Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Amina Mama,
Henning Melber and Francis B. Nyamnjoh

Identity and Beyond: Rethinking Africanity

Discussion Paper

1. Kenneth Hermele and Bertil Odén, *Sanctions Dilemmas. Some Implications of Economic Sanctions against South Africa*. 1988, 43pp, ISBN 91-7106-286-6, SEK 45,-

2. Elling Njål Tjønneland, Pax Pretoriana. *The Fall of Apartheid and the Politics of Regional Destabilisation*. 1989, 31 pp, ISBN 91-7106-292-0, SEK 45,-

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Contents

Beyond Africanity? – An Introduction

Henning Melber

The Nordic Africa Days 2001 were organised at the Nordic Africa Institute from 5 to 7 October. They brought together around hundred scholars in African Studies from the Nordic countries, who attended plenary sessions and parallel working groups on a variety of subjects. An organising committee[1] had defined a general theme "Beyond Identities – Rethinking Power in Africa". It served as an orientation and framework in particular for the invited three African scholars, who presented their views in the plenary sessions.

The following conceptual background note was shared with the invited plenary speakers:

> This year's Nordic Africa Days addresses aspects of identity politics in Africa, both historically and in contemporary contexts. The organisers are aware of the specific historical juncture at which personal and collective identities appear to be holding sway, both in Africa and beyond. It is the alleged "end of history", the "death of ideologies", the era of pluralism, often associated with the passing of the Cold War and, in sub-Saharan Africa, with attempts to reintroduce competitive multiparty politics. What some observers have called the "post-everything age" invites us, as critical social scientists, to devise new approaches for inter-disciplinary debate on power and ideology, culture and meaning, poverty and prosperity.

> This biennial gathering of Nordic and African scholars seeks to interrogate the preoccupation with identities as a key feature of the current historical juncture in Africa. Plenary lectures, panel discussions and working groups pose critical questions about identity politics, through studies and reflections on the ways in which history is apprehended in identity politics, how sexualities take on new forms and meanings in changing circumstances, how the preoccupation with identities is also a way of making claims in the ubiquitous "rights talk", how identities emerge through arguments about "authenticity" in cultural productions, and how, last but not least, the attempts to move beyond Structural Adjustment shape the conditions of the African poor, both in rural and urban areas. Our interest is in identity *politics* in order to highlight questions of power in arguments, which often present themselves as revolving around "natural" modes of identification. We hope to steer Africanist scholarship away from a debilitating focus on identities, not through a return to bygone analytical models, but through enhanced sensitivity to complex African life-worlds and to the ever-shifting disguises of power in them."[2]

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[1] Comprising of Susanne Linderos and Solveig Hauser from the Information Unit, Signe Arnfred, Harri Englund and Henning Melber from the Research Unit.

[2] Credit goes to Harri Englund for formulating this synopsis on the basis of the discussions in the committee.

On the basis of these proposed guidelines Amina Mama and Souleymane Bachir Diagne presented their lectures during the first two days. Francis Nyamnjoh was tasked with a summarising introduction to a final panel debate concluding the event. He has since then put his comments in writing and hence makes this introduction almost redundant. We herewith publish these three contributions, compiled as a Discussion Paper, thereby making the diversity of approaches and views accessible to a wider audience beyond the Nordic Africa Days 2001.

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To no surprise, the issues of "identity" (or more aptly identities) as well as "Africanity"[1] provoke a wide range of views and convictions. As Amina Mama states at the beginning of her essay: "Not only is there no all-encompassing concept for identity in much of Africa, but there is no substantive apparatus for the production of the kind of singularity that the term seems to require." And she continues to suggest: "identity is at best a gross simplification of self-hood, a denial and negation of the complexity and multiplicity at the roots of most African communities".[2] Evidence of the differing views (if not discrepancies) on "identity" is the level of reflections in the three papers and the fact that Francis Nyamnjoh responds in his comments right at the beginning on statements by Amina Mama, emphasising himself the "negotiability of identity as a process".

That "African identity" is contested and discussed continuously (and controversially) is a confirmation of the relevance of dealing with the underlying concept(s) – even if it is asked too much to come up with one relevant and valid answer only. The variety of aspects raised and presented in the lectures illustrate the diversity of thought, partly at least also guided by the different academic disciplines and hence the access to the subject.

While Geschiere (2001: 93) recently pointed out that the similarity of slogans (on "soil" and "roots", or "own people first" etc.) suggests a strong mobilising potential in very different parts of the world despite or due to increasing mobility and "global flows", he at the same time concedes that "for African studies, the whole issue of belonging and its changing parameters is truly a nodal point, bringing together a wide array of preoccupations and aspects: cultural but also political and economic ones". It is therefore of no surprise that in response to our outlined theme we did receive so different elaborations.

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[1] The notion and concept of "Africanity" brings us back to the early days of Pan-Africanism and *Negritude*, as well as "Afrocentrism", and the criticism of such concepts and ideologies from both within and outside the continent (see for example Howe 1998).

[2] The same applies certainly to societies with different degrees of complexity beyond the confinement to "Africa", even if official discourse has induced (if not coerced) or at least claims a certain degree of homogeneity based on "Imagined Communities" (Anderson 1983) or "The Invention of Tradition" (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983) beyond the reality of daily diversities of life as a result of social engineering by strong state authorities with a far reaching socialising apparatus at hand.

Amina Mama's "gendered perspective" contrasts markedly with the focus on a particular philosophical approach related to language and identity as presented by Souleymane Bachir Diagne. Without commenting in more detail on the stimulating and thought provoking aspects raised in his paper, I take the liberty to add a spontaneous reflection sparked off by his presentation: If Tolstoi would have written in Italian, Dante in German, Goethe in English, Doris Lessing in Gikuyu, Ngugi wa Thiongo in French, and Simone de Beauvoir in Arabic – how then would our world today be different from what it is, if it would be different?[1]

Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of Africanity as expressed in his preface to "Black Orpheus" plays a role in Souleymane Bachir Diagne's presentation. Jean-Paul Sartre also wrote an elaborate Preface to a rather different treatment of "the African issue", published as a manifesto entitled "The Wretched of the Earth". Its author, who died the same day the original French manuscript was published in December 1961, did himself represent the complexity of "identity": Born 1925 in the French Antilles, he came in 1944 to France. After completing medical studies he moved in 1953 to Algeria, where he joined the FLN and was appointed in 1960 as Ambassador of the Algerian Provisional Government to Ghana. He had earlier on in an almost physically painful and emotional way been dealing with his experiences of racism he was confronted with as a black man in France during the late 1940s (at a time when Jean-Paul Sartre wrote his comments on "Black Orpheus"). He summarised his own insights and convictions in a remarkable way at the end of his moving and challenging personal account. The manner of tackling issues of identity almost half a century ago offers still a relevant perspective. It pointed already then into a truly humanistic direction beyond the notion of "Africanity":

> I am convinced that it would be of the greatest interest to be able to have contact with a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ. I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe. ... The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions. I am my own foundation. ... It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the You? At the conclusion of this study, I want the world to recognize, with me, the open door of every consciousness. (Fanon 1967: 230–232)

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[1] This is supposed to be a highly arbitrary association and should not be considered as more than it is: a thought provoking effort. Along similar lines it was interesting to note that the debate over the three days was conducted in a second or third language to almost all of the participants, since only a handful of them had English as a mother tongue.

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Challenging Subjects: Gender and Power
in African Contexts

Amina Mama

> What is certain is that "normality" cannot be separated from the hierarchization of
> identities. The great hegemonic, rational, political-philosophical mechanisms are pre-
> cisely what fabricate normality, with the consent of the group concerned. (Etienne
> Balibar 1998: 777)

There is no word for "identity" in the African languages with which I can claim
any degree of familiarity. Perhaps there is good reason for this. In English, the
word "identity" implies a singular, individual subject with clear ego boundaries.
In Africa, if I were to generalise, ask a person who he or she is and a name will
quickly be followed by a qualifier, a communal term that will indicate ethnic or
clan origins (Omoregbe 1999:6). To this day, African bureaucracies use forms
that require the applicant (for a passport, a driving licence, to gain to access to
public education, housing or health services) to specify "tribe".

The idea of identity is an interesting one to most Africans, largely because it
has remained so vexed. We seem to be constantly seeking the integrity and unity
that the notion implies, without succeeding in securing it or coming to terms with
it. We are being asked to think "beyond identity", when for many of us identity
remains a quest, something in-the-making. I think that the reason that African
thinkers – or indeed other post-colonial subjects – may balk at the prospect of
working "beyond identity" is clear. It relates to the contentious nature of the
term in our upbringing, as a site of oppression and resistance. We recall distaste-
ful colonial impositions that *told* us who we were: a race of kaffirs, natives,
negroes and negresses.

I must say that I was not much aware of these things when I was growing up
in a post-colonial city inhabited by people from all over the world: Lebanese,
Syrians and Egyptian business people and professionals, Indian doctors, Pakistani
teachers, Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Irish nuns, Italian construction engineers,
Japanese industrialists, Chinese oil workers, and a fair representation of Nigeria's
many ethnic groups, Muslim and Christian. There were differences, true, but I
recall learning to eat with chopsticks, to make fresh pasta, and to appreciate good
coffee at an early age, alongside all the usual West African cultural details.

I seem to recall that I "grew" a more specifiable "identity" only when I was
sent away to school in Europe by parents hoping to protect me from the horrors
of the Biafran civil war, which, after all, started in Kaduna in 1966. I developed
an awareness of my difference, my Other-ness, when I was far away from home,

family and the cosmopolitan community I had known. It was in an English boarding school that I was first compelled to claim and assert an identity, if only to correct the daily nonsense that I was subjected to by teachers who were often as parochial as my peers. Maybe the support system "back home" had been unrealistically reassuring, but we had been raised to assume that we were "citizens of the world" in a world that now turned out to be deeply divided. In England, these cosmopolitan wings were clipped to more parochial size, insofar as I was now reduced to being a "coloured girl" or a "black", to be treated variously as though I was an orphan, a refugee or an immigrant. Furthermore, I was assumed to have an "identity problem". It is possible that this formative experience gave rise to my longstanding interest in working on the subject of identity.

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It was on my many visits and eventual return to Africa that I gradually realised the nature of the problem. Not only is there no all-encompassing concept of identity in much of Africa, but there is no substantive apparatus for the production of the kind of singularity that the term seemed to require. The petty bureaucratic insistence on tribal and racial markers, our new flags and anthems, and even the grand national stadiums and basilicas could not and still cannot be compared to the imperial administrative and ideological apparatus that lay behind the production of English culture and its more encompassing political front, British identity. So how was British-ness produced?

Perhaps we should recall that these European psychotechnologies have been implicitly designed to serve the administrative, bureaucratic selection and social-control needs of late capitalist welfare states (Donzelot 1980, Rose 1985). The focus on mental measurement was motivated by the administrative need to find ways of distinguishing between those who were "fit" from those who were "unfit', initially for military purposes (Rose 1985). Later, selection and testing was turned to civilian application, in differentiating "the deserving" from "the undeserving" poor, as a means of determining whether individuals would be entitled to work, welfare, education, health, residence permits, or not. Petty bureaucrats were thus provided with gatekeeping devices that were always heavily imbued with racism and sexism. In the colonies, the same tools were deployed in the selection of a suitably fit, yet docile, exclusively male labour force, suited to the dangers of deep-shaft mining and the like (Bulhan 1981). Given that the centuries-old technologies of the self[1] and the nation have been developed in such close liaison with the twin projects of industrial capitalist development and imperial expansionism, can these concepts and tools be usefully turned around and deployed to assist in the oppositional project of decolonization, democratisation and women's liberation?

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[1] Derived from Foucault, and subsequent applications of his work in France and Britain (Donzelot 1979; Rose 1985, 1989; Hollway et al. 1984).

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Returning to the matter of identity in Africa, here even the "raw material" at hand in our strangely constructed and fragile nation-states vexes the question, nationally and individually. Nigeria illustrates the typical conundrum, because like the vast majority of African nation-states it does not have a single language that everyone learns. Rather, there are a plethora of tongues, and most citizens grow up speaking two, three or even four languages.[1] If there is an homogenizing, unifying language at all, it is that thing called "broken English", actually a Creole product of the creative grafting of so many of our tongues on Bo the standard issue English of Janet and John delivered through the colonial missions and schools. Never very concerned with correctly mimicking His Master's Voice, imparted through the royal cadences of the BBC World Service, Nigerians crafted a new use of English, one quite incomprehensible to those whose command is restricted to the Queen's version.

One might also invoke the example of Afrikanerdom, and the great lengths that the Boers and the *Broederbond* went to in their plan to coerce the all-white nation of their dreams out of the African land they had occupied. McClintock provides us with an astute analysis of this bizarrely contrived moment in history, and draws out the manner in which gender dynamics have been at least as central to nationalist projects as to racist ones (McClintock 1995).

In my own case, I could claim three continents in my global ancestry. If I limit myself to discussion of my African (Nigerian) aspect, I would still have to address the fact that this includes several local ethnicities and creeds, the result of at least one *jihad*, and various migrations across the savannah lands, up and down the tributaries of the River Niger. Englishness, however, seems to be the simplest aspect of who I am, perhaps because identity is at best a gross simplification of selfhood, a denial and negation of the complexity and multiplicity at the roots of most African communities. Better still, everybody has quite clear ideas about who and what the English are, so that Englishness flows easily as cultural currency, retaining a degree of value that appears to have survived the loss of Britains colonial possessions. The same may not be said for all the other selves I so casually lay claim to, for none of these travel quite so easily, and the difficulties of communication and mis-identification are profoundly exacerbated by the prevailing mystiques surrounding women of a different "race" or nationality.

In short, the implication of history for our sense of who we are is complicated and extends far beyond the scope of academic theorisations of identity, notably within 20th century psychology.[2] By and large, these have not been alert to considerations of power or politics and could even be said to have obscured them.

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[1] One estimate states that there are "at least 250 language groups" in Nigeria (Appiah & Gates 1999)

[2] The 21st century is seeing a more critical movement within psychology gain promising ground in its theorisation of "subjectivity" as historically constituted, multiple and above all, dynamic. This paradigm shift dates back to the early 1980s (Hollway et al. 'Changing the Subject', 1984).

Contemporary conceptualisations of "identity politics", largely by political economists, have also proved insubstantial, tautological even. "Identity politics" is a term used to describe mobilisations around what now *appear* to be primordial notions of selfhood and community. These are in fact very new inventions, albeit inventions that seek to assert their own primordial character by making frequent reference to old books and holy scrolls, and to mythical, grandiose histories, in much the way so skilfully laid out for us by Benedict Anderson in his seminal discussion of nationalism nearly twenty years ago (1983). Valentin Mudimbe (1989) is among those who have challenged the construction of "Africa" by imperial Europe.[1] The difference between the nationalisms of the past and the proliferating identities of today seems to lie in the fact that whereas the former assisted in the construction of the nation, the latter constantly threatens to fragment and implode it. Nonetheless, today's identities are just as historical and political, despite the scholarly insistence on substituting culturally deterministic arguments for previous biological arguments now no longer in vogue. Furthermore, in the post-Cold War era, identity is the main site offering anything that *resembles* resistance to US-style globalisation. Thinking beyond identity therefore runs the risk of suggesting that identities – oppressive or liberatory – have no relevance to politics.

The generic response to manifestations of identity within Western institutions has been to put together some kind of training workshop in "multiculturalism" or "diversity management" to facilitate the necessary sociocultural adjustment. But what should Africans be adjusting to in the era of globalisation? As young urban Africans rush to embrace the often violent and misogynistic North American ghetto cultures of rap, hip hop and Rambo-style machismo, their elders cannot but view this as a form of maladjustment! While swallowing the prescriptions of macroeconomic advisers, governments still express a concern for political and cultural integrity to be somehow preserved. The first reflexes of nationalist men still convey unitary (masculine) notions of patriotism, national unity and integrity, largely through restorationist appeals to implicitly masculine constructions of African culture.[2] The critics of this simplified response have correctly taken issue with the limitations of patriarchal nationalism, but without fully acknowledging that this is what they are doing, and developing the insights that a gender analysis would yield.[3] Meanwhile the "market forces" quietly deplete the sovereignty of the state, and corporate cultures infuse the public and the civic spheres of organisation with the style and ethos of a well-known "global" fast food outfit, applying the same management systems, procedures and practices.

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[1] Even earlier, Edward Said challenged the hegemonic construction of the Orient by the Western cultural and political apparatuses (Said 1978).

[2] These have included Negritude, Pan Africanism, *Africanite*, *Authenticite*, Black Consciousness and the African Renaissance.

[3] McClintock (1995) discusses this occlusion in the work of Fanon and Bhabha, but a similar point could be made regarding the work of Appiah (1995) and others.

It may well be true, as I have suggested, that existing theories of identity do not have much explanatory power in African contexts. But does this inadequacy mean we can just make a note, perhaps adopt the North American rhetoric and procedures of "diversity management", to deal with some of the consequences of identity in our organisational, social and cultural life, and move on?

The English word "identity" is closely linked to others – the notions of integrity and security. I would like to suggest that much of what we are grouping under the dubious rubric of "identity politics" is actually about popular struggles for material redistribution and justice and related desires for existential integrity and security. Put simply, poverty is probably the worst threat to integrity and security worldwide. *It is a threat that cannot be adequately addressed through the cultural lip-service strategy of recognition and celebration, because poverty, and its offspring insecurity and loss of integrity, are all matters of global and local political economy, matters that demand redistribution and justice.*

The present moment is one in which the integrity and security of today's prime-target Others have never been more profoundly threatened. As non-Americans we all find ourselves being subjected to a high technology financial, political and informational onslaught emanating from the epicentre of global power, and backed up by the military muscle currently flexing across our TV screens.

Recent events only underline the precariousness of our situation, and suggest that we do need to take matters of identity very seriously, not just as some kind of psychological artefact or cultural consumable, but as a matter of profound political, economic and military strategy and counter-strategy. Identity is all about power and resistance, subjection and citizenship, action and reaction. I would suggest that *rather than simply passing over identity in order to rethink power, we need to profoundly **rethink** identity if we are to begin to comprehend the meaning of power.*

This is one sense in which "identity" is a challenging subject: it challenges us to rethink power and all the banal and brutal simplifications and subjections that have accompanied the exercise of power by the ruling regime. That some of these simplifications, and their financial accompaniments, have given rise to forces that now exhibit degrees of agency and strategy that threaten the global order can only add to our sense of urgency.

Post-colonial thinkers challenge the hegemony of the colonial regime and the coercive manner in which it has produced us as subject peoples and reduced, simplified and embedded us in dubiously defined nativist notions of custom and creed, notions so thoroughly imbued with insecurity and mistrust that they manifest themselves in spasms of internecine enmity and hatred. That these enmities are often more imagined than real can be seen in the record of history. One might even go so far as to suggest that they have been discursively *orchestrated*, first by colonial regimes, then by the subjective conservatism of post-colonial rulers, and later compounded by the duplicity of global economic institutions that deny their own agency, instead attributing responsibility to an abstraction, "market forces". How can an abstraction have systematically eroded the promises of decolonisa-

tion, denied the aspirations of generations of young Africans, and depleted the collective desire for democratisation and development? It is a dangerous abstraction indeed that leaves people outside the imperial heartlands impoverished enough to clutch at tribal straws and drown their sorrows in the elixir of fatalism, many now shunning secularism because of its apparent association with the dubiously regarded fat cat West?

With such an efflorescence of identities and what *appear* to be identity-based conflicts, it is worth reminding ourselves that the substantial part of African history lies outside the established instances of war and slavery, displaying a diverse tapestry that includes centuries of peaceful coexistence, migrations and movements across the continent and round the world, long before the barriers came up, and, ironically, the word "globalisation" was suddenly on everybody's lips. The proof of these generally hospitable mutual relations can be seen in the fact that while the affluent nations of Europe, America and Australia make a great deal of noise about refugees and fear being swamped, the vast majority of refugees have never left the continent. Rather, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children have been absorbed by impoverished African communities, accepted as guests and been given land to farm for their own use.[1]

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Once born, any given identity spans the distance between subjectivity and politics, between micropolitical and macropolitical. It is no accident that this is an idea that has been well developed within revolutionary feminist thought, dedicated as it is to transforming women's lives. The politicisation of personal experience has been a key strategy of women's movements all over the world. As a result of the accumulated experience generated by the democratic praxis of women's movements, feminist theory has developed a sophisticated understanding of power that can usefully be brought to bear on considerations of identity, an understanding that highlights the workings of power from the bedroom to the boardroom.

There is a certain holism in all this, yet our theorisations of identity remain Balkanised within the artificial boundaries of academic disciplines. Identities exist *across* the separated-out terrains of politics, economics, sociology, anthropology and psychology. All identities have histories, as Freud pointed out quite some time ago, and they all involve questions of power, integrity and security, questions that have emotional as well as political currency (Freud 1976, 1977; Mitchell 1974). Somehow we still seem unable to get an analytical handle on the complicated relationship between the production of individual identities and the

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[1] This is not to deny the manifestations of xenophobia, but rather to note that this is not by any means the usual response to the problems of neighbours. Where it does exist, the post-colonial state is often duplicitous, and the people in question have been stigmatised and incarcerated in camps as a precondition for the delivery of "aid".

production of communal identities. It is here that the inadequacies of theorisations of identity can be located. What does an understanding of gender theory contribute to this?

All identities are gendered, perhaps dangerously so.[1] Again we can thank Sigmund Freud for placing gender at the centre of theorisations of identity (Freud 1977). Within post-colonial feminist circles there has been an intellectually fertile debate on nationalism and its discontents, as revealed through gender analysis (e.g., McClintock 1995, Yuval Davis and Anthias 1989, Lazreg 1994, Badran 1994). How is it then that some post-colonial theorists choose to ignore the relevance of gender to our understanding of national identity and nationalism (Bhabha 1986, 1990; Mamdani 1996, 2000)? Equally problematic are those who would deny that gender has any relevance to matters authentically African by inventing an imaginary precolonial community in which gender did not exist (Oyewunmi 1999). Yet there is ample evidence to suggest that gender, in all its diverse manifestations, has long been one of the central organising principles of African societies past and present. Working with this insight adds much to our analysis, as the burgeoning literature on gender and post-colonial states adequately demonstrates.

The manner in which identity and power are configured by gender in post-colonial African states today is mediated by complicated gender politics. We all know that women are more pervasively governed by the dictates of custom and community and are correspondingly less able to realise the rights afforded to citizens-in-general through the trope of civil law. This is why one of the strategies of feminist jurisprudence in African contexts involves enabling a more gender-equitable access to civil law, generally understood to be a better vehicle for the protection of women's rights and the realisation of their citizenship. This is most obviously so where customary laws still afford women only minor status, and customary practices can be said to violate the physical and emotional integrity of women.[2] What this means is that if the state is indeed bifurcated along the tropes of civil and customary legal systems (Mamdani 1995), the implementation of both is also deeply gendered, and unevenly so, with consequences that seem to me to be well worth exploring further.

The last two decades or so have seen the feminist movement becoming increasingly internationalised, with feminist struggles being pursued through international as well as local organisations and networks. The uptake of demands originating in women's movements by the international development industry is now an important variable in this process of internationalisation. But what were the conditions that gave rise to it? During the 1980s, the deleterious impact of structural adjustment packages on all but the duplicitous elite living in the capitalist periphery exacerbated the feminisation of poverty to such an extent that the gendered nature of global economic strategies and their consequences could no

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[1] Reference to McClintock's opening statement "All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous". (1995: 352)

[2] The network, Women and Law in Southern Africa has been engaged in such work since 1988.

longer be denied.[1] Once the international agencies trumpeted their interest in women, the African governments of the 1980s were quick to see the potential benefits of adopting a posture that involved this too, albeit on largely instrumental grounds (Mama 2000a). How else do we explain the rather contradictory establishment of national machinery for women all over Africa at a time when macroeconomic imperatives require the state to reduce its sphere of operation, not expand it? I am suggesting that these national structures and gender policies are not adequately provided for in national budgets, because they have been established on the assumption that they will attract donor funds. Elsewhere, I have explored the contradictions and challenges of post-colonial African gender politics in more detail, using the example of Nigeria's military regimes (Mama 1995, 1999, 2000).

It is important to note that there were also local political pressures that led African governments to engage with gender in one way or another. For less-than-democratic regimes, women have provided a foil for tyranny. Mobutu is well known for his corruption, brutality and sexual profligacy. As if to divert attention from these, he embarked on a highly publicised "mass promotion" of women during the crisis of the 1980s, not as equal citizens in his dictatorship, but in the circumscribed roles of wives and mothers. By reinscribing Zairois women in this way, he not only reaffirmed a particular form of masculine control over women, but also extended the reach of his dictatorship both temporally and territorially. Re-asserting the subjugation of women appealed to the ordinary men who might well have felt emasculated by their own experience of Mobutu-style patriarchy, and indeed to the many women who felt flattered by this sudden attention.

In Zimbabwe, the Mugabe government has played a contradictory game of gender politics. Here the initial commendation of women's role in the liberation war and the support for women's legal and civil rights soon gave way to a series of retractions. If the early 1980s saw the mass detention and abuse of hundreds of women by the police in "Operation Clean Up", the 1990s were characterised by the refusal of the law courts to uphold women's rights to inherit property and own land under civil law. Discriminatory judgments are invariably based on male judges' assertions that such rights are not "customary" (ZWRCN forthcoming, Nkiwane 2000).

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A feminist analysis of post-colonial states links the violent and destructive manifestations of modern statecraft with the persistence of patriarchy in all its perversity. It approaches authoritarianism in a manner that draws on the insights of

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[1] However, the manner in which gender has been addressed, largely through an affirmative women-in-development paradigm leaves much to be desired. The marked persistence of gender inequality and injustice indicates a high degree of what the industry refers to as "project failure".

feminist studies, building on work that begins to explore the complex resonances and dissonances that occur between subjectivities and politics, between the individual and the collective. It offers a powerful rethinking of national identity and opens up possibilities for imagining radically different communities. At a more concrete level, I suggest that the accumulated experience of the participatory democratic organising within women's movements provides ample evidence that there are other more inclusive ways to govern and be governed than those assumed by contemporary liberal democratic systems.

The examples I have given so far illustrate the instrumental uptake of international gender discourses by authoritarian regimes to curry favour with the international community, while at the same time consolidating their hold on power by placating those they govern with the affirmation of conventional gender identities. Other examples might address the manner in which these dynamics play out down the line, and use a similar analytical strategy to explore the various complicated manifestations of gender politics in all the organisational forms that comprise post-colonial society: corporate, governmental, non-governmental and community-based. For example, in the new South Africa it is worth investigating how financial liberalisation and the adoption of corporate managerial procedures has affected the implementation of national and institutional policy commitments to transformation and gender equality. How has the macroeconomic policy affected the availability of resources and capacities for the realisation of democratic promises?

Finally, allow me to suggest that within women's movements, perhaps because of their widespread adherence to participatory democratic organisational practices, we can discern the emergence of new and more challenging identities. Here we find women-people intent on creating autonomous spaces in which to work at elaborating and developing their own individual and collective agency, women who dare to differ and sabotage the patriarchal precedents of received "identity politics" being reproduced by the old regime.

At the present time, if we choose to look beyond the sinister machinations of the late capitalism and listen beyond the battle cries of powerful men, we will hear the quietly persistent challenge articulated by women. We can take heart from the fact that there are communities all over the world resisting fundamentalism, militarism and warmongering, grouping and regrouping and innovating political, economic and cultural strategies in the interstices of power. The intellectual challenge of identity lies in the exercise of adding gender to the arsenal of analytical tools required to rethink identity, so that we can deepen our understanding of power and increase our strategic capacity to engage with and challenge its destructive capacity. Being an optimist, I assume that we still have the chance to do so.

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Africanity as an Open Question

Souleymane Bachir Diagne

My theme and title were first suggested to me by the public discussion organised on the notion of "africanity" among African scholars associated with Codesria, in particular in the *Codesria Bulletin* that came out, probably not coincidentally, as the first of the millenium. That issue was devoted, among other topics, to a reflection on the "Trends of Our Times" and also presented under the heading, "Conversation: Race and Identity in Africa", four papers published as reactions to a concept paper on that theme by Wambui Mwangi and André Zaaima.

More precisely, under the heading "Trends of Our Times", Achille Mbembe has an article on "African modes of self writing", which he clearly wishes to be widely discussed by African and Africanist scholars, because he has since republished it in the journal *Politique africaine,* edited in France, and it is to appear with slight changes as a lead article in the next issue of *Public culture*, along with reactions to it and Achille Mbembe's answers to these reactions. And in the same *Codesria Bulletin*, under the title "Conversation: Race and Identity in Africa", Archie Mafeje's "Africanity: a Combative Ontology" appears to be the perfect counterpoint to Mbembe's text. Thus, on the one hand, Africanity is thought of as *substance* by Archie Mafeje, who uses the philosophical category of *ontology* to define it, while, on the other hand, Achille Mbembe's contention is to de-substantialise it, to say that Africanity is not a pre-constituted self expressed afterwards in writing, but rather is continuously created through the very process of writing. To use an analogy (which is not an identification) with *Negritude* and *Creoleness*, this opposition is reproduced in different terms. And in this debate, the issue of language is known to be central.

I wish in this paper to question these categories of *ontology* and *becoming through writing* by revisiting the issue of the *expression* of Africanity through African versus European languages. For that aim, I consider the poetical way in which Senghor and Sartre have dealt with the issue, second with what I would call Ngugi wa Thiongo's theatrical way, and, third with Kwasi Wiredu's philosophical way.

AFRICANITY AS EURYDICE

Jean-Paul Sartre in *Black Orpheus*, published in 1948 as a preface to Leopold Sedar Senghor's *Anthology of Negro and Malagasy poetry in the French language* raises the following question: Can Africanity (he says that "negritude is a rather

ugly term", p. 23) write itself (to use Mbembe's terminology) in a European language: or in other words, isn't Africanity condemned to be missed when it looks for itself in a non-African language? By raising that question, Sartre was ascertaining two facts. *First* that in that very year, 1948, while the faltering that would lead to the decolonisations in Africa could be discerned, the *Anthology* he was prefacing was, notwithstanding its diversity, the single voice of peoples that met in one common condition and one common language to say that they constituted one single refusal and one single affirmation, namely that Africanity which Aimé Césaire had coined as *Negritude.* This fact is perfectly embodied in Mafeje's notion of a "combative ontology". The *second* fact was that this *Anthology* had thus created the very concept of *francophonie,* and was an interesting paradox for the philosopher who had devoted in the preceding year, in his *Being and Nothingness,* to the question, among others, of what it means to be authentically oneself under the gaze of the Other. The paradox here was that in order to write oneself, and therefore, to seize one's subjectivity authentically (that is, in an independent way), one has to install inside oneself, at the heart of the poetical creation through which one seeks coincidence with oneself – "in the most secret council" – the presence of the other represented by his language, the "thinking apparatus of the enemy", as Sartre calls it using a warlike metaphor (p. 23). As a matter of fact, says Sartre, African nationalism is unique when compared to other examples of nationalism because it has to express itself in the very language against which it defines itself in some way. Thus, "to be Irish it is also necessary to *think* Irish, which means, above all, to think *in* Irish", while Africanity appears as a broken and scattered reality unified by the colonial language: in Sartre's words, "the apostles of the new negritude are constrained to edit their gospel in French" (p. 22).

Paradox is not impossibility. The francophone vehicle of Africanity is not absolute contradiction, given what Africanity is. This is Sartre's thesis: of the thinking apparatus of the enemy there has indeed been *appropriation* and the foreign language is not foreign anymore. Here is the detail of Sartre's demonstration. The relation of externality to the language creates a distance between what is meant and what is said: far from expressing the coincidence of the being with itself, the words are, on the contrary, continuously digging the being's distance from itself. But one has to consider that this distance, the split that makes the words forever strange and unfamiliar, is the very essence of poetry: "The feeling of failure before the language when considered as a means of direct expression is at the source of all poetic experience" (p. 24). Distance is failure only inasmuch as the language of prose is concerned, that is to say the discourse aiming at expressing things directly, whereas that distance is the very condition of the experience of being which pertains specifically to poetry: in Sartre's terms the way in which poetry induces "being in and by the vibratory disappearance of the word" (p. 25). On this theme of poetry as the true language of being that we associate with Heidegger, Sartre, in a style that becomes at this point highly poetical, evokes the way in which, through the poem that is able to "create a silence with

language" (p. 25), *Negritude* is perceived as "a huge idol, black and mute, behind the flaming fall of words" (p. 27).

This is the way in which the philosopher has transmuted, to use a particularly fitting word borrowed from alchemy, the paradox of *francophonie,* that is to say Africanity expressed in French, with the "thinking apparatus of the enemy", into making *francophonie* the very condition of Negritude. Thus we have, at the end of the demonstration, this Sartrian/Senghorian viewpoint that Africanity as expressed in Francophone literature is in its essence the result of the *appropriation* by African writers of the French language. The concept of *appropriation* is here to be understood as this inextricable combination of distance from, and intimacy with, the language that constitutes the poetical experience known as *Negritude*. This concept of appropriation thus understood is at the bottom of what Senghor means when he says that he had encountered his poetical voice after having set fire to many verses he had previously written and was able to find the poetry that would sound Sereer in French.

Two consequences of Sartre's concept of Africanity as it is expressed in *Black Orpheus* are particularly important when reflecting on Africanity today. The first consequence is the notion that Africanity is an invention, the mere effect of this "holocaust of words" (p. 25) out of which it came "as a huge, black and mute idol". In the terminology of his existentialist philosophy, Negritude (which is not, once again, a reality outside the language in which it is expressed and standing prior to it[1]) is "Negativity". Far from being a recent postmodern deconstruction of the notion of Africanity, the theme of *Africa* as an *invention*, an imaginary Other (Mudimbe, Appiah) had been stated by Sartre in 1948 ("Africa beyond reach", he writes, is an "*imaginary* continent", p. 19) clearly and with the philosophical depth so characteristic of the existentialist analysis of human experience: Africanity is *invented* negativity but is also, at the same time, totally *authentic* poetical experience.

The second consequence is connected with the first one. As poetical experience of negativity, Africanity in the sense of Negritude is a swansong, condemned to disappear, just like Eurydice, Orpheus's beloved one, after she has been evoked by the song out of the infernal depths. Not much attention has been paid by the fathers of Negritude to the fact that a leading white intellectual like Sartre spoke in his preface of the poet as a black Orpheus, and understood the Africanity he expressed as a condemned Eurydice. That is precisely the poetical beauty of the swansong, the "vibratory disappearance" of it.

This is one figure of "Africanity as an open question".

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[1] "The words of Césaire do not describe negritude, they do not designate it, they do not copy it from outside as a painter does of a model; they *make* it; they compose it under our eyes". *Black Orpheus*, p.39.

PERFORMING AFRICANITY

The notion of Africanity as performed (after the notion of its creation through the poetical experience of language) appears as characteristic of Ngugi wa Thiongo's positions on what authentic self-writing means.

Ngugi would agree with Sartre on two essential points. First he would applaud what Sartre says about Irish nationalism and would draw the conclusion that to be Kikuyu is to think Kikuyu, and that means, above all, to think in Kikuyu. Second, in some ways and on his own terms, he agrees also that identity is less a datum, some preconstituted self, than a dynamic construction. His decision not to write any more fiction except in his own "mother" tongue, Kikuyu, is an effect of his discovering the fact that the literary act is also the construction of a moving identity.

In his *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), he explains that it all started when he decided, with a few friends of his, to create a different African theatre. By "different", he means first, not in the closed space of the National Kenyan Theatre conceived and built, he explains, according to the colonial logic of "development". For this new total theatre continuously in-the-making, only the open space of a village is appropriate. And because it is in the making, it has to be created by the villagers. And this is how, as Ngugi explains, praxis itself imposed the inversion whereby meaning now flows from the audience to the author, or rather emerges from the confusion of the audience, the actors and the author. Hence the question of the language was solved ipso facto: it would be, of course, the language of the village. One very important element of the necessity of performing in Kikuyu is the light shed, in retrospect, on the literary pact that exists between the author and his audience. Ngugi remarks that when the author makes his characters speak, it is understood that they actually express themselves in their African native tongue. But when it comes to bringing into the performance popular aspects, songs, for example, or any other folk element that could be considered non-transferable into the written language, that literary pact is broken under the weight of the contradiction that then becomes evident: the African language of the song poses as *Other* the language that had been understood until then as the characters" natural medium.

Another lesson conveyed by the experience of writing in Kikuyu the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (which was later translated as *I will marry when I want*) concerned the meaning of identity, of Africanity. The question, as Ngugi discovers it, is to speak to the villagers not about their "tradition" or what they *are,* but of what they are *becoming*. The mirror that the play puts in front of them, as it is conceived by them and performed, sung, and danced by them, simultaneously presents them with the social and economic evolution of the peasantry they belong to towards proletarization and a new consciousness of themselves. As a matter of fact, theatre thus plays the function Bertold Brecht had assigned to it, namely the practical function of developing solidarity and of revealing the possibilities open to action. Theatre has created what Sartre calls a "group in fusion". And when the play was eventually censored after a few performances and he was

arrested and sent to jail by the Kenyan authorities, these events appeared to him as evidence that he was right: by moving from English to Kikuyu he had transformed the literary act into sociocultural and, ultimately, political action.

The question of the language of Africanity first experienced in theatre, subsequently gets the same answer in respect of novels, literature in general, and finally, theoretical discourse. Thus Ngugi in the opening statement in his *Decolonizing the mind* depicts this book as his "farewell" to English: From now on, he said in 1986, he would write only in Kikuyu or Swahili, hoping, nevertheless, that through translation he would still maintain his dialogue with all. Incidentally, without having theorized it at length, as in the case of Ngugi, the francophone Senegalese poet, novelist and playwright, Cheikh Aliou Ndao, holds the same position. And very recently, Boubacar Boris Diop, probably the most prominent novelist of the younger generation, has announced that his next book will be in Wolof, again emphasizing the notion of interaction with an audience in order to perform Africanity.

Now the question is, does one have to present the question of the language as a dilemma? Does one have to choose? That is, between the poetical perspective of Sartre and Senghor about a "negro feeling" expressed in French, for example, and the political and aesthetic statement of Ngugi and Ndao affirming that African literature only gets its true meaning when created in African languages? I would like to underline, in answer to this question, the important notion of the given *possibility* to choose, which is the opposite of a dilemma. As the Africanity of Senegalese literature is constituted by Senghor weaving verses in French and Wolof chants, or the first Cheikh Aliou Ndiao the francophone, and the second, the Ndiao writing in Wolof, the question of the language remains always *open.* That is to say that the next novel that Boubacar Boris Diop writes in Wolof will be nourished by his experience of writing in French and will nourish in turn other creations in French when he returns to that language. Somehow Africanity is this possibility of coming and going from one language to another.

I would like to conclude by illustrating the value of this coming and going from one language to another. One excellent illustration is what Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu calls an *African orientation* in philosophy, using African languages.

Let us look first at what Wiredu says about translation (which is the main form of this coming and going from one language to another): "In truth, the ability to perceive the untranslatability of an expression from one language into another is a mark of linguistic understanding more profound than the ability to do routine translation. The second ability involves merely moving from the one language into the other, whereas the first involves stepping above both on to a meta-platform, so to speak, an ability that has not seemed to come easily to some students of 'other cultures'. Untranslatability, then, can be a problem, but it does not necessarily argue unintelligibility".[1]

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[1] Kwasi Wiredu. In "Are There Cultural Universals". In *Readings in African philosophy*. Chap.2. p.34.

This notion of untranslatability is one of the most important concepts in Wiredu's philosophy, because of the consequence he is able to draw from it concerning what we might call "Africanity in philosophy". What can happen when we endeavour to translate a philosophical problem, formulated in an Indo-European language, into an African language? This is the question raised in Wiredu's famous article "The concept of truth in Akan language".[1] Either we have the ability to do routine translation or we perceive the untranslatability in the very formulation of the philosophical problem. Now, what Wiredu says and shows in concrete examples is the philosophical significance of this apparent breakdown in intercultural communication. Far from being a failure, untranslatability has essential things to teach us when we take, for example, the Wittgensteinian notion that philosophical activity "results in the clarification of propositions". Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: "Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical. Consequently we cannot give any answer to questions of this kind, but can only point out that they are nonsensical. Most of the propositions and questions of philosophers arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language."[2]

What Wiredu adds to this is that the program of clarification is better conducted when one is able to navigate between the logic of two very different languages, such as English and Akan, for example. What if the formulation of Rudolph Carnap's question of how to define truth is clear in German and English and *nonsensical* for an Akan speaker? Again, as in the poetical experience of language, this situation of untranslatability (the "meta-platform" standpoint) has many things to teach us about the logic of the two languages and also the very nature and implications of the philosophical problem of truth.

Wiredu's programme is thus a concrete illustration of the proverbial saying that a person has the value of as many languages as he understands.

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[1] In P.O. Bodunrin (ed.) *Philosophy in Africa: trends and perspectives* (University of Ife Press, Nigeria, 1985).

[2] Translation by D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1974.

Concluding Reflections on Beyond Identities:
Rethinking Power in Africa

Francis B. Nyamnjoh

In the preceding chapters, both Amina Mama and Souleymane Bachir Diagne not only highlight the importance and topicality of debating identity in Africa, but also the fact that academics have yet to agree on how to render the very notion of *identity* into an analytical concept. Mama and Diagne may not agree with each other's understanding of identity or how it should be articulated, but they both write passionately either about the need to challenge or to endorse certain usages of the concept. I would like to start by revisiting some pertinent issues raised by both authors.

Amina Mama speaks of identity in Africa as still being a quest for many, and therefore finds it difficult to begin contemplating beyond identity in such a context. This is an interesting remark, if one buys into the rhetoric of identity as a singular, permanent, total and final marker of individuals and/or groups. But if one takes the reality of individuals and groups as melting pots for various identities, and as capable of straddling different identity margins in often creative and fascinating ways, one is bound to wonder if identity can in fact be anything other than a process of identification. In other words, isn't the fact of a continuous quest for an identity what Africans ought to be praised for instead? To me, this is evidence of a continent seeking to negotiate itself above the egoism of singularities that conventional and often insensitive notions of identity have sought to impose on it and its peoples. The fact is that most people in Africa refuse to be fenced in by particular identity markers, choosing instead to draw from the competing influences in their lives as individuals and communities, in order to challenge parochial notions of identification that deplete those they are expected to enhance by denying them the negotiability and creativity that comes from encountering diversity. Africans refuse to be confined by the simplistic logic of dualisms, dichotomies and "winner takes all" that has characterised meta-narratives of modernisation on their continent.

Indeed, sections of Mama's paper appear precisely to suggest such negotiability of identity as a process. She refers to West Africans who have crafted a new use of English, *Pidgin English* (resulting in a rich blend between English and local West African languages), and draws our attention to the fact that commonplace usages of identity appear as a gross oversimplification of personhood. It is in this connection that Mama makes a very important point: Gender as key to the way forward if we must move away from the kind of singularity and masculinity that

commonplace notions of identity prescribe or impose. Constructing identity through femininity would appear to suggest more pluralistic and negotiated outcomes than are currently possible with existing identity conceptions and articulations.

Drawing from Mamdani's distinction between "citizens" and "subjects" and the bifurcation of the African state and its legal systems, Mama suggests that women have been doubly disadvantaged through the gendered implementation of such bifurcations. For one thing, whether in the realm of civic citizenship or that of ethnic citizenship, the laws in place have always tended to favour men to the detriment of women. The very fact that patriarchy remains dominant, and that it allows for recognition of descent exclusively through the male line by disqualifying the integration that comes with intermarriage, has ensured the illusion of fixed, singular and non-negotiable identity markers. The sociology of interconnectedness forged by women as social actors between supposedly different (and even warring) identities has often been underplayed both by those claiming primordial identities and by academics seeking to understand identity as a social phenomenon. Hence Mama's call for academics to challenge gendered identities, and for post-colonial studies to be more sensitive to gender, both theoretically and methodologically. In her words, "there is the need to add gender to the arsenal of analytical tools for rethinking identity".

However, gender can only be useful as an analytical tool if those seeking theoretical and methodological space for it are not simply keen on substituting one orthodoxy with another. There is certainly a problem with gender proponents who seem to reduce every issue or problem to the male/female (masculinity/femininity) dichotomy, ignoring, for example, deep material and symbolic inequalities among women in favour of strategic essentialism. In other words, proponents of more gender-sensitive approaches should be willing and ready to avoid the pitfalls, insensitivities and arrogant pontification of the grand narratives currently under fire. As academics, we mustn't be like little children so keen to win that we keep shifting the goalposts. Neither should we stubbornly stick to our spots in the fashion of the leopard, nor behave like an undertaker who would rather trim a corpse than expand her/his coffin to accommodate a giant. We should be theoretically and methodologically flexible enough to allow for debate, in order not to be like workmen/women whose only tool is a hammer and to whom every problem is a nail.

In the realm of social action, while recognising the need for policies and programmes aimed at promoting women's interests, Mama cautions against African governments that set up programmes instrumentally without assuring budgetary and other responsibilities, merely because they know foreign donors would fund anything that has the right rhetoric. She also cautions against some elite women who may appear to do things for women but in reality are not acting in the collective interest of women. Thus her call to donors and funding bodies to be careful of the way they fund purported women's organisations and NGOs in Africa. For "simplistic, clumsy, funding can indeed do more harm than good". Such

cautionary statements, coming from an academic with a proven research record on various aspects of women and gender studies in Africa, can only be well informed.

From Bachir Diagne's paper, I take up three important issues: Africanity and its indicators, language as a key identity marker, and the appropriation of foreignness by Africans. My comments on Diagne's contribution are here woven into my own thoughts as points of commonality and divergence.

First, on Africanity: What is it to be African? Different people have different answers, and there is a rich body of literature and opinion on this issue. However, I am comfortable with those who see Africanity as a process, not something one acquires from birth, transmitted through the "life essence of a black African father", and to be protected from contamination by other ways of seeing and doing. Being African is not a birthmark. Although there is reason to lament the marginalisation of African identities in today's rapidly homogenising and culturally MacDonaldised globe, it would be quite misleading to assume from this a counter-notion of a universal and homogeneous African cultural identity, that, "as a solid rock ... has withstood all the storms of history except colonialism" (Masolo 1997:285). On the contrary, any serious research points to the fact that "there is no group ... with a given, monolithic, traditional identity, but rather only simple, unpredictable forces which compose and recompose themselves all the time in history" (Masolo 1997:288).

Identities, whether African or otherwise, "are complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces". They are "almost always in opposition to other identities", and, therefore, "have to be constantly fought for and rethought"(Appiah, 1992:177–8). Identities are therefore not constants, but subject to renegotiation with new experiences and aspirations. Any African identity must be seen and treated as "a dynamic reality ... that moves forward daily but knows no end" (Mveng 1985:68). This, indeed, ought to be the case, since identity is not "innate in consciousness at birth", but rather "something formed through unconscious processes over time" (Hall 1994:122). As Stuart Hall aptly reminds us, identity "always remains incomplete, is always "in process", always "being formed", and therefore, "rather than speaking of identity as a finished thing, we should speak of *identification*, and see it as an on-going process" (Hall 1994:122). Jan Servaes argues further that cultural identity refers to two phenomena that complement each other: "an inward sense of association or identification with a specific culture or subculture" on the one hand, and "an outward tendency within a specific culture to share a sense of what it has in common with other cultures and of what distinguishes it from other cultures" on the other (Servaes 1997:81).

Thus, although African identities have had a raw deal in relation to other identities, and there is certainly a need to create greater limelight for African philosophies of personhood and world-views, Africa has been subjected to certain influences through slavery, colonialism and by interaction with other cultures that have affected African identities in no small way, and that cannot simply be

brushed away like dust off one's coat (cf., Appiah 1992; Masolo 1997). For example, our abhorrence of Western colonialism and consumerism notwithstanding, we cannot afford to dismiss as non-Africans those among us who have found attraction in the current Western consumer culture for purposes of prestige and power, especially as these individuals not only preside over our destinies, but have domesticated in a most creative and original manner their consumption of Western identity markers. Nor should we dismiss as non-Africans Africans of European and Asian descent, born and brought up in Africa, some of whom have never lived outside the continent. How can we, for example, deny a prominent African and scholar like Mahmood Mamdani his Africanity and Ugandan citizenship, simply because his ancestors can be traced back to the Indian subcontinent? We must indeed be creative, negotiating, dynamic and realistic in our claims about entitlements as Africans.

I share Bachir Diagne's idea of *appropriation*, whereby Africans are able to adopt and use Western languages as if these were their own. But Africans have not only tended to appropriate other cultural values and institutions (be these Western or Oriental), but have done so in very creative and negotiated ways. Regarding language, sometimes the creative domestication of a Western language is such that a native speaker from Europe is almost completely lost when faced with African users of that language, as old words take on new meanings and new words are created to depict old realities. In their daily interactions through verbal communication, music, theatre, *radio trottoir*, etc., Africans demonstrate continuous creativity as they seek to reconcile otherwise conflicting influences. In this way, Africans have succeeded in creating something new from their encounters with the West and the rest. Put differently, creative appropriation makes it possible for Africans to modernise their traditions at the same time as they are traditionalising their modernities. From such creativity, I see a future with less rigid notions of identity, and with people sharing diversity in conviviality.

Hence the need for post-colonial Africa and Africanists to come to terms with Africa's hybrid identity, thanks to ongoing processes of "sorting out, selection, choice, and finally *voluntary* adoption of some ideas, values, outlooks and institutions" that have resulted from the encounter with other forms of identity (Gyekyre 1997:25–6). The outcome of this process is certainly a notion of identity in Africa as hybridity or *metissage*, which, though drawing heavily from mainstream cultures and values, cannot be reduced to these without losing some of the richness of the continent's experience in the encounters of cultures. Identity and alterity, Mudimbe reminds us, "are always given to others, assumed by an I- or a We-subject, structured in multiple individual histories, and, at any rate, expressed or silenced according to personal desires vis-à-vis an *episteme*" (Mudimbe 1988:xi). Studies have evidenced that even in precolonial Africa the idea of a fixed *cultural identity* is more romantic than real (cf., Appiah 1992); rather, ethnic groups (the Kongo, for example) have tended to have "a constant flux of identities" depending on political expediency and other factors (cf., MacGaffey 1995). Indeed, my own identity cannot be confined to any particular

community among those currently laying claims to me and my purported achievements (cf., Nyamnjoh forthcoming).

We need to take seriously Appiah's timely warning against an African identity or unity founded on "racial" or "tribal" differences. We should resist the temptation "to celebrate and endorse those identities that seem at the moment to offer the best hope of advancing our other goals, and to keep silence about the lies and the myths" in such identities. Such an "inscription of difference" would fail "to empower us" and "play into the hands of the very exploiters whose shackles we are trying to escape". Our duty as social scientists and Africanists, Appiah recalls, is, in the face of all "the falsehoods of race and tribe and nation", to stay committed to the truth about identities in Africa. For, although "we cannot change the world simply by evidence and reasoning ... we surely cannot change it without them either" (1992:173–80).

In this connection, while we appreciate the analytical distinction Mamdani (1996, 1998) makes between citizen and subject, I am critical of the impression it creates that the ultimate aspiration should be sacrificing subjection (custom and tradition) for civic rights along the liberal democratic tradition. My extensive fieldwork in Cameroon and Botswana for example, suggest that Africans are not only interested in rights and freedoms as individuals, but also in rights and recognition as communal and cultural solidarities. This reality is a marriage of the bifurcation between "citizens" and "subjects" to which Mamdani draws attention, an acknowledgement of individuals and groups who live their lives both as citizens and subjects as a strategy of survival. It is survival strategy, especially given the constraining reality of Africa being at the fringes of global consumer capitalism. This fringe location provokes or reinforces survival strategies, having "no fixed divide between self and other", and also an interconnectedness marked by continuous centrifugal and centripetal pressures within and among nations and/or communities "to assert and elaborate particular identities" or "to create broader, more universalistic alliances" for strategic purposes (P. Werbner 1997a:248–9). The context is one where individuals and groups are more than contingent hybrids, where the fascination with boundaries and belonging makes the experience of hybridity "disturbing and shocking for some" and "revelatory" for others (P. Werbner 1997b:22), and where marginality limits action and creativity for both individuals and groups. In this post-colonial African context, discussions of identity must be informed by the reality on the ground of the creative quest for survival. The same is true of the Creole/Pidgin/hybrid reality, such as the accounts depicted in Karin Barber's *Readings in African Popular Culture* (1997). This calls for hybrid/Pidgin/Creole ideas of identity, but it also calls for new notions of community and conviviality.

Going beyond identity does not and should not imply that people must desist from identifying with what they believe in and are proud of. On the contrary, it calls on us not to censor the rich variety of identity markers to which we as individuals are exposed through multiple experiences. Attempts to build such artificial fences could result, instead, in fierce displays of obsession with primordial

notions of identity. Thus I maintain that discussion of beyond identity should call, precisely, for scrutiny of the importance of cultural identity in the lives of individuals and groups. In mainstream anthropology, cultures often appear unique and geographically or socially localised (for a critique, see Ferguson & Gupta 1997). Culture is seen to be a source of identification for groups and individuals and of differentiation from others. It enables social actors to assert themselves in relation to one another and to their environment. Culture and tradition are, however, not frozen or stagnant; the individuals and groups partaking of any culture or tradition actively shape and reshape it in their daily endeavours. Culture changes because it is enmeshed in the turbulence of history, and because each act, each signification, each decision risks opening new meanings, vistas and possibilities. In order to provide orientation or serve as a compass, culture must integrate change, which by no means entails throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Few changes succeed in the form of a clean sweep, the total replacement of the old by the new. Something old is always in the new, even if the new cannot be reduced to the old. Given accelerated flows and interactions of diverse cultural products as a result of globalisation, does it make sense to still talk of individuals and groups as belonging to given cultures like fettered slaves and zombies, or confined like canned sardines?

If cultures are subject to influences from without and tinkering from within, and to reformulation in accordance with historical contexts, what does this say of culturally specific conceptualisations of identity? Within the context of globalisation and post-coloniality, it is possible for a single individual to assume multiple identifications that draw from different linguistic, cultural or religious repertoires, depending on the context (cf., R. Werbner 1996; Barber 1997; Warnier 1999). If cultures prescribe behaviour and beliefs, and if an individual or community is exposed to competing cultural codes or styles in this way, should we talk of identity in the singular in relation to that individual or community, especially as every culture takes much time to be transmitted, assimilated or undone? What do we have to say about human action and identity inspired by drawing from multiple cultural repertoires? How do individuals and communities come to terms with the fact that identity in the post-colonial age of globalisation is not determined solely by birth, nor entirely by choices made by individuals or groups?

Although Africans have always negotiated multiple identities since precolonial times, it would be particularly instructive to seek thorough understanding of how migrants are negotiating their way through different identity markers in various diasporic spaces within and outside the continent. Globalisation is fascinating as a process that encourages greater mobility by Africans to other parts of the continent and the world, but it also encourages the building or re-actualisation of identity fences by various individuals and communities. Understanding the threshold of tolerance and acceptability set by different individuals and communities on the one hand, and the creative manoeuvrability of diasporic Africans fighting for survival on the other, is key to a future beyond conventional notions of identity, a future that stresses conviviality over conflict.

I end my brief reflections on identity by referring to someone whom I believe epitomises the ideal marriage of identities that I have attempted to sketch out. Upon reading a feature on Tiger Woods by John Carlin in the South African *Mail & Guardian*[1] recently, I was struck by the fact that although the traditional recipe was there for a classic case of identity crisis, Tiger Woods appeared to have no crisis of identity at all, but to be rather comfortable with straddling identity margins. He is reported to take offence when he is referred to as "African-American", and to claim that he is in fact: "one quarter black, one quarter Thai, one quarter Chinese, one eighth white and one eighth American Indian". As he puts it, "Growing up ... I came up with this name: I'm a Cablinasian", meaning he was Caucasian, black, Indian and Asian. Even his parents refer to him as "the Universal Child", "the bridge between the East and the West", "the chosen one" imbued with the mission of bringing about a new "humanitarianism".

Tiger Wood's lack of a clear-cut identity, of obsession with his accident of race, and of militancy for social change, have made him a threat to no one and proved an invaluable asset to advertisers and endorsers. In the words of one of his endorsers, the president of American Express, "It is hard for me to visualise what audience Tiger does not appeal to". As Carlin puts it, "the market that might be persuaded to purchase products sponsored by Tiger is limitless: young and old, rich and poor, black and white. And Asian-American. Even Native American ..." His agency, far from being diminished through multiple identities that defy conventional wisdom, has actually been enhanced, making Tiger Woods, "an icon in a culture that believes in utopia and worships success – success as defined by excellence and vast wealth".[2]

In the year 2000 national census, Americans were for the first time allowed to designate themselves by multiple identities and were not forced to choose between being Hispanic and Pacific Islander, African-American or Asian American. In other times, in other situations, and for others less well positioned to claim and negotiate hybridity, people like Tiger Woods would most certainly have been reduced to a single category: black (cf., Dominquez 1996, on Louisiana's history of racial classification). At the same time, American society is conceding to having an individual who refuses classification in conventional terms, just as it has conceded already to the same individual becoming champion golfer on courses he would certainly not have been allowed to play in the past, for being only "one eighth white". One might well ask, how much of our so-called identities or the lack thereof are a result of an obsession with boundaries and belonging, as well as a readiness to pigeonhole even the unpigeonholeable? Does it suffice to rationalise this practice with reasons of expediency that such pigeonholing is necessary for state formation and reproduction? Doesn't our obsession with neat and easy labels or categories distort and oversimplify the hybrid reality of our actual cir-

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[1] See South African *Mail & Guardian* (July 14–20, 2000, pp.22–3)

[2] Ibid.

cumstance? In this question, I see the need for us to move beyond primordialism in our conception and articulation of identities.

Promising though Tiger Wood's straddling of multiple identity margins is, the same possibilities and opportunities are not available to a multitude of African-Americans and Hispanics, who, because they are poor or less successful, continue to be pigeonholed through disabling reductionism. Although liberal democracy invites all and sundry among the ethnic minorities to become part of the American dream, and celebrate success in a similar manner as does Tiger Wood and a handful of others, few can match their record, if they succeed at all. This is because the American dream is like a bazaar to which many are attracted, but few rewarded or given clear-cut choices. As this reality dawns on ordinary Americans, Africans and people elsewhere in the world, the need for alternative channels of fulfilment and protection arises for marginalized groups and individuals. Whether in the success of Tiger Wood or in the exclusion of most of his ethnic kind, I see an opportunity for enabling individuals and groups to dissolve differences either by buying their way into acceptance or by seeking conviviality and solidarity as survival strategy.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that identity is not only what we give ourselves, but also how others categorize and acknowledge or reject us. This makes it difficult for Africans, no matter how willing they may be, to negotiate interconnectedness and conviviality without participation by the rest of the global community. If others continue to label and pigeonhole Africans in very essentialist terms, then the temptation to fall back on primordial notions of identity, even for the most diasporic and cosmopolitan Africans, remains great. Thus, only through a conscious, popular and universally shared political action can we hope to achieve a world beyond identities that emphasise difference to the detriment of conviviality. Curiously, neither the first two authors nor I have done justice to the second theme in this Discussion Paper's title: "Rethinking Power in Africa". Perhaps in rethinking power in Africa, we should consider the possibility that the problem of power may not be so much the persistence of primordial identities as the failure by liberal democracy to recognise popular quests in Africa for a type of democracy that guarantees not only the rights of individuals and minority groups, but also, and above all, the group rights of all communities, majorities and minorities alike. This calls for revisiting popular notions of personhood and agency common throughout Africa, notions that were wrongly predicted to disappear in favour of the autonomous and modern individual attuned to liberal democratic ideals of being.

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