, metal, paper, and plastics) are performed by the informal sector, occurring spontaneously when economically viable. However, better inclusion and formalization of the formal sector represent an important option for improving waste recovery. Several encouraging examples come from different developing countries, with the aggregation of waste pickers in cooperatives or micro-enterprises and achieving recycling rates up to 20-30% by weight (Gutberlet and Carenzo 2018; Wilson et al. 2009). The involvement of the informal sector represents a critical task at political, economic, and institutional levels in order to achieve social acceptance, political will, mobilisation of cooperatives, partnerships with private enterprises, management and technical skills, and legal protection measures (Ezeah et al. 2013).

According to Lavagnolo and Grossule (2018), in the design of a solid waste management system, sensitisation represents a fundamental tool in order to assure the success of the 3S strategy application. An education process needs to be carried out at different levels (from citizens to administrators) and throughout the entire framework of the Solid waste management system.

Case studies

Some projects implementing the 3S strategy have been designed in Sub-Saharan Africa by the Environmental Engineering research group of the University of Padua, to which the authors of this article belong:

1. a bottom up cultural project developed in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to raise awareness in environmental topics, particularly solid waste management, involving local people of different education and cultural levels;
2. a project of collection and valorisation of household waste in Agnibilékru, Ivory Coast;
3. a quite complex technical project regarding the MSW collection and disposal in Bissau, Guinea Bissau.

1. The literary café in Yaoundé, Cameroun (2015)

Yaoundé counts more than 4,000,000 inhabitants (population growth of 7-10%). Nearly 80% of the urban population lives in informal settlements and 46% of the population has no access to improved water sources and uses latrines as wastewater devices. The daily production of municipal waste has been calculated in about 840 tonnes: less than 50% is collected, the rest is abandoned on the road or in water channels and often burned in the open air. No formal recycling is planned and only 5% of waste is informally recycled by private citizens. The awareness of the people as regards environmental and health issues should be urgently improved, although no educational material is available, particularly for the unschooled people.

Within this framework, a decision was reached to design a venue open to the public of all ages and levels of education, based on the model of the literary café, where they can find more or less detailed information (video, books, journals, etc.) relating to environmental issues; there they can connect to the internet to browse international related platforms, and seminars on specific topics can be organized to encourage debate and raise awareness. The literary café welcomes common people rather than intellectuals, invites local and visiting experts to promote dialogue, and hosts creative interactions, conversations, and training seminars (Lavagnolo and Failli 2018).

The literary café was initially financed by a series of different institutions, but after a start up phase, the organizers set up a business activity. The literary café opened at the end of 2015 and is managed by a local non-profit organization. Many activities have been carried out since then, such as awareness and information campaigns on environmental issues for all (seminars and training on municipal garbage, WEEE recycling, computer laboratory); the production and distribution of informative material (how to prevent health risks due to poor sanitation); education and training for women and young people in situations of vulnerability (especially in the form of campaigns against gender-based violence and the promotion of women in the business world).

2. Collection and valorisation of household waste in Agnibilékru, Ivory Coast (2016)

Agnibilèkrou, with a population of 69,174 inhabitants (2014), suffers severe problems related to the lack of an efficient solid waste management that leads to the littering of streets and canals, and to uncontrolled waste burning and burying. The limited financial and economic situation, together with the urgent need for actions aimed to health and environmental protection, make the 3S strategy a potential valuable first approach. The project has been implemented with the financial support of the Waldensian Evangelical Church and has the following objectives: environmental sensitization of the population; sanitization of the city by removing/controlling the informal deposits of waste; implementation of a reliable door to door collection for 30% of the population; design of a compost facility for the organic waste fraction management, assuming the future upgrade to a separate collection; definition of a business plan for the sale of compost on a base of the subsistence economy; design of an economic and environmental sustainable landfill.

The study was developed in collaboration with the local agricultural cooperative Coopayea, which provided an added value to the project. The cooperative represented not only the main beneficiary of the business of compost, but also, with the involvement of 3,000 women, the cooperative enhanced women's empowerment in society. The sensitisation campaign was developed by means of educational activities with children, local radio, and social events involving the community, in order to promote the active participation of the citizens. The sanitisation measure consisted in the overall removal of widespread waste, in order to provide an immediate demonstration of the improved quality of life by controlling waste disposal. The implementation of a door-to-door collection in five districts was simultaneously developed, serving 30% of the population. The aim was to design a robust and efficient waste collection system to be progressively extended to an increasing number of inhabitants and to be upgraded with the separate collection of the putrescible fraction.

3. Solid waste management in Bissau, Guinea Bissau (2015-16)

In Bissau, the capital city of Guinea-Bissau, in 2015 a new MSW management system was implemented with the collaborations of the Government, the municipality, the local companies, an Italian NGO, the University of Padua, and the citizens. Inside the ten-year plan, the project was based on 3S strategy. At that time Bissau produced around 300 tonnes of MSW per day (2015) and only 55% of MSW was collected (50% from the urban centre and 5% from peripheral areas), the rest was discharged along the roads, in the water channels or burned in open fires. The collected waste was disposed in the *Antula* open dumpsite, 10 km from the city centre, where many scavengers collected valuable materials, while cows and pigs looked for food. Scavengers were organized in specialized waste pickers groups: foreigners (from Nigeria or Senegal) collected metal scraps, while women plastic collected bottles and glass jars with a screw cap.

The distinctive feature of this project is that all the different steps put into action were discussed, shared, and implemented by the different stakeholders. The intervention, financed by the EU and the Guinea Bissau Government, was designed considering the local needs in terms of environmental and health protection (sanitisation), economic and social empower-ment (subsidence economy), safe treatment/disposal of waste (sustainable landfill), education of the local administrators and the citizens (sensitisation). An educational campaign for cleaning the streets (waste collection) was organised in different neighbourhoods, with the aims to raise citizens' awareness and to collect data on waste quality and quantity (figure 4); a survey was planned to collect information about the *Antula* scavengers and the market of valuable materials, for a future safe involvement in the MSW management plan and their social inclusion; technical surveys for the siting of the new sustainable landfill were developed with the Guinea Bissau Interministerial Commission, the local authorities and the citizens and a specific Multi Criteria Analysis was designed on purpose.

Figure 4. Educational campaign to promote waste collection in the neighbourhoods of Bissau (2015-16).

Finally, the sustainable landfill was designed considering the potential environmental impact, the technical constraints (no skilled technicians, scarce availability of appropriate construction material, no stable energy supply, few paved roads) and following socio-economic criteria (religious sites in the surroundings, jobs opportunity, financing). A new and safer management of the waste at the *Antula* open dumpsite was also suggested, to face the period before the opening of the new landfill, and the final remediation.

Conclusions

Sustainable development needs wise and strong environmental policies to ensure long-term prosperity for all, particularly in Africa where natural resources are mainly exploited by international companies through foreign investments. One of the main environmental pressure is the huge amount of waste that will double in less than ten years, due to demographic and

economic growth, especially in the Sub-Saharan region. So far, there have been few examples of successful strategies and policies on solid waste management realised in Africa, which causes serious problems of environmental pollution, resources depletion, energy consumption, and social inequity. The implementation of the 3S strategy promoting sanitation, subsistence economy, and a simple but sustainable wasteland disposal, could be considered the first effective step towards the realisation of the more complex circular economy, whose application would need public infrastructures, a stable energy network, skilled technicians at different educational levels, a strong and successful industrial policy, and huge investments. Above all, education should be considered the most powerful driver for raising awareness among citizens, politicians, and administrators and should accordingly be the priority of Africa in the new century.

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Ecology and justice in Africa

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ABSTRACT

According to robust scientific evidence, the Earth could reach the extreme rates of the past "Big Five" mass extinctions of biodiversity within just few centuries if current threats to many species are not alleviated. Africa is a paradoxical and crucial laboratory in this sense. We know exactly the six interacting causes of the so-called "Sixth Mass-Extinction," all of them working in Africa as well. All these six proximate causes are related to a remote cause: our predatory economy, our inability to look far into the future, our absurd greed, as in the case of poaching. Biodiversity, economy, and social issues are strictly connected in Africa. Here we argue the reasons why we will never be able to defend biodiversity in Africa and elsewhere if we do not defend social justice and the dignity of the populations that have always lived in the midst of biodiversity.

Keywords

Sixth Mass-Extinction, Anthropocene defaunation, self-endangered species, niche construction theory, conservation

In terms of evolution and biodiversity, Africa is a paradoxical and crucial laboratory. As Edward O. Wilson, Niles Eldredge, and other distinguished evolutionists and biodiversity experts claimed twenty years ago, due to the dramatic rate of extinction of species induced by human activities in recent centuries, the biosphere is going through a planetary "mass-extinction," meaning a rapid loss of biodiversity on a global scale comparable with the last five catastrophes that we see in the paleontological record, caused by volcanic eruptions, ocean acidification, climatic fluctuations, changes in atmosphere composition, impacts of asteroids on Earth, or a combination of these factors (Wilson 2003).

The Sixth Mass-Extinction

Africa and its many hot-spots of biodiversity, unfortunately, are at the centre of this crisis. The official label "Sixth Mass-Extinction" was first introduced by paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey and science-writer Roger Lewin to indicate the anthropic sequel of the Big Five mass-extinctions of the paleontological past, denouncing the destruction of biodiversity (mainly large mammals) in East Africa (Leakey and Lewin 1992). Other pioneering studies gave the first confirmations at the end of the past century (Lawton, May et al. 1995; Pimm et al. 1995). If we compare the rates and amounts of extinction during the mass-extinctions that we see in the

paleontological record with the range of species losses over the past few centuries, we observe a very similar trend. This time the asteroid is us, *Homo* so-called *sapiens* (Kolbert 2014).

At that time, the scientific community received the news as an exaggeration, a form of new millenarian "catastrophism." However, in 2010 Hoffmann et al. reported alarming percentages of extinction in amphibians, corals, freshwater molluscs, sharks, in addition to mammals, reptiles, and birds (see also Butchart et al. 2010; Pereira et al. 2010). Now, 20 years later, we have the data and we have the causes. In March 2011, an international team led in Berkeley by Anthony D. Barnosky verified the measures and came to a rather worrying conclusion, published in *Nature*: we are very close to the "Sixth Mass-Extinction," and we are doing nothing to stop it. And *Nature* is not exactly a journal of radical ecologist militancy. Humans may be more effective exterminators than asteroids and volcanic eruptions. A record that we should not be proud of.

The extinction rates of the past 500 years (22% in mammals, 47-56% in gastropods and bivalves) far exceed those recorded in the fossil record for the five major extinctions of the past 540 million years. Thus we are on a mass-extinction trajectory, with accelerating rates: "Our results confirm that current extinction rates are higher than would be expected from the fossil record. […] The Earth could reach the extreme rates of the Big Five mass extinctions within just few centuries if current threats to many species are not alleviated" (Barnosky et al. 2011, 51).

According to the refined calculations produced by ecologist Rodolfo Dirzo's team, at the Department of Biology in Stanford, and published in *Science* (another very important scientific journal and not a militant one) in 2014, human impacts on animal biodiversity are bringing about global environmental changes that are going to show increasing effects on ecosystems functioning and on the health of our own species. Our planet is no longer the same. Every year we are losing a total amount of 11,000 to 58,000 species, concentrated mainly in tropical regions, and mainly in South America, East Asia, and Africa. One species is being lost every twenty minutes. We are extinguishing species that we have not yet even had time to describe. The frightening technical term coined for this phenomenon by Rodolfo Dirzo in *Science* is: "Anthropocene Defaunation."

Charismatic vertebrates, particularly mammals and birds, are just a part of the problem. New data collected in a recent global review about the decline of arthropod biodiversity are alarming (Sánchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys 2019). Over 40% of insect species are threatened with extinction (expected in the next few decades if adequate conservation measures are not implemented and prioritised). Lepidoptera, hymenoptera, and dung beetles are the taxa most affected. Habitat loss by conversion to intensive agriculture (using pesticides) is the main driver of the declines. Agro-chemical pollutants, invasive species, and climate change are additional causes. It implies that ecosystem services provided by insects are strongly threatened too.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, promoted by the United Nations in 2001,

defined "ecosystem services" as all the benefits, direct and indirect, gained for free by humans from ecosystems, in other words from natural environments and their properly-functioning webs of ecological interactions. Examples of ecosystem services are: soil fertility, clean drinking water, land maintenance, the decomposition of wastes, the natural pollination of crops and other plants, etc. According to Gretchen C. Daily and Pamela A. Matson (2008), in order to fight ongoing extinction and impoverishment of ecosystems, we need to recognize "ecosystems as natural capital assets that supply life-support services of tremendous value," linking conservation and social and economic (sustainable) development.

We are not so *sapiens*. We do not pay money for ecosystem services, therefore we are often unaware of the true cost of maintaining them. But with the disappearance of thousands of species every year, ecosystems are becoming progressively less efficient in ensuring their services, such as water purification, nutrient cycling, and soil maintenance. 75% of food crops in the world depend on pollinator insects, so the dramatic decline of pollinator insects abundance is bad news even for our short-sighted neo-liberal economies. We are trying to become the first "self-endangered" species in the natural history, a record not very honourable (Pievani e Meneganzin).

The six causes

We know exactly the causes, all of them working in Africa as well. So, no alibi permitted. The human impact on biodiversity is due to a convergence of different and interacting factors (Pievani 2015):

1. Habitat fragmentation and alteration of species-areas relationships (i.e. forest clearance, conversion into pastures and intensive cultivations, mining activities);

2. Invasive species (the inter-continental remixing of alien species due to travel and commerce has been able to cause mass-extinctions in entire regions, in islands and archipelagos);

3. Population growth and urban macro-agglomerates (producing barriers and limitations to the dispersal of animals and plants);

4. Pollution (agricultural, industrial, chemical pollution of air, water and soils);

5. Overexploitation of biological resources by overfishing, overhunting, and poaching.

6. Finally, climate change, producing ecological mismatches in the seasonal cycles of species (mostly in long-distance migratory birds), polar species endangered, and alarming global effects triggered by ocean acidification.

1-6. In addition, we should consider the non-linear interactions between the six forces (for example, fragmentation of territory and global warming in tropical forests; devastating synergic effects of pollution, overexploitation, and climate change on coral reefs).

It is a very long story: the destructive environmental impact of our species began in earnest towards the end of the Pleistocene (Cavalli-Sforza and Pievani 2012). The "Anthropocene"

signals the fact that *Homo sapiens* has become a dominant evolutionary force (Pievani 2013). All these six proximate causes are related to a remote cause: the needs of our industrial economies, of an expanding population, and of the reinforcement of the transport and trade networks; in other words, our predatory economy, our geopolitical jungle without rules, our inability to look far into the future, and our absurd greed, as in the case of poaching.

This is a striking example from Africa. Because of the superstitions of the *Homo* so-called *sapiens*, white and black rhinos are on the verge of extinction. This massacre is due to the fact that in the Far East many are convinced that the rhinoceros' horn (made of the same matter of hair and nails, the keratin) has some miraculous medicinal and aphrodisiac properties. The demand is very high and on illegal markets a horn is worth almost a million dollars today. In Africa then the poachers arrive by helicopter: they can just afford it. At this rate another couple of species (together with many birds, reptiles, and other species) will become extinct due to the superstitions of *Homo sapiens*.

A (risky) niche construction process

The human-induced extinction wave we are witnessing today is likely to bring self-harming consequences for our own species, since the ongoing decimation of life-forms is also affecting the life-support conditions and the ecosystem services on which our civilization depends (Daily and Matson 2008, Cardinale et al. 2012, Ceballos et al. 2015). Human dependence and impact on biodiversity have mostly been studied as separated phenomena, but today's urgency of rethinking the policies of conservation demand an integrated perspective, which must not be confined to merely ethical and emotional appeals.

Plants, nonhuman animals, and microbes define the ecological niche we live in – a delicate equilibrium of interdependent relationships, in which we do not only represent the major active modifiers of the environmental states and the selective pressures at work, but we are also modified by the ecological and evolutionary feedbacks that the niche returns to its constructors. Niche construction theory (Odling-Smee, Laland, and Feldman 2003) provides a useful theoretical framework to appreciate the current unsustainability of human niche and the self-endangering feedbacks at stake, providing an integrative scenario in which *Homo sapiens* can no longer be treated as a mere exogenous phenomenon (Albuquerque et al. 2014).

By the time *Homo sapiens* reached the capacity for ecosystem engineering, the biosphere underwent dramatic changes, with the reshaping of global species distribution and the introduction of new ones. These result from intensive and complex niche construction activities, which respond to the needs of industrial economies, of an expanding population, and of the reinforcement of the transport network (Boivin et al. 2016).

In environmental conservation and ecology, the impact of human action has traditionally been investigated in two forms: acute disturbances (drastic environmental changes) and CAD, chronic anthropogenic disturbances (Singh 1998). In the case of tropical forests, where the

impact of CAD is most studied, clear-cutting, logging, anthropogenic fires fall within the first definition, whereas the chronic form is characterized by subtler activities that remove only a small fraction of biomass at a time, but at a constant rate and for the long term. Such activities are, to use the same example, the collection of firewood, fodder, and secondary forest products (seeds, leaves, tree oils, etc.). The main problem with the chronic activities is the fact that their persistence does not allow enough time for the ecosystems to recover adequately, making CAD one of the most widespread sources of habitat degradation in developing countries (Singh 1998) and a cause of the decrease of taxonomic and phylogenetic diversities (Ribeiro et al. 2015, 2016). Human-driven ecological disturbances, along with better-known drivers of biodiversity loss, like habitat fragmentation and defaunation, provide important examples of human niche construction, whose effects persist longer than the lifetime of the constructors themselves and are passed on to the following generations (ecological inheritance).

In niche construction processes, and mostly in those related to *Homo sapiens*, populations and environments are engaged in reciprocally caused relationships, including the impact of biodiversity loss on human activities and health. There's a vast array of phenomena that can be fruitfully analysed from a niche construction perspective, ranging from the ecological and economic impact of pollinator declines, to the global consequences of overfishing and of ocean acidification.

There is a burgeoning body of literature that is beginning to show that reduced biodiversity affects the transmission of pathogens to human beings, livestock, wildlife, and plants (Keesing et al. 2010, Civitello et al. 2015, Ostfeld 2017). The reasons behind the inhibitory effect on pathogen displayed by environments with a high biodiversity are linked to biotic homogenization and the so-called "dilution effect," which arises from the following observations. The majority of infectious human diseases have a zoonotic origin, with pathogens that are for the most part host generalist, meaning that they are capable to infect multiple species of host (which vary in their susceptibility to infection). The reservoir-hosts – the species that are more likely to acquire and transmit diseases – are those who are the most widespread, overrepresented and resilient to the perturbations induced by humans. Consequently, higher interspecific diversity (that includes species sensitive to anthropogenic perturbations) can 'dilute' the effect of the reservoir species and the general risk of infection.

As an example, a study conducted by researchers at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, found that, in tropical forests, biodiversity can play a role in preventing malaria outbreaks due to two different mechanisms: the dilution effect provided by warm-blooded mammals acting as a biological 'shield' for human people, and the competition between vector and non-vector mosquito species for blood feeding (Laporta et al. 2013). Malaria is reported to have caused 429.000 deaths and 212 million of new cases in 2015 (World Malaria Report 2016), making it a concrete threat to nearly half of the world's population, with Sub-Saharan Africa still carrying the greatest portion of the global burden.

Another example, from Africa. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is hypothesized to have been the result of a combination of policy-driven changes in Guinea and Liberia, brought about by neoliberal development (Wallace et al. 2014). The increase in oil palm plantation in Guinea's forested regions seems to have strongly impacted the forest epi-zoology. The first case of Ebola outbreak in West Africa was documented in the Guéckédou area, with a landscape characterized by a mosaic of villages enclosed by dense vegetation, with crop fields of oil palm that provide an ideal man-bat interface. Frugivorous bats are a key Ebola-reservoir and they are attracted to oil palm trees, where they migrate searching for food and shelter, thus shifting their foraging behaviour as the forest gradually disappears. The lethal virus can be transmitted through direct contact with the infected animal, via contaminated body fluids. As confirmed in an another study in 2017, deforestation is likely to push infected wild animals in areas inhabited by humans, increasing the probability of contact between them, by disrupting animal movements and population densities (Olivero et al. 2017).

This provides a straightforward case of undesired feedbacks induced by politically – and economically – driven niche activities that impact the population distribution of the endemic fauna and the ecosystem ecology in general, reminding the representatives of *Homo sapiens* of their role and weight in the interconnected nature of an ecosystem.

Conservation and social justice

Biodiversity, economy, and social issues are therefore strictly connected, more than usually expected. We change the environments, and the environments change us. If this is true, a hidden hope could emerge. As niche constructors, we could reverse the process. In Africa there are very different types of nature reserves and protected areas. From Kenya to South Africa, the most renowned parks are invaded by caravans of visitors, involved in the safaris. When an elephant appears, you see a queue of vehicles like in the highway. The animals have become addicted and show off, except to get nervous sometimes for the trouble. Sick animals are not shown. Nature is softened for invasive tourism. But if a leopard walks on the hood of your jeep, you or the leopard have done something wrong. The experience may be thrilling, but dangerous, because the leopard is the predator while we come from a long evolutionary career as preys. Yet on the net there are plenty of scenes of lions cuddled under the acacias and canoes that defy the fangs of hippopotamus mothers.

In other reserves the owners decided to make natural selection on customers, asking for very expensive prices for lodging and stay. But if environmentalism becomes a luxury for the few, it can hardly affect the effective conservation of the wildlife. Again, in other private reserves, mainly in South Africa, the very rich customers can shoot the animals. The chosen victims must die on the spot and bleed as little as possible, so that the trophies over the fireplaces may be exposed in their untouched integrity without any blood stains: this is really the most unfair sport in history. And it has nothing to do with conservation.

Hopefully, we can think differently. In Africa, and this is my favourite laboratory, a lot of reserves in several countries, even small reserves, are experimenting with new forms of sustainable and respectful tourism, whose gains are devoted to both conservation and research. Few tourists, no more than a dozen at a time, sleep and eat in lodges by the river, jeeping from dawn to sunset with the guides to observe, at a distance of respect, the animals in their natural behaviours. International teams of scientists study wildlife and deal with environmental conservation strategies, also with the help of eco-volunteers from all over the world. The problem is that such reserves are small handkerchiefs scattered in the African immensity. Several projects under study plan to unite some of them to create large cross-border African parks.

Furthermore, in many of these new generation reserves the revenues are partly allocated to social activities in favour of surrounding local communities, which actively participate in conservation through educational and employment programmes. Biodiversity becomes an opportunity of social and economic development. In some cases, local communities and native peoples have become the direct managers of natural reserves, in partnership with the scientists (like in the case of Floreana island, in Galápagos archipelago, UNESCO world heritage, where the small and proud local community is now the main ally of scientists in preserving biodiversity, extirpating alien species, and sharing the economic profits from selected tourism). Instead of ruining the environment by grazing the cows or cutting the trees to make firewood, local and native communities can directly manage the environment as a shared resource, thanks to the use of operators and the proceeds of eco-sustainable tourism and educational projects.

In Africa we see how much natural, cultural, and social evolution are interlaced. Zoological gardens all over the world are funding similar cooperation projects with local population for the conservation of wildlife. Plants and animals at risk for the most part live in the poorest countries, afflicted by social inequalities, reckless exploitation of resources, corrupt local politicians ready to sell off the territory to foreign investors, the impact of increasing global warming, and extreme weather events. The hyper-protected sanctuaries of nature, reserved for a lucky few, are no longer enough. It is unrealistic to think that conservation policies can work if they are administered paternalistically from above, without a concrete return to local communities. We will never be able to defend biodiversity in Africa and elsewhere if we do not defend social justice and the dignity of the populations that have always lived in the midst of that biodiversity.

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Democrazia e razzismo. Alle frontiere dell'umano

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Achille Mbembe, *Nanorazzismo. Il corpo notturno della democrazia*, trad. G. Lagomarsino. Laterza: Bari-Roma, 2019 (192 pagine)

ABSTRACT

In *Politiques de l'inimitié*, Achille Mbembe focuses on what he believes to be today's main global issues: the shrinking of the world and the growth of its population, a possible redefinition of humankind within the frame of a planetary geography, the transformation of capital into algorithmic capital, the power of capital in relation to its ability to radically change the human. In order to deal with these issues, the author traces the genealogy of the contemporary world in the economic and racial system of the plantation, the violence of colonialism and its consequences on the articulation of race and social relations worldwide. Mbembe sees the border as that key and haunting figure that, from early slave and colonial modernity, reaches out to our world, where and when the violence of the border is the main governmental tool.
The author's critical references range from W.E.B Du Bois to Ralph Ellison, from James Baldwin to Paul Gilroy, from Jacques Derrida to Frantz Fanon, to whom an entire chapter is dedicated. Through Fanon, Mbembe goes back to the tragic colonial scene, in order to understand where a possible history and the origin of contemporary wasted lives exactly lie, and thus imagining the figure of the "passer-by" as human beings' only chance to regain their humanity.

Keywords

racism, frontier, colony, postcolony, democracy

In un saggio del 2016, *"We, the People": Thoughts on Freedom of Assembly*, Judith Butler contribuiva insieme ad altri intellettuali contemporanei a definire la figura, così tanto evocata oggi, del "popolo". Nel nuovo contesto nazionalista, cosiddetto sovranista e populista della politica in Europa e Nord America, Butler ribadiva che il movimento che anima il corpo politico è sempre doppio: è lotta ed è mobilità. E proprio insistendo sulla natura corporea e organica della vita sulla Terra, la filosofa americana si interrogava sulle condizioni di possibilità per poter realmente soprav/vivere, essendo contemporaneamente corpi vulnerabili e corpi politici. È esattamente questa vulnerabilità – "l'estrema fragilità di tutti" (165) – e questa politicità dei corpi che Achille Mbembe, storico e filosofo politico alla Witwatersrand University di Johannesburg, mette a tema in *Nanorazzismo. Il corpo notturno dello democrazia* (2019; *Politiques de l'inimitié*, 2016) osservando come il nodo centrale di controllo e segmentazione dello spazio abitato dai corpi oggi sia rappresentato dalle frontiere, "linee di demarcazione"

che segnano impietosamente quello che si vorrebbe un "pensiero globale" (3) e divengono di volta in volta sbarramento, allontanamento, accerchiamento, conferimento degli scarti, controllo e governo dei corpi. E idealmente riecheggiando Butler, Mbembe si domanda "su cosa si basa la mia umanità e quella altrui?" (XI).

In quattro capitoli ("L'uscita dalla democrazia"; "La società dell'inimicizia"; "La farmacia di Fanon"; "Questo mezzogiorno asfissiante"), più un'introduzione e delle conclusioni significativamente intitolate "L'epoca del passante", Mbembe squaderna questioni globali cruciali: il restringimento del mondo e il suo ripopolamento, una possibile ridefinizione dell'umano nel quadro di una geografia planetaria, la trasformazione del capitale in capitale algoritmico, la potenza del capitale in relazione alla sua capacità di alterare l'umano. Ad attraversare tutte queste questioni e ad accomunarle vi sono le frontiere, strumento privilegiato per portare ovunque la guerra intesa come occupazione, conquista e terrore, che cristallizza e sancisce ineguaglianze e segregazioni. La frontiera è, innanzi tutto, guerra alla libertà di movimento come diritto che più di tutti è posto sotto attacco nella contemporaneità.

Per illuminare bene il punto in cui siamo, Mbembe fa ricorso a una genealogia che trova la sua origine agli albori dell'epoca coloniale. Il "corpo notturno della democrazia" del sottotitolo, infatti, è quell'ammasso originario di fenomeni di crudeltà che originano dal sistema della piantagione e dal più generale sistema coloniale che, consegnando gradualmente periodi sempre più lunghi di pace e arricchimento all'Occidente e all'Europa, hanno determinato un mondo di violenze inaudite con l'aumentare della distanza delle colonie dall'Europa e dall'Occidente. Così, l'estendersi di pratiche di sfruttamento e genocidio coincide con l'estendersi di pratiche di godimento e artistiche nonché di dibattiti culturali. Mbembe non smette mai di indicare questa verità genealogica sull'origine della cultura europea moderna che, in un'epoca di nuove forme di segregazioni, pare nuovamente eclissarsi, nonostante quarant'anni di teorie e pratiche postcoloniali/ste. E ribadisce un'altra verità persino banale eppure ancora sconvolgente – e non solo per il pensare comune ma per il pensiero storico-politico europeo e bianco: cioè che la storia della democrazia moderna è una "storia […] a due corpi: il corpo solare da una parte e il corpo notturno dall'altra. L'impero coloniale e lo stato schiavista […] rappresentano i maggiori emblemi di questo corpo notturno" (23). Il testo – talvolta imbrigliato da questa metafora oscura del notturno – progressivamente sprofonda negli esiti delle guerre e dei massacri contemporanei, soffermandosi soprattutto sull'accanimento di una violenza materiale e chirurgica, di smembramento e incisione dei corpi. Al fondo, Mbembe ravvisa una sorta di politica dello scorticamento come movimento verso la de-umanizzazione.

Per Mbembe, il tipo peculiare di razzismo che dà il titolo al volume italiano – nell'originale francese *Politiques de l'inimitié* vi è invece il rovesciamento delle politiche dell'amicizia derridiane fondate sul superamento delle relazioni scaturite dal mero dato comunitario, andate così perdute – è una "forma di narcoterapia" (71): non, dunque, una forza

mobilitante, che interpella soggetti verso una qualsivoglia azione politica, sia essa pure quella reazionaria e tendente allo sterminio (come molte pulsioni della nostra epoca, come sottolinea il filosofo camerunese), ma "perfetta naftalina per i periodi di intorpidimento e di floscia paralisi" (71). E tuttavia, esso si esprime nella vita quotidiana come micro-vessazione che dilaga nelle pratiche e nelle relazioni: dai sottintesi delle barzellette fino alle cattiverie deliberate, tese a una precisa e radicale stigmatizzazione di tutto ciò e tutti coloro che sono altro e altri. Si tratta di "fare violenza ferire e umiliare, di infangare chi non si considera dei nostri" (71) con atteggiamenti che Mbembe definisce di "razzismo lercio" (71). Il contraltare di questo lerciume quotidiano è l'afflizione di soggetti e corpi continuamente chiamati in causa da autorità che chiedono loro di spiegare la propria provenienza, identità, destinazione finale, addirittura talvolta la ragione stessa della loro esistenza in vita. Corpi martoriati da ferite spesso invisibili ma profonde e difficilmente cicatrizzabili. Poiché essi vengono colpiti in ciò che "hanno di privato, di più intimo e più vulnerabile" (72). È un razzismo che, muovendo dal risentimento dei "proletari" bianchi e rancorosi delle società europee – soggetto tuttavia discutibile e fantasmatico del discorso politico contemporaneo – fino alla macchina burocratica statale che produce esseri umani clandestini e illegali, accumulando rifiuti umani ai margini delle città e degli Stati, lungo le loro frontiere elettrificate e militarizzate.

Impossibile, leggendo, non pensare alla celebre *Prefazione* (1977) che Michel Foucault scrisse all'edizione nordamericana de *L'anti-Edipo. Capitalismo e schizofrenia* di Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari. Il "microfascismo" foucaultiano, infatti, si presenta come un agglomerato di micropratiche quotidiane di repressione del desiderio e passione (triste) per il potere. Il "nanorazzismo" è la sua versione postcoloniale con precise connotazioni di razza e di genere. Tuttavia non vi è alcuna connotazione utopica nella critica di Mbembe al nanorazzismo; vi si adombra invece una prospettiva quasi rovesciata, lontanissima dalla temperie libertaria a cavallo tra anni Sessanta e Settanta del Novecento.

Non a caso, lascia a tratti stupefatti la prosa di questo volume, soprattutto l'uso di registri linguistici volutamente calibrati sui toni dell'invettiva livorosa, nel tentativo evidente e riuscito di restituire materialità e densità corporea a fenomeni che rischierebbero altrimenti di eclissarsi nel blando mormorio della ridondante e morente saggistica accademica e specialistica. Perché, del resto, nota Mbembe, il nanorazzismo è fatto di "culture e respiro nella sua banalità e nella sua capacità di infiltrarsi nei pori e nelle vene della società" (73). In quelle vene scorre il terrore che i Negri, gli Arabi e i musulmani possano trasformare le nazioni europee in immondezzai, un terrore frutto delle ideologie del decoro dominanti; un terrore che è sempre l'anticamera del "campo": figura debordante in un tempo, il nostro, disseminato di luoghi di detenzione, smistamento e transizione di esseri umani a ridosso delle frontiere.[1] Ciò che emerge dalle pagine di questo saggio è la presa d'atto, continuamente ribadita, che nella nostra epoca le democrazie liberali europee hanno imboccato la curva cieca del negativo. Con questo negativo, va detto, l'autore in qualche modo si relaziona: lo descrive minuziosa-

mente, lo invoca apocalitticamente, talvolta lo blandisce con l'intento retorico di allucinare e spaventare il lettore e la lettrice che ne sottovalutano la potenza di penetrazione. In questo contesto, il campo è descritto come "forma di governo del mondo" (74).

Mbembe non teme di definire le democrazie liberali, che ripetutamente descrive come decadenti se non comatose, in preda a un "nazionalismo pezzente" (76) denazionalizzato dalle vere forze al comando della globalizzazione: l'offshoring delle ricchezze, il debito di massa e la recinzione dell'umanità in eccesso, di scarto. Il nazionalismo sovranista emerge da queste pagine come una pulsione necrofila. Di qui, l'evocazione di Carl Schmitt e la sua idea del politico come il luogo di conflitto amico/nemico e di Martin Heidegger e il suo essere Occidentale come centro di emanazione dell'universale, che restano per Mbembe i responsabili di una metafisica mefitica, sulla quale si basano nuove, inquietanti fantasie di annichilimento e distruzione di ciò che è estraneo.

Ma dall'altro lato, sul versante della lotta al mostruoso essere sovrano universalizzante che presiede alla scomposizione dell'umano di Schmitt e Heidegger, nel lungo capitolo centrale tutto fanoniano, Mbembe si appella ad alcuni dei numi tutelari della cultura nera novecentesca e oltre (Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin e Paul Gilroy), sottolineando la centralità di Negri, schiavi e africani, nel processo costitutivo della modernità globale. "Autentici fochisti della modernità" (136) che nonostante la dolorosissima "cancellazione" a cui i loro corpi, le loro vicende e la loro Storia sono state sottoposte, conservano una "triplice dimensione planetaria, eteroclita e poliglotta" (136). Ma il filosofo africano può far questo – sembra dirci – perché sin dalle pagine introduttive enuncia chiaramente il suo posizionamento geostorico, "partendo dall'Africa, dove vivo e lavoro" (3) scrive. Con i piedi della teoria e della pratica – della filosofia, della ricerca e dell'insegnamento – ben piantati in Africa, dunque, Mbembe guarda alle democrazie liberali europee, in particolare, inquadrandole come il nodo storico dei problemi psicanalitici del mondo che trovano, nella scena coloniale di castrazione del maschio colonizzato attraverso la violenza sul corpo delle donne colonizzate – in un avvitamento allucinatorio di violenze multiple – descritto da Fanon, la scena originaria dolorosa del nostro mondo.

Sintomaticamente, il più celebre e dirompente dei testi di Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2000; *Postcolonialismo*, 2005), si concludeva interrogandosi su quale fosse stato il ruolo dell'africano nel Novecento e se quel secolo avesse o meno segnato e significato l'uscita dalla colonia e dal colonialismo. *Nanorazzismo*, invece, si ritrova, spaesato e spossato, in una terra incerta, di confine, che quotidianamente ripresenta – dislocati e risemantizzati – gli stessi problemi della colonia. Ma ad essere febbrilmente imprigionata in un passato che non vuole passare è piuttosto l'Europa (oltre che Palestina/Israele), dove Mbembe, come già nel potente *Necropolitcs* (2003; *Necropolitica*, 2016), rintraccia gli elementi dolorosi di forme di de-umanizzazione che sono tornate a infestare le relazioni. In questo contesto, il filosofo camerunese parla di un "Negro di fondo", che avrebbe preso il

posto del "Negro di superficie", l'erede dello schiavo africano delle piantagioni che era soggetto a un razzismo epidermico. Il "Negro di fondo" – sempre nominato tra virgolette – è una nuova "categoria subordinata dell'umanità, un genere umano subalterno, la parte superflua e quasi eccedente", l'Altro del "nuovo uomo-flusso, digitale, che è infiltrato dovunque da organi sintetici e da protesi artificiali di ogni sorta" (158-59).

Occorre considerare questo denso e oscuro saggio come un vero manuale per l'attraversamento della nostra epoca, proprio qui, proprio ora: nell'Italia periferica di un'Europa periferica, dove la battaglia cruciale del monstrum politico che vede al Governo nuove forme di fascismo nazionalista e di populismo sovranista eterodiretto da una piattaforma digitale, è quella sul controllo dei corpi dei migranti provenienti dall'Africa: corpi politici e corpi organici, che si affollano lunga la frontiera fluida del Mediterraneo, reclamando libertà di movimento e il riconoscimento della propria "vulnerabilità" e del proprio "volto" (155). Perché la presa d'atto del "nostro ruolo di passanti" (167), ovvero di soggettività che popolano il mondo di passaggio e lungo un'articolazione temporale di accidenti casuali e di altrove, è il modo in cui veniamo a patti con la nostra umanità.

Note

[1] Il 'campo' è inteso nel senso agambeniano di "spazio di eccezione." È pensato come una zona d'eccezione in senso tecnico, come zona di sospensione della legge, così come zone di sospensione assoluta della legge erano i campi di concentramento, in cui – come dice Hannah Arendt – "tutto era possibile" perché appunto la legge era sospesa.

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"Black to the future": progettualità di un'utopia attiva in *Afrotopia* di Felwine Sarr

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Felwine Sarr, *Afrotopia*, trad. L. Apa. Bologna: Edizioni dell'Asino, 2018 (134 pagine)

ABSTRACT

Afrotopia is the name of a place not yet inhabited, the *a-topos* of an arriving Africa. In his recent book, Felwine Sarr writes a manifesto of the new African intelligentsia looking for unprecedented metaphors and imageries to realize the enormous potential of the continent at an economic, social, political and, above all, cultural level. Silvia Riva tries to show the importance and the poeticity of his project, which for once emphasizes the primacy of culture over the economy and over politics.

Keywords
Afrofuturism, utopia, African culture, tradition, literature

Non a caso uscito nella collana "Libri necessari" a soltanto un anno dalla sua prima pubblicazione in Francia per volere della traduttrice e operatrice culturale Livia Apa, *Afrotopia* di Felwine Sarr può essere considerato un manifesto della nuova intellighenzia africana. A partire dal 2017, con Achille Mbembe, Sarr ha infatti dato avvio ai cosiddetti *Ateliers de la pensée* di Dakar, che, in pochissimo tempo, si sono rivelati uno spazio di dibattito aperto a chiunque desideri proporre immaginari innovativi per l'Africa. Intellettuale poliedrico (economista, sociologo, musicista, esperto di arti marziali, editore e saggista), Felwine Sarr scrive *Afrotopia* per rispondere al grande quesito su quale contributo, oggi, il continente più a Sud del mondo e in piena crescita economica possa offrire al pianeta.

Afrotopia è infatti il nome di un luogo non ancora abitato, l'atopos di un'Africa che sta arrivando: "L'Afrotopos – scrive Felwine Sarr – è questo luogo altro dell'Africa. Bisogna accelerarne l'avvento, per realizzare le sue felici potenzialità. Fondare un'utopia, senza lasciarsi andare a un dolce sogno, ma pensare piuttosto uno spazio del reale a cui giungere attraverso il pensiero e l'azione. Bisogna ritrovare i segni e i germi nel tempo presente, per nutrirli. L'Afrotopia è un'utopia attiva che si dà come compito quello di cercare nel reale africano vasti spazi del possibile e fecondarli" (15-16).

Per amore di concisione si potrebbe affermare che l'invito di quest'opera è quello di

tornare a far dialogare fra loro economia e cultura. Soprattutto – ed è in ciò che risiede il principale interesse di questo scritto – l'invito è di reintegrare la seconda nel quadro della prima, e non viceversa, come abitualmente accade.

Così facendo, si recupera anche la dimensione politica, intesa nel senso più alto del termine: il patrimonio culturale, frutto della storia millenaria del continente che il colonialismo è riuscito soltanto a mettere fra parentesi, deve infatti ridiventare, nella concezione di Felwine Sarr e nelle azioni da intraprendere a livello legislativo, il riferimento per l'economia di un continente emergente.

Siamo vicini e distanti, allo stesso tempo, dalle antiche dottrine del ricorso all'autenticità, usate dai dittatori delle indipendenze per smarcarsi, con un'operazione di facciata, dalla morsa neocoloniale. Qui non si santifica l'epoca pre-coloniale ma, pragmaticamente, se ne salvano i concetti, le pratiche e i saperi che tuttora possono essere utili all'Africa. E per giungere a questa sintesi occorre reinvestire, in primo luogo, nel pensiero e nell'immaginario.

Un esempio (al quale è dedicato un intero capitolo): guardando agli spazi urbani, che sono i centri della maggiore mobilità e dei principali tassi di crescita dell'Africa di oggi, occorre trovare nuove configurazioni possibili, progettando "città che non grattano il cielo, non perché manchi loro ambizione, ma perché i loro abitanti scelgono di privilegiare gli interstizi dove ci si rincontra, dove viviamo e siamo" (124). L'urbanista Kobina Banning immagina allora a Kumasi, la seconda città del Ghana, il *Sankofa Garden City Park,* una città-giardino che, da un lato, "si riappropria degli spazi informali tradizionali come punti di partenza per esaminare l'avvenire" e, dall'altro, reintroduce il termine *sankofa* della cultura ashanti che significa "nutrirsi del passato per andare meglio avanti" (123).

Il recupero di un passato che possa contribuire a reiventare il futuro costringe a confrontarsi necessariamente anche con la ferita dell'alienazione identitaria, generata prima dalla tragica esperienza della tratta e dalla deportazione di centinaia di migliaia di africani nel Nuovo Mondo in quattro secoli, poi da quasi cent'anni di relegazione all'ambito minoritario nel contesto imperialista coloniale. "Guarire, nominarsi" è il capitolo in cui questo tema, che ha occupato la scena del discorso panafricanista per decenni, viene affrontato. Si suggerisce qui il superamento di un'ottica patologicamente "occidentalocentrica" (79). Sarr evoca il pensiero di Achille Mbembe e riprende una formula che quest'ultimo ha utilizzato nel saggio del 2010 *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée*, invitando a considerare "la musica, la religione e la scrittura […] parte della cura, luoghi delle pratiche analitiche che possono accompagnare la *risalita in umanità*" (80, corsivo dell'autore).

Pur non negando la profondità e l'impatto ancora attuale di queste fratture primigenie, Sarr preferisce ricordare, rifacendosi in modo implicito alla poetica del "tutto-mondo" di Edouard Glissant (*Tutto-Mondo*, 1993), anch'egli citato, che qualunque civiltà è in realtà ibridamente colorata: occorre soltanto "scegliere il colore dominante della mescolanza dei suoi colori, perché è stato riconosciuto come il migliore per il suo progetto di umanità. Non si tratta

di non scegliere con il pretesto della creolità, ma di edificare la propria voce/via. Ogni vera *presenza* è innanzi tutto una presenza a se stessi" (126-127, corsivo dell'autore). Si pone quindi il tema fondamentale della scelta. Ecco allora una serie di quesiti cruciali. Qual è il miglior modello politico, economico, culturale e sociale da perseguire? In economia bisogna tendere in ogni caso al progresso? Lo stato-nazione è l'opzione vincente nello scacchiere politico attuale? Che valori è meglio perseguire, quelli esogeni o, piuttosto, quelli endogeni, come i concetti di *jom* (dignità del vivere-assieme), della *téraanga* (dell'ospitalità), del *kersa* (pudore, scrupolo), di *ngor* (che corrisponde al senso dell'onore)? Qual è l'impatto dell'Africa nell'ecologia del pensiero del pianeta e nell'ecologia vera e propria? Pur pronunciandosi contro gli universalismi, il progetto utopico di Sarr non è un sogno e, pragmaticamente e attivamente, tenta di immaginare un nuovo umanesimo, che superi le dicotomie consuete che oppongono modernità = Occidente a tradizione = Africa.

Se, come ricorda Günther Anders in *L'uomo è antiquato* (1956), nella società contemporanea l'uomo è già antiquato poiché la tecnica lo ha di fatto superato, dall'Africa arriva un invito: "La posta in gioco è riuscire a liberarsi da tutto quello che, nella modernità così come nella tradizione, riduce l'essere umano, annientando la sua forza e la sua creatività, (liberando) le sue mani e i suoi piedi legati alle strutture mostruose di un ordine economico mondiale implacabile" (30).

Riportando così la dimensione economica entro la dimensione culturale, il volume affronta, talvolta poeticamente, la questione delle nuove metafore da forgiare per immaginare un mondo nuovo. È nell'invito alla creazione di nuovi immaginari, di nuove configurazioni discorsive, con tutto il rischio che ne consegue, che risiede non solo l'importanza, ma il fascino estetico di questo saggio. Un saggio politico che guarda con interesse e acume all'arte e alla letteratura, e alle soluzioni che esse propongono attraverso l'immaginario: si rivolge infatti a Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie che, in *Metà di un sole giallo*,

è riuscita perfettamente a rappresentare destini individuali sullo sfondo di storie sociali e politiche. Esplora anche, nel suo lavoro, il modo di abitare mondi diversi, e di navigare tra le loro rive (la Nigeria e gli Stati Uniti). Kossi Efoui svela l'ombra dei giorni che vengono e fissa spazi immaginari in una lingua dura e poetica. Nafissatou Dia Diouf scopre le tensioni delle esistenze individuali all'interno delle società africane, e interpella la sintesi delle risorse cognitive africane e occidentali. Célestin Monga pensa l'alterità, le identità leggere e le condizioni di un'etica della differenza. (115)

Anche le narrazioni diasporiche e le sue musiche, "escrescenze del continente, talee piantate in altre terre e nutrite da altri umori" (116), parlano al futuro prossimo del continente attraverso la loro estetica sincretica, ma sempre riconoscibile. Infine le realizzazioni creole, che hanno le loro radici nell'ormai lontana Africa, ci insegnano, così come lo fa la poesia del martinicano Aimé Césaire, a "non considerare mai l'opera dell'uomo come qualcosa di finito e ad abitare un pensiero vasto non confinandoci nella parte più piccola delle nostre idee e a portare l'ultima goccia d'acqua salvata in una delle lontane ramificazioni del sole, verso un

indugio d'isole estinte e di vulcani assopiti" (117).

Insomma, occorre pensare l'Africa "contro le maree," ulteriore titolo evocativo del terzo capitolo di *Afrotopia* che, in realtà, si rifà all'espressione francese *contre vents et marées*, ossia "qualunque cosa accada": o meglio, qualunque indicatore economico ci venga offerto dalle agenzie di rating internazionali, ci si deve opporre alla quantificazione a partire da parametri che sono, sempre e una volta di più, esogeni. Sarr esorta quindi ad andare controcorrente e a pensare che quantità non significa necessariamente qualità: "La vita forma un tutto indistinto e il sentimento del vissuto aggrega esperienze provenienti da dimensioni diverse dell'esistenza. Quelle legate alla comodità o a un'ottima organizzazione sociale si mescolano a quelle collegate alla qualità e all'intensità del vissuto (le prime possono essere dominate da queste ultime)" (20).

Le rappresentazioni di quest'Africa nuova, come osserva Achille Mbembe, citato nel saggio, si forgiano così nell'interfaccia fra autoctonia e cosmopolitismo, dando luogo a "un immenso campo di lavoro della materia e delle cose, capace di aprire un *universo infinito*, estensivo ed eterogeno, l'universo della pluralità e dell'ampio" (38, corsivi dell'autore).

Afrotopia è dunque un libro importante, non solo per l'Africa. In esso c'è molto, forse talvolta troppo. Nonostante l'affermazione reiterata relativa alla necessità di un nuovo umanesimo, l'argomentazione rischia in alcuni passaggi di prendere una piega nettamente essenzialista. Ad esempio, quando viene evocato Cheick Anta Diop, il celebre studioso senegalese che cercò di dimostrare la comune discendenza dall'Antico Egitto delle culture africane, evocato per aver sottolineato come esista una unitarietà culturale fra tutti i popoli dell'Africa, dal Maghreb al Sudan, e che questa unitarietà identitaria garantisce loro "una sopravvivenza di certi tratti della cultura tradizionale" (67). Allo stesso modo, le parole con cui lo stesso Felwine Sarr evoca l'*Homo Africanus* (67-68), che pare non essere per natura *Homo Economicus* (67), fanno riflettere e ci interrogano su quanto quello che viene cacciato dalla porta non rientri, alla fine, dalla finestra.

Inoltre, talvolta pare che l'argomentazione ignori il pregresso e gli autori di riferimento che hanno già riflettuto sul contributo che i popoli non-occidentali possono portare al mondo. In altre parole, in filigrana si scorgono alcuni degli apporti del pensiero decoloniale latinoamericano, che ha come capostipite Walter Mignolo e che prosegue, in anni più recenti, attraverso il lavoro del portoghese Boaventura de Sousa Santos: l'idea, ad esempio, di temporalità altre (cicliche e non lineari, come accade nella visione del mondo del Nord).

Detto questo, *Afrotopia* rappresenta un tentativo importante e, non di rado, poetico, di pensare al futuro dell'Africa, collocandola finalmente nella realtà a noi contemporanea. Si parla tanto oggi di afrofuturismo e questo scritto di Felwine Sarr sembra essere una delle risposte francofone più convincenti al movimento, avviato nel 1993 da Mark Dery, grazie al suo articolo dal titolo provocatorio, "Black to the Future."

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Pensare la fine del colonialismo italiano

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Antonio M. Morone, a cura di, *La fine del colonialismo italiano. Politica, società e memorie*. Le Monnier-Mondadori, Milano 2018 (296 pagine)

ABSTRACT

The volume edited by Antonio Morone reflects on the ways in which, after the end of the Second World War, Italy transformed its relationship with the ex-colonies; how the Italians who continued to live in ex-colonial territories were treated and related to the population of the ex-colonies and, in general, in which ways colonial societies changed in the aftermath of decolonization; but also, on the ways in which the inhabitants of the former colonies were received in Italy in the decades following the end of the colonial experience. This choice of essay provides new and original insights on the history of Post-war and Republican Italian history and contribute to its renewal.

Keywords
colonies, Italy, colonial society, continuities and ruptures

La fine del colonialismo italiano è un volume a più mani che aiuta a riflettere sulle aporie dei miti fondativi dell'Italia repubblicana e sulle contraddizioni e i silenzi che alimentano le memorie pubbliche (e private) degli italiani in relazione al fascismo e al colonialismo.

Il volume si apre con una ricca introduzione di Antonio Morone, che dà conto di un campo di studi in piena espansione, dove tradizioni culturali e storiografiche, e generazioni diverse di studiosi, si sono incrociati. In particolare il curatore sottolinea l'importanza degli studi che negli ultimi anni si sono imposti all'attenzione della storiografia e di altre discipline, in Italia e a livello internazionale, riflettendo sul modo in cui la storiografia italiana si è incrociata e scontrata con i *Postcolonial Studies*. Questa riflessione permette a Morone di fare un bilancio degli elementi critici di tale evoluzione, sottolineando in particolar modo la difficoltà di questa storiografia a diventare un ingrediente fondamentale nella più ampia riflessione sulla storia d'Italia e, in particolare, sulla transizione dal fascismo alla Repubblica. La storiografia italiana, secondo l'autore, non solo dimostra un grande ritardo nell'inserire il contesto coloniale nella riflessione sulla transizione, ma anche dimentica di analizzare la presenza e la permanenza di strutture e pratiche coloniali nei primi decenni postbellici. Questo è evidente per esempio nell'assenza di una riflessione sull'Amministrazione fiduciaria italiana in Somalia nel dopoguerra. Morone non è nuovo a questi temi, che ha già affrontato anche in un suo volume nel 2011, ma queste rifles-

sioni qui tornano in un contesto diverso, in cui la pluralità delle voci aiuta a ricomporre un quadro complesso in cui la storia politico-diplomatica si coniuga con la vita di uomini e donne che hanno attraversato mondi diversi e con la difficoltà della storiografia di darne pienamente conto. Tra l'altro questi nuovi studi permettono di ragionare sull'importanza della fuoriuscita della riflessione sul colonialismo italiano (e non solo) da una prospettiva nazionale ed esclusivista, che fa fatica a riconoscere, ad esempio, l'importanza della relazione italo-britannica di fine secolo nella possibilità dell'accesso italiano all'esperienza coloniale. Questi studi aiutano inoltre anche ad uscire da una prospettiva esclusivamente eurocentrica, dal momento che sono alimentati da una riflessione scientifica sulla storia africana e sull'incontro, squilibrato e dentro campi di potere ben evidenti, tra popolazione coloniale e popolazione africana. In questo contesto si registra anche l'importanza di guardare al modo in cui non solo il colonialismo ha utilizzato per fini di dominio le divisioni all'interno delle terre di conquista, ma anche al modo in cui il processo di decolonizzazione ha determinato l'emergere – con tempi e forme diverse a seconda dei diversi contesti istituzionali – di nuovi gruppi dirigenti in Africa, con relazioni, prospettive ideologiche e memorie differenti del passato rispetto ai gruppi coloniali dominanti nei decenni precedenti. L'intersecarsi di voci ed esperienze disciplinari articolate all'interno del volume aiuta ad arricchire grandemente il nostro sguardo, aprendo squarci su realtà che richiederebbero ulteriore approfondimento e che dovrebbero essere oggetto anche di una riflessione più ampia rispetto al pubblico di specialisti cui questi studi sono destinati.

Il volume si articola in tre sezioni, rispettivamente dedicate alla "Rinnovata politica coloniale dell'Italia repubblicana e le risposte africane," all'"Africa nuova, Africa vecchia" e a "Oltre la società coloniale: italiani e africani". La prima parte ha l'obiettivo di riflettere maggiormente sulle politiche coloniali, con enfasi particolare al dopoguerra, e sulle reazioni africane alla definizione dello statuto dei territori ex-coloniali italiani, oltre che anche sul ruolo di gruppi di pressione e della propaganda italiana nella definizione di un discorso pubblico intorno al ruolo coloniale (e post-coloniale) dell'Italia. Morone apre con un articolo in cui riflette sul modo in cui l'Italia provò a mantenere un controllo sulla Libia (in particolare sulla Tripolitania) ben oltre la firma del trattato di pace. Strumento fondamentale di questa politica fu il rafforzamento dei rapporti con il notabilato locale, un gruppo che costruiva, anche attraverso la continuità delle relazioni italiane con il territorio, la propria legittimazione per conservare un potere tradizionale, a scapito delle élites progressiste. Tommaso Palmieri analizza invece le dinamiche delle relazioni tra italiani e francesi, e tra francesi e classi dirigenti locali, nel Fezzan dalla Seconda guerra mondiale fino all'indipendenza, esaminando l'impatto delle politiche francesi nel determinare la costituzione di uno stato federale in Libia. Massimo Zaccaria riflette infine sul ruolo della propaganda italiana filo-coloniale anche nel dopoguerra sia per legittimare la passata presenza italiana nelle colonie sia per consolidare i rapporti economico-commerciali negli anni successivi alla decolonizzazione. I tre saggi danno conto dei diversi attori presenti su territori ex-coloniali italiani e di cosa le dinamiche di potere di cui sono portatori determinano sul

campo, influenzando rapporti di potere interni e nuovi assetti istituzionali.

La seconda sezione del volume è dedicata nuovamente alle continuità tra il periodo precedente alla guerra, rendendo così il confine con la prima parte per molti versi labile. Questa sezione si occupa del modo in cui la politica italiana del dopoguerra in Africa sia fortemente improntata sull'esempio del passato. Grande attenzione è dedicata al ruolo della cooperazione militare, alla permanenza di strutture giuridiche coloniali e al ruolo italiano nella crisi del Congo. È di nuovo Morone ad occuparsi della cooperazione militare italiana in Somalia, evidenziando le difficoltà e le ambiguità delle politiche italiane nell'ambito dell'amministrazione fiduciaria, la difficoltà della devoluzione del potere ai somali e l'incapacità dell'Italia di mantenere nel tempo i rapporti con la classe dirigente somale, ma anche l'importanza del quadro geopolitico internazionale nel determinare l'instabilità politica del Corno d'Africa. Morone si occupa poi anche del ruolo della cooperazione e dell'aiuto allo sviluppo nel rinnovare i rapporti di dipendenza tra potenze e territori ex-coloniali, bloccandone o comunque limitandone l'emancipazione sostanziale. In questo quadro, viene analizzato il ruolo italiano nella crisi del Congo, le contraddizioni peninsulari tra la volontà di mantenere una parziale autonomia in un contesto bipolare e l'importanza dei condizionamenti geopolitici, ma anche la riemersione di linguaggi e discorsi coloniali nel contesto di questa crisi e quindi il complesso rapporto tra politiche africane opinione pubblica nazionale, che rimane però solo accennato. Molto stimolante, tra gli articoli di questa sezione, il tema trattato da Mazza, ossia le permanenze del diritto coloniale nei nuovi stati africani, malgrado l'esistenza di un 'mosaico' di diritti diversi e le diverse applicazioni di questi diritti in relazione ai diversi abitanti (coloniali e non) del territorio. Ne emerge l'attualità della conoscenza del diritto coloniale per l'analisi giuridica e istituzionale, e quindi la dimensione al tempo stesso storica ma anche l'impatto immediato sulla contemporaneità che il diritto coloniale continua ad avere in questi contesti. Si collega per molti versi a questo articolo anche il saggio di Valentina Fusaro dedicato alla "Mobilità umana e acquisizione della cittadinanza italiana nel caso degli italo-eritrei", perché ci permette di riflettere come continuità e discontinuità in contesto eritreo e italiano abbiano avuto (e abbiano tuttora) un ruolo nella possibilità di eritrei e italoeritrei di varcare i confini del proprio stato di nascita e nella possibilità di trasferirsi sul continente europeo. L'autrice riflette su questo tema avendo in mente non solo l'apparato normativo, ma anche il lavoro sul campo che le permette di ragionare sulle norme e sulle pratiche che presiedono la concessione della cittadinanza italiana agli italoeritrei e il modo in cui tale questione incide sulle relazioni tra stati e tra individui e stati.

Questo saggio è situato nell'ultima sezione del volume, dedicata al rapporto tra italiani ed eritrei, somali, etiopici nella contemporaneità postcoloniale, un rapporto che è ancora largamente definito e influenzato dal passato coloniale italiano. Questa sezione appare per molti versi la più originale e per certi versi accattivante, enucleando, attraverso le storie di vita degli italiani rimasti in Africa, degli italoeritrei alla ricerca di un quadro legale di cittadinanza e delle donne eritree arrivate a Roma negli anni Sessanta e Settanta, diversi itinerari e prospettive

individuali attraverso la storia coloniale e postcoloniale. Questa sezione ci fa vedere la molteplicità delle memorie e dei condizionamenti storico-sociali, oltre che culturali, che operano nelle vite e nelle esperienze di uomini e donne, portatori – talvolta anche loro malgrado – di una storia che sembra lontana, ma che in realtà è molto vicina e dimostra l'importanza dell'incrocio, anche in singole ricerche, di approcci disciplinari diversi. Particolarmente interessante, perché anche di cerniera tra diverse riflessioni del volume, è il saggio di Emanuele Ertola sugli italiani in Etiopia dopo la fine del dominio coloniale. Ertola rappresenta un quadro sociale dell'universo italiano non appiattito solamente sulle rappresentazioni spesso socialmente limitate dei protagonisti. Utilizzando vari tipi di fonte e diversi metodi, Ertola cerca di costruire una rappresentazione completa della società italiana in Etiopia, fornendo un quadro complesso non solo dell'andamento demografico, ma anche della trasformazione dei rapporti tra italiani e locali che attraversano i gruppi sociali e che incidono a tutti i livelli sulle relazioni di chi rimane. Sempre alla comunità italiana, ma questa volta in Ghana e Congo, è dedicato anche il saggio di Matteo Grilli che analizza l'impatto dell'indipendenza di questi due paesi sulla società italiana locale. La prospettiva comparata aiuta Grilli a mostrare come l'impatto di questo processo politico sia profondamente diverso nei due casi, e permette alla comunità italiana in Ghana di svolgere un ruolo di rilievo nella costruzione di uno stato indipendente, mentre ciò non accade in Congo, dove la lentezza del processo di devoluzione del potere alla popolazione locale da parte del Belgio ebbe un impatto molto profondo sulle modalità della decolonizzazione. Infine il saggio di Marchetti lavora su come il passato coloniale agisca sulle domestiche eritree arrivate a Roma prima del 1980 e sulla loro percezione e inserimento nella società italiana, evidenziando le diverse reazioni delle donne appartenenti a strati sociali diversi rispetto all'ingresso in un paese che conoscevano e di cui si sentivano per molti versi parte.

Quest'ultima sezione riesce a tematizzare più pienamente come la rimozione del passato fascista coloniale, ma anche della storia coloniale repubblicana, abbia da una parte privato gli italiani della possibilità di una lettura complessa del loro passato, il cui rimosso ha lavorato in profondità come dimostra il dibattito pubblico sull'immigrazione degli ultimi anni, e dall'altra abbia favorito la lettura di questo passato in chiavi defascistizzanti e relativiste, il cui impatto è anche in questo caso ben evidente nella realtà odierna.

Il volume si presta quindi a molteplici letture e appare un importante punto di partenza per ulteriori ricerche che approfondiscano non solamente il caso italiano, ma anche il rapporto specifico tra l'esperienza italiana coloniale e il suo portato fascista, in comparazione con le storie coloniali di paesi che invece si confrontavano con un'opinione pubblica liberale nel territorio metropolitano. Esso fornisce un'interessante panoramica in un campo di studi e su una serie di ricerche in corso che potranno illuminare ulteriormente le conoscenze su una questione che tocca a molti livelli il presente italiano.

Giulia Albanese is Associate Professor of Modern History at the University of Padua, Italy. Her research focuses on the origins of fascism, political violence, and the rise of authoritarian regimes in the interwar period. She is the author of *Dittature mediterranee. Sovversioni fasciste e colpi di Stato in Italia, Spagna e Portogallo* (Laterza 2016); *La Marcia su Roma* (Laterza 2006; Routledge 2019) and co-editor of *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence and Agency in Mussolini's Italy* (Palgrave 2012).