Achille Mbembe
Difference and Self-Determination

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Whether in literature, philosophy, the arts, or politics, Black discourse has been dominated by three events: slavery, colonization, and apartheid. Still today, they imprison the ways in which Black discourse expresses itself. These events have acquired certain canonical meanings, three of which are worth highlighting. First, there is separation from oneself. Separation leads to a loss of familiarity with the self to the point that the subject, estranged, is relegated to an alienated, almost lifeless identity. In place of the being-connected-to-itself (another name for tradition) that might have shaped experience, one is constituted out of an alterity in which the self becomes unrecognizable to itself: this is the spectacle of separation and quartering.[1] Second is the idea of disappropriation.[2] This process refers, on the one hand, to the juridical and economic procedures that lead to material expropriation and dispossession, and, on the other, to a singular experience of subjection characterized by the falsification of oneself by the other. What flows from this is a state of maximal exteriority and ontological impoverishment.[3] These two gestures (material expropriation and ontological impoverishment) constitute the singular elements of the Black experience and the drama that is its corollary. Finally, there is the idea of degradation. Not only did the servile condition plunge the Black subject into humiliation, abjection, and nameless suffering. It also incited a process of "social death" characterized by the denial of dignity, dispersion, and the torment of exile.[4] In all three cases, the foundational events that were slavery, colonialism, and apartheid played a key role: they condensed and unified the desire of the Black Man to know himself (the moment of sovereignty) and hold himself in the world (the moment of autonomy).

Liberalism and Racial Pessimism

From a historical perspective, the emergence of the plantation and the colony as institutions coincides with the very long period in the West during which a new form of governmental reason emerged and was affirmed: that of mercantile reason. It considered the market as the ultimate mechanism for exchange and the privileged locus of the veridiction both of the political and of the value and utility of things in general. The expansion of liberalism as an economic doctrine and a particular art of governance took place at a time when European states, in tight competition with one another and against the backdrop of the slave trade, were working to expand their power and saw the rest of the world as their economic domain and within their possession.

The plantation specifically and later the

A eerie textile design depicts the slave trade, designed by Frédéric Etienne Joseph Feldtrappe (1786–1849) after a painting by George Morland (British, London 1763–1804 London). The colonial textile industry depended on slave trade for resources such as cotton, which politicized its self-referential nature. According to the Met Museum: "Frederic Feldtrappe produced this textile in the early nineteenth century during a moment of intense debate in France over the viability and morality of the slave trade. Of the four narrative scenes, two reference earlier paintings by English artist George Moreland and contrast the brutality of European slave traders with the kindness of Africans who minister to a shipwrecked European family. The other two scenes, based on engravings by Frenchman Nicolas Colibert, juxtapose a happy African family with the appearance of European traders in Africa. Their cache of trade goods (including textiles) ominously foreshadows the horrors of the traffic in human beings."

A film still from Julie Dash's recently restored 1991 masterpiece *Daughters of the Dust*.

colony were in gestation from the second half of the fifteenth century. They constituted an essential machinery within a new form of calculation and planetary consciousness. It considered merchandise to be the elemental form of wealth and saw the capitalist mode of production as being fundamentally about the immense accumulation of merchandise. Merchandise had value only to the extent that it contributed to the formation of wealth, which constituted the reason for its use and exchange. From the perspective of mercantilist reason, the Black slave is at once object, body, and merchandise. It has form as a body-object or an object-body. It is also a potential substance. Its substance, which creates its value, flows from its physical energy. It is worksubstance. In this view the Black Man is material energy. This is the first door through which he enters into the process of exchange.

As an object of value to be sold, bought, and used, the Black Man also has access to a second door. The planter who purchases a Black slave does so neither to destroy nor to kill him but rather to use him in order to produce and augment the planter's own power. Not all Black slaves cost the same. The variability in price corresponds to the formal quality attributed to

each of them. But any use of the slave diminishes the attributed formal quality. Once subjected to use, consumed and exhausted by their owner, the object returns to nature, static and henceforth unusable. In the mercantilist system, the Black Man is therefore the body-object, the merchandise, that passes from one form to another and – once in its terminal phase, exhausted, destroyed – is the object of a universal devalorization. The death of the slave signals the end of the object and escape from the status of merchandise.

Mercantilist reason thinks of the world as an unlimited market, a space of free competition and free circulation. The two approaches to the world that developed during the period were linked: the idea of the globe as a surface connected by commercial relations that cross state borders and thus threaten sovereignty, and the birth of international law, civil law, and cosmopolitan law, whose combined goal was to guarantee "perpetual peace." The modern idea of democracy, like liberalism itself, was inseparable from the project of commercial globalization. The plantation and the colony were nodal chains holding the project together. From their beginnings, as we well know, the plantation and the colony were racial dispositions whose

A plate from Wyck Historic House, England features the Wedgewood abolition emblem: "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" The curvy, Rococo revival form dates it aproximately in the c.1840s-50s.

calculus revolved around an exchange relationship based on property and profit. Part of liberalism, and racism, is therefore based on naturalism.

In his study *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Michel Foucault highlights the fact that, at its origin, liberalism "entails at its heart a productive/destructive relationship [with] freedom." He forgot to specify that the high point, historically, of the destruction of liberty was the enslavement of Blacks. According to Foucault, the paradox of liberalism is that it "must produce freedom, but this very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etc." The production of liberty therefore has a cost whose calculating principle is, adds Foucault, security and protection. In other words, the economy of power that defines liberalism, and the democracy of the same name, depends on a tight link between liberty, security, and protection against omnipresent threat, risk, and danger. Danger can result from the poor adjustment of the mechanisms balancing the diverse interests that make up the political community. But it can also come from outside. In both cases "liberalism turns into a mechanism continually having to arbitrate between the freedom and security of individuals by reference to this notion of danger." The Black slave represents the danger.[5]

One of the motors of liberalism is the permanent animation, or the reactualization and placement into circulation, of the topic of danger and threat – and the resulting stimulation of a culture of fear. If the stimulation of a culture of fear is the condition, the "internal psychological and cultural correlative of liberalism," then, historically, the Black slave is its primary conduit.[6] From the beginning, racial danger has been one of the pillars of the culture of fear intrinsic to racial democracy. The consequence of fear, as Foucault reminds us, has always been the broad expansion of procedures of control, constraint, and coercion that, far from being aberrations, constitute the counterpart to liberty. Race, and in particular the existence of the Black slave, played a driving role in the historical formation of this counterpart.

The plantation regime and, later, the colonial regime presented a problem by making race a principle of the exercise of power, a rule of sociability, and a mechanism for training people in behaviors aimed at the growth of economic profitability. Modern ideas of liberty, equality, and democracy are, from this point of view, historically inseparable from the reality of slavery. It was in the Caribbean, specifically on the small island of Barbados, that the reality took shape for the first time before spreading to the English colonies of North America. There, racial domination would survive almost all historical moments: the revolution in the eighteenth century, the Civil War and Reconstruction in the nineteenth, and even the great struggles for civil rights a century later. Revolution carried out in the name of liberty and equality accommodated itself quite well to the practice of slavery and racial segregation.

These two scourges were, however, at the heart of the debates surrounding independence. Seeking to enlist slaves in the fight against the revolution, the English offered them sparkling promises of liberty. From then on, the specter of a generalized insurrection of the slaves – an old fear, part of the American system from its beginnings – shadowed the War of Independence. In fact, during the hostilities tens of thousands of slaves proclaimed their own freedom. There were important defections in Virginia. But there was a gap between the way Blacks conceived of their liberty (as something to conquer) and the ideas of the revolutionaries, who saw it as something that should be gradually granted. At the end of the conflict, the slave system was not dismantled. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were clearly texts of liberation, except when it came to race and slavery. A new kind of tyranny was consolidated at the very moment of liberation from tyranny. The idea of formal equality between White citizens emerged in a roundabout way from the revolution. It was the consequence of a conscious effort to put social distance between Whites on the one hand and African and Native American slaves on the other. The dispossession of the latter was justified through references to their laziness and lust. And if later, during the Civil War, there was a relatively equal amount of blood spilled by Whites and Blacks, the abolition of slavery did not lead to compensation for ex-slaves.

In this regard the chapter in Alexis de Tocqueville's portrait of American democracy devoted to "the Present State and Probable Future of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States" is particularly interesting. He writes both of the race of men "par excellence," the Whites, the "first in enlightenment, in power, in happiness," and of the "unfortunate races": Blacks and Native Americans. These three racial formations are not part of the same family. They are not just distinct from one another. Everything, or almost everything, separates them: education, law, origins, and external appearance. And the barrier that divides them is, from his point of view, almost insurmountable. What unites them is their potential enmity, since "the European is to the men of other races what man himself is to

the animals" to the extent that he "makes them serve his purposes, and when he cannot make them bend, he destroys them." Blacks have been the privileged subjects of this process of destruction, since their oppression has taken from them "nearly all the privileges of humanity." "The Negro of the United States has lost even the memory of his country; he no longer hears the language spoken by his fathers; he has renounced their religion and forgotten their mores. While thus ceasing to belong to Africa, however, he has acquired no right to the good things of Europe; but he has stopped between the two societies; he has remained isolated between the two peoples; sold by the one and repudiated by the other; finding in the whole world only the home of his master to offer him the incomplete picture of a native land."[7]

For Tocqueville, the Black slave embodies all the traits of debasement and abjection. He arouses aversion, repulsion, and disgust. A herd animal, he is the symbol of castrated and atrophied humanity from which emanates poisoned exhalations: he is a kind of constitutive horror. To encounter the slave is to experience an emptiness that is as spectacular as it is tragic. What characterizes him is the impossibility of finding a path that does not always return to servitude as its point of departure. It is the slave's taste for subjection. He "admires his tyrants even more than he hates them, and finds his joy and his pride in servile imitation of those who oppress him." As the property of another he is useless to himself. Since he does not dispose of the property of himself, "the care for his own fate has not devolved upon him. The very use of thought seems to him a useless gift from Providence, and he peacefully enjoys all the privileges of his servility." The enjoyment of the privileges of servility is an almost innate disposition. Here is a slave who is not in a struggle with his master. He risks nothing, not even his life. He does not struggle for his animal needs, much less to express sovereignty. He prefers his servitude and recoils when faced with death: "Servitude brutalizes him and liberty destroys him." The master, by contrast, lives in a constant fear of menace. The terror that envelops him is the possibility of being killed by his slave, a mere figure of a man that he does not even recognize as fully human.[8]

The fact that there is not a single Black person who has come freely to the shores of the New World is, for Tocqueville, one of the great dilemmas of American democracy. For him, there is no solution to the problem of the relationship between race and democracy, even though the central fact of race constitutes one of the future dangers for democracy. "The most formidable of all the evils that threaten the future of the United States arises from the presence of Blacks on their soil." "You can make the Negro free, but he remains in the position of a stranger vis-à-vis the European." In other words, the emancipation of the slaves cannot erase the stain of ignominy on them because of their race – the ignominy that means that Black necessarily rhymes with servitude. "The memory of slavery dishonors the race, and race perpetuates the memory of slavery," claims Tocqueville. "In this man who is born in lowliness," furthermore, "in this stranger that slavery introduced among us, we scarcely acknowledge the general features of humanity. His face appears hideous to us, his intelligence seems limited to us, his tastes are base; we very nearly take him for an intermediate being between brute and man."[9]

In liberal democracy, formal equality can therefore be paired with the natural prejudice that leads the oppressor to disdain those who were once his inferior even long after they have been emancipated. Without the destruction of prejudice, equality can only be imaginary. Even if the law makes of the Black Man an equal, he will never be like us. Tocqueville insists that there is an "insurmountable distance" separating the Blacks of America from the Europeans. The difference is unchangeable. It has its roots in nature itself, and the prejudice that surrounds it is indestructible. For this reason, the relationship between the two races can only oscillate between the degradation of the Blacks and their enslavement by Whites, on the one hand, and the fear of the destruction of Whites by the Blacks, on the other. The antagonism is unsurpassable.[10]

The second kind of fear experienced by the White master is that he will be confused for the debased race and end up resembling his former slave. It is important, therefore, to keep his slaves at the margins, as far away from himself as possible – thus the ideology of separation. Even if the Black Man has obtained formal liberty, "he is not able to share either the rights or the pleasures or the labors or the pains or even the tomb of the one whose equal he has been declared to be; he cannot meet him anywhere, either in life or in death." As Tocqueville specifies, "the gates of heaven are not closed to him: but in equality scarcely stops at the edge of the other world. When the Negro is no more, his bones are thrown aside, and the difference in conditions is found again even in the equality of death." In fact, racial prejudice "seems to increase proportionately as Negroes cease to be slaves," and "in equality becomes imprinted in the mores as it fades in the laws." The abolition of the principle of servitude does not necessarily signify the liberation of the slaves and equal access. It only contributes to

transforming them into "unfortunate remnants" doomed to destruction.[11]

Tocqueville believes that the question of the relationship between race and democracy can be resolved only in one of two ways: "Negroes and Whites must either blend entirely or separate." But he conclusively sets aside the first solution. "I do not think that the white race and the black race will come to live on an equal footing anywhere." This kind of mixing would only be possible, he argues, under a despotic regime. In a democracy the liberty of Whites can only be viable if accompanied by the segregation of Blacks and the isolation of the Whites among themselves. Since democracy is fundamentally incapable of resolving the racial question, the question that remains is how America can free itself of Blacks. To avoid a race war, Blacks must dis appear from the New World and return home, to their countries of origin. This will allow an escape from slavery "without [Whites] having anything to fear from free Negroes." Any other option would result only in the "the ruin of one of the two races."[12]

Human like All Others?

In Tocqueville's period the terms of the question were therefore clear: could Blacks govern themselves? The doubt regarding the aptitude of Blacks for self-governance led to another, more fundamental doubt, one deeply embedded in the modern approach to the complex problem of alterity – and to the status of the African sign in the midst of the economy of alterity. To understand the political implications of these debates, we must remember that, despite the romantic revolution, Western metaphysics has traditionally defined the human in terms of the possession of language and reason. In effect, there is no humanity without language. Reason in particular confers on the human being a generic identity, a universal essence, from which flows a collection of rights and values. It unites all humans. It is identical in each of them. The exercise of this faculty generates liberty and autonomy, as well as the capacity to live an individual life according to moral principles and an idea of what is good. That being the case, the question at the time was whether Blacks were human beings like all others. Could one find among them the same humanity, albeit hidden under different designations and forms? Could one detect in their bodies, their language, their work, or their lives the product of human activity and the manifestation of subjectivity – in short, the presence of a conscience like ours – a presence that would authorize us to consider each of them, individually, as an alter ego?

These questions gave rise to three different kinds of answers with relatively distinct political

implications. The first response was that the human experience of Blacks should be understood as fundamental difference. The humanity of Blacks had no history as such. Humanity without history understood neither work nor rules, much less law. Because they had not liberated themselves from animal needs, Blacks did not see either giving or receiving death as a form of violence. One animal can always eat another. The *African sign* therefore had something distinct, singular, even indelible that separated it from all other human signs. The best testament to this was the Black body, its forms and colors.[13] The body had no consciousness or any of the characteristics of reason or beauty. It could not therefore be considered a body composed of flesh like one's own, because it belonged solely to the realm of material extension as an object doomed to peril and destruction. The centrality of the body – and especially of its color – in the calculus of political subjection explains the importance assumed by theories of the physical, moral, and political regeneration of Blacks over the course of the nineteenth century. These theories developed conceptions of society and the world – and of the good – that claimed an absence among Blacks. They lacked the power of invention and the possibility of universalism that comes with reason. The representations, lives, works, languages, and actions of Blacks – or even their deaths – obeyed no rule or law whose meaning they themselves could, on their own authority, conceive or justify. Because of this radical difference, this being-apart, it was deemed legitimate to exclude them in practice and in law from the sphere of full and complete human citizenship: they had nothing to contribute to the work of the universal.[14]

A significant shift occurred at the moment of abolitionism and the end of the slave trade. The thesis of Blacks as "humans apart" certainly persisted. But there was a slight slippage within the old economy of alterity that permitted a second kind of response. The thesis of nonsimilarity was not repudiated, but it was no longer based on the emptiness of the sign as such. Now the sign was filled with content. If Blacks were beings apart, it was because they had things of their own, customs that should not be abolished or destroyed but rather modified. The goal was to inscribe difference within a distinct institutional system in a way that forced it to operate within a fundamentally inegalitarian and hierarchical order. The subject of this order was the native, and the mode of governance that befitted him was indirect administration – an inexpensive form of domination that, in the British colonies especially, made it possible to command natives in a regularized manner, with
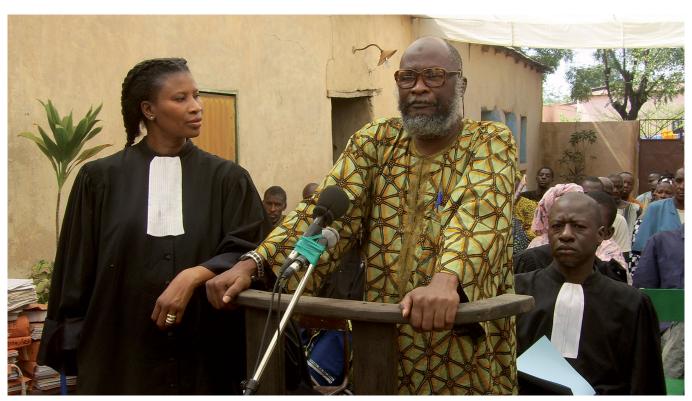
few soldiers, and to pit them against one another by bringing their own passions and customs into play.[15] Difference was therefore relativized, but it continued to justify a relationship of inequality and the right to command. Understood as natural, the inequality was nevertheless justified by difference.[16] Later, the colonial state used custom, or the principle of difference and inequality, in pursuit of the goal of segregation. Specific forms of knowledge (colonial science) were produced with the goal of documenting difference, purifying it of plurality and ambivalence, and fixing it in a canon. The paradox of the process of abstraction and reification was that it presented the appearance of recognition. But it also constituted a moral judgment since, in the end, custom was singularized only to emphasize the extent to which the world of the native, in its naturalness, did not coincide in any way with our own. It was not part of our world and could not, therefore, serve as the basis for a common experience of citizenship.

The third response had to do with the policy called assimilation. In principle, the idea of assimilation was based on the possibility of an experience of the world common to all human beings, or rather on the possibility of such an experience as premised on an essential similarity among all human beings. But this

world common to all human beings, this similarity, was not granted outright to natives. They had to be converted to it. Education would be the condition under which they could be perceived and recognized as fellow human beings. Through it, their humanity would cease to be indefinable and incomprehensible. Once the condition was met, the assimilated became full individuals, no longer subject to custom. They could receive and enjoy rights, not by virtue of belonging to a particular ethnic group, but because of their status as autonomous subjects capable of thinking for themselves and exercising that particular human faculty that is reason. The assimilated signaled the possibility that the Black Man could, under certain conditions, become – if not equal or similar to us – at least our alter ego. Difference could be abolished, erased, or reabsorbed. Thus, the essence of the politics of assimilation consisted in desubstantializing and aestheticizing difference, at least for the subset of natives co-opted into the space of modernity by being "converted" or "cultivated," made apt for citizenship and the enjoyment of civil rights.

The Universal and the Particular
When Black criticism first took up the question of self-governance at the end of the Atlantic slave trade, and then during the struggles for

In Abderrahmane Sissako's 2006 movie *Bamako,* the plot follows a trial that is attempting to determine whether the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are guilty of the current financial state and debt of African countries.

decolonization, it inherited these three responses and the contradictions they had engendered. Criticism essentially accepted the basic categories then used in Western discourse to account for universal history. The notion of civilization was one of the categories.[17] It authorized the distinction between the human and the nonhuman – or the not-yet-sufficiently human that might become human if given appropriate training.[18] The three vectors of the process of domestication were thought to be conversion to Christianity, the introduction of a market economy through labor practices, and the adoption of rational, enlightened forms of government.[19] Among the first modern African thinkers, liberation from servitude meant above all the acquisition of the formal power to decide autonomously for oneself. Postwar African nationalism followed the tendencies of the moment by replacing the concept of civilization with that of progress. But this was simply a way to embrace the teleologies of the period.[20] The possibility of an alternative modernity was not excluded a priori, which explains why debates about "African socialism," for example, were so intense. But the problematic of the conquest of power dominated anticolonial nationalist thought and practices, notably in cases involving armed struggle. Two central categories were mobilized in the struggle to gain power and to justify the right to sovereignty and self-determination: on the one hand, the figure of the Black Man as a "suffering will," a victimized and hurt subject, and, on the other, the recovery and redeployment by Blacks themselves of the thematic of cultural difference, which, as we have seen, was at the heart of colonial theories of inferiority and in equality.

Defining oneself in this way depended on a reading of the world that later ideological currents would amplify, one that laid claim as much to progressivism and radicalism as to nativism. At the heart of the paradigm of victimization was a vision of history as a series of inevitabilities. History was seen as essentially governed by forces that escape us, following a linear cycle in which there are no accidents, one that is always the same, spasmodic, infinitely repeating itself in a pattern of conspiracy. The conspiracy is carried out by an external enemy that remains more or less hidden and that gains strength from private complicities. Such a conspiratorial reading of history was presented as the radical discourse of emancipation and autonomy, the foundation for a so-called politics of Africanity. But behind the neurosis of victimization lurks in reality a negative and circular way of thinking that relies on superstition to function. It creates its own fables, which subsequently pass for reality. It makes

masks that are conserved and remodeled in different epochs. So it is with the couple formed by the executioner (enemy) and his victim (the innocent). The enemy – the executioner – incarnates the absolute form of cruelty. The victim, full of virtue, is incapable of violence, terror, or corruption. In this closed universe, where "making history" becomes nothing more than flushing out one's enemies or destroying them, any form of dissent is seen as extremism. There exists a Black subject only within a violent struggle for power – above all, the power to spill blood. The Black Man is a castrated subject, a passive instrument for the enjoyment of the Other, and becomes himself only through the act of taking the power to spill blood from the colonizer and using it himself. In the end, history moves within a vast economy of sorcery.

As we have underscored, Black discourse consists in part in appropriating the ideology of cultural difference for one's own purposes, in internalizing it and using it to one's own benefit. The ideology leans on the three crutches that are race, geography, and tradition. In fact, most political theories of the nineteenth century established a tight link between the human subject and the racial subject. To a large extent, they read the human subject first through the prism of race. Race itself was understood as a set of visible physiological properties with discernible moral characteristics. It was thought that these properties and characteristics were what distinguished human species from one another.[21] Physiological properties and moral characteristics made it possible to classify races according to a hierarchy whose violent effects were both political and cultural.[22] As we have already noted, the dominant classification during the nineteenth century excluded Blacks from the circle of humanity or at least assigned them an inferior status in the hierarchy of races. It is this denial of humanity (or inferior status) that forces such discourse to inscribe itself, from the beginning, in a tautology: "We are also human beings."[23] Or better yet: "We have a glorious past that proves our humanity."[24] That is also the reason that, at its origins, the discourse on Black identity is infused with a tension from which it still has difficulty escaping: are Blacks part of a generic humanity?[25] Or, in the name of difference and singularity, do Blacks insist on the possibility of diverse cultural forms within a single humanity – cultural forms whose vocation is not simply to reproduce themselves but also to seek a final, universal destination?[26]

In this sense, the reaffirmation of a human identity denied by others is part of a discourse of refutation and rehabilitation. But if the discourse of rehabilitation seeks to confirm the cobelonging of Blacks to humanity in general, it

does not – except in a few rare cases – set aside the fiction of a racial subject or of race in general.[27] In fact, it embraces the fiction. This is true as much of Negritude as of the various versions of Pan-Africanism. In fact, in these propositions – all of them imbued with an imagined culture and an imagined politics – race is the foundation not only of difference in general but also of the very idea of nation and community, since racial determinants are seen as the necessary moral basis for political solidarity. Race serves as proof of (or sometimes justification for) the existence of the nation. It defines the moral subject as well as the immanent fact of consciousness. Within much of Black discourse, the fundamental foundations of nineteenth-century anthropology – the prejudice of evolutionary thinking and the belief in progress – remain intact. And the racialization of the nation and the nationalization of race go hand in hand.

The latent tension that has always broadly shaped reflection on Black identity disappears in the gap of race. The tension opposes a universalizing approach, one that proclaims a cobelonging to the human condition, with a particularizing approach that insists on difference and the dissimilar by emphasizing not originality as such but the principle of repetition (custom) and the values of autonomy. In the history of Black thought during the last two centuries, race has been the point of reconciliation between the two politico-cultural approaches. The defense of the humanity of Blacks almost always exists in tandem with claims about the specific character of their race, traditions, customs, and history. All language is deployed along this fault line, from which flow representations of what is "Black." We rebel not against the idea that Blacks constitute a distinct race but against the prejudice of inferiority attached to the race. The specificity of so-called African culture is not placed in doubt: what is proclaimed is the relativity of cultures in general. In this context the "work for the universal" consists in expanding the Western ratio of the contributions brought by Black "values of civilization," the "specific genius" of the Black race, for which "emotion" in particular is considered the cornerstone. It is what Senghor calls the "encounter of giving and receiving," one of whose results should be the mixing of cultures.[28]

The discourse of cultural difference was developed on the basis of these common beliefs. In the nineteenth century, there emerged attempts to settle on a general denomination and locate a place in which to anchor the prose of Black difference and the idea of African autonomy. Its geographic locus was tropical Africa, a place of fictions if ever there was one. The goal was to abolish the fantastic anatomy of the place that Europeans had invented and that Hegel and others echoed.[29] Somehow, the scattered limbs of Africa were gathered up and reattached, its fragmented body reconstructed in the imaginary zenith of race and in the radiance of myth.[30] The project was to locate Africanness in a collection of specific cultural traits that ethnographic research would furnish. Finally, nationalist historiography sought out what was lacking in ancient African empires – even in pharaonic Egypt.[31] This approach, taken up by ideological currents linked to progressivism and radicalism, consisted first in establishing a quasiequivalence between race and geography, and then in creating a cultural identity that flowed from the relationship between the two terms. Geography became the ideal terrain in which the power of race and institutions could take form.[32] Pan-Africanism effectively defined the native and the citizen by identifying them as Black. Blacks became citizens because they were human beings endowed, like all others, with reason. But added to this was the double fact of their color and the privilege of indigeneity. Racial authenticity and territoriality were combined, and in such conditions Africa became the land of the Blacks. As a result, every thing that was not Black had no place and consequently could not claim any sort of Africanity. The spatial body, racial body, and civic body all became one. The spatial body served as a witness to the common indigeneity by virtue of which all of those born there or sharing the same color and the same ancestors were brothers and sisters. The racial referent became the basis for civic kinship. In the process of determining who was Black and who was not, there was no way to imagine identity without racial consciousness. The Black Man would henceforth no longer be someone who simply participated in the human condition but the person who, born in Africa, lives in Africa and is of the Black race. The idea of an Africanity that is not Black simply became unthinkable. In this logic of identity assignation, non-Blacks were not from Africa (they were not natives) since they came from elsewhere (they were settlers). As a result, it was impossible to conceive of Africans of European origin.

But, because of the slave trade, it so happened that Blacks inhabited faraway lands. How was their inscription in a racially defined nation to be conceived when geography had separated them from their place of birth, which was far from the place where they lived and worked? Some proposed that the best way for them to consecrate their Africanity was purely and simply to return to Africa. Since the African geographic space constituted the natural

homeland for Blacks, those who through slavery were taken far from the bosom of Africa lived in a condition of exile.[33] To a large extent, the horizon of the ultimate return (the back-to-Africa movement) infused the Pan-Africanist movement. More fundamentally, Pan-Africanism developed within a racist paradigm that triumphed in Europe during the nineteenth century.[34] It was a discourse of inversion, drawing its fundamental categories from the myths that it claimed to oppose and reproducing their dichotomies: the racial difference between Black and White, the cultural confrontation between the civilized and the savage, the religious opposition between Christians and pagans, the conviction that race founded nation and vice versa. It inscribed itself within an intellectual genealogy founded on the territorialization of identity on the one hand and the racialization of geography on the other, or the myth of a racial polis. And it forgot a key fact: that if exile was certainly the result of the rapacity of capitalism, its origins also lay in a family murder.[35]

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Whether through the vocabulary of alienation or that of deracination, Francophone criticism has probably conceptualized this process of the "exit from oneself " best. See in particular Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967); Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure* (London: Heinemann, 1972); Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu: Authenticité africaine et philosophie* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1977); and Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianity without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

2

This applies in particular to Anglophone work in Marxist political economy. See, for example, Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1982); or the works of authors such as Samir Amin, *Le développement inégal: Essai sur les formations sociales du capitalisme périphérique* (Paris: Minuit, 1973).

3

On falsification and the necessity to "re-establish historical truth," see, for example, the work of nationalist historians: Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique noire, d'hier à demain* (Paris: Hatier, 1972); and Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, trans. Mercer Cook (New York: L. Hill, 1974).

4

On the problematic of slavery as social death, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

5

Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 64, 66.

6

Ibid., 67.

7

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of "De la démocratie en Amérique,"* ed. Eduardo Nolla, trans. James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2012), 516–17.

8

Ibid., 517–18.

9

Ibid., 549, 551.

10

Ibid., 552.

11

Ibid., 555, 566.

12

Ibid., 572, 578.

13

On the centrality of the body as the ideal unity of the subject and the locus of recognition of its unity, its identity, and its value, see Umberto Galimberti, *Les raisons du corps* (Paris: Grasset, 1998).

14

On this point and those that precede it, see, among others, Pierre Pluchon, *Nègres et Juifs au XVIIIe siècle: Le racisme au siècle des lumières* (Paris: Tallandier, 1984); Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois,* vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier/Flammarion, 1979); Voltaire, "Essais sur les moeurs et l'esprit" des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIV," in *OEuvres complètes* (Paris: Imprimerie de la Société Littéraire et Typographique, 1784), vol. 16; and Immanuel Kant, *Observations sur le sentiment du beau et du sublime*, trans. Roger Kempf (Paris: Vrin, 1988).

15

Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

16

The most developed institutional form of this economy of alterity was the apartheid regime, in which hierarchies were of a biological order. It was an expanded version of indirect rule. See Lucy P. Mair, *Native Policies in Africa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936); and Frederick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1980).

17

See the texts gathered in Henry S. Wilson, *Origins of West African Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1969).

18

See, for example, Nicolas de Condorcet, "Réflexions sur l'esclavage des Nègres (1778)," in *OEuvres* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1847), vol. 7.

19

Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994); and Edward W. Blyden, *Liberia's Offering* (New York: John A. Gray, 1862).

20

See, for example, the texts gathered in *The African Liberation Reader*, 3 vols., eds. Aquino de Bragança and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Zed, 1982).

21

See Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Chicago: Southern Illinois Press, 1978).

22

On this point, see *L'idée de la race dans la pensée politique française contemporaine* eds. Pierre Guiral and Emile Temime (Paris: Editions du cnrs, 1977).

23

You can see the centrality of this theme in Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks;* Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*; and, in a general sense, the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor.

24

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: International Publishers, 1946).

25

To this effect, see the final pages of Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

26

This is the thesis of Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Negritude: A Humanism in the Twentieth Century," in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 27–35.

27

In this regard, see the critique of the texts of Alexander Crummell and W. E. B. Du Bois in Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chaps. 1 and 2. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Racism and Moral Pollution," *Philosophical Forum*, vol. 18, nos. 2–3 (1986–1987): 185–202.

28

Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1964); and Senghor, *Liberté III: Négritude et civilisation de l'universel* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

29

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953).

30

In the Francophone world, see in particular the works of Diop and, in the Anglophone world, the theses on Afrocentricity offered by Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988).

31

See, among others, *Théophile Obenga, L'Afrique dans l'Antiquité: Égypte pharaonique, Afrique noire* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973)

32

Paradoxically, we find the same impulse and the same desire to conflate race and geography in the racist writings of White colonists in South Africa. For details on this, see John M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988). See especially the chapters on Sarah Gertrude Millin, Pauline Smith, and Christiaan Maurits van den Heever.

33

They must "return to the land of (their) fathers and be at peace," as writes Blyden in *Christianity*, 124.

34

Africa as a subject of racial mythology can be found as much in the works of Du Bois as those of Diop or else Wole Soyinka; for the latter, see Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

35

Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).