



CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHE ET DE DOCUMENTATION
SUR LES TRADITIONS ET LES LANGUES AFRICAINES

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION
ON AFRICAN TRADITIONS AND LANGUAGE

CERDOTOLA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (CIC) 2022

CONVENTION FOR A *NEW AFRICAN THOUGHT*

Yaounde, Cameroon, 25 - 27 October 2022

ARGUMENT – CONCEPTUAL NOTE

Africa is sorely missing in contemporary thought... and yet Africa does not lack Thinkers... What does this paradox hold? One of the plausible explanations lies in the fact that "African thought" is backed by thought from elsewhere... In fact, what is commonly called "African thought" would only be a thought by proxy or under trusteeship, a thought in tow, a thought in the bonds or chains of dominant thought...

This state of affairs is not without consequences. At best, it erases the "African presence"; at worst, it perpetuates a world order that has been defined for several centuries already, in which Africa is excluded from the orbit of the realities that matter, with the African man being relegated "out of history".

This state of affairs quite naturally justifies the "international division of labour" set in motion following the transatlantic slave trade and then the colonial adventure sealed in particular by the Berlin Conference, which made Africa the "property" of a handful of old Europe's powers, a vast reserve of raw materials, natural as well as human.

The end of formal colonisation has changed little in this reality: colonialism was simply transformed into a subtler ogre, one that confiscates African peoples' desire for independence, proves uncompromising with the bearers of demands for authentic independence, and secures its power to place at the head of the continent's institutions docile and faithful servants of the said "international division of labour".

Thus is trapped Africa's liberation thought. For African thinkers to be recognized and celebrated their works must be sanctioned by "metropolitan" dispensaries. The best African writers of course identify themselves with these dispensaries, swear only by them, and often only translate "the voice of the master". The elites are (and are pleased to stay) on a leash by the circles that have ennobled them: universities, training schools, research institutes, multinational firms, secret societies, religious congregations, various networks. Many Africans thus put Africa's intelligence at the service of supposedly "universal" causes which are turned against their own interests. Sad observation!

Caricatural as it may seem, this observation not only indicates the nature of the challenge but constitutes a call to meet the challenge. The presumed thinkers being in chains, African thought needs to free itself, to regain its autonomy... And all sectors, all domains, all fields of expression of the living African humanity are summoned for this purpose. Economy, Ecology, Health, Education, Politics, Governance, Scientific Research,

Technologies, Communication, Organization, Religion, are in need of being carried... by an "African thought" other than this universal instrumental thought responsible for this specific Africa's ill that is the absence of thought. It is characterized by the fact that all the reference points are borrowed and transported through the multiple extraversions instilled or installed in the mental schemas of the colonial systems on which many African elites are dependent.

The time of Break and Re-composition is knocking at the door of History, as a condition for the much-desired African Renaissance. Only a New African Thought can assume the stakes and guarantee that Africa rises up to them.

This argument is enough to justify the 2022 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE which CERDOTOLA convenes around the major objectives below:

- **Enabling ideas to descend from the ethereal realms of the imaginary and extroverted metaphysical speculation, property of lecture halls and laboratories**
- **Reconciling vision, existence and action in favour of Africa**
- **Building ideologies of action and operationalisation of endogenous lived experience**
- **Irrigating the existence of African peoples with faith in their humanity**
- **Justifying the establishment of foundations of a competitive humanism of diversity and multipolarity**
- **“Decolonising” the act of thinking and liberating thought from its confiscation by philosophers and the order of “philosophy” locked in the sole sense of foreign schools**
- **Putting thought back at the heart and at the service of life as assumed wisdom, conceptualised action, planned dream, assumed project, enlightened praxis nurtured with African ethics and aesthetics.**

The *New African Thought* thus posits itself as

- **Thought of renewal for Development without exclusion**
- **Thought of renewal to heal the ills of everyday life**
- **Thought as medicine for the compromised Aspirations of Peoples to ward off Distress**
- **Thought as a system of production of innovative, inspiring and mobilising ideas to contribute to the problematisation, by Africa herself, of her Being-in-the-world.**

CALL FOR PAPERS

The CERDOTOLA International Conference 2022 is thus convened as a crossed reflections platform to lay the foundations of this New African Thought (NAT). Why? The interpellation emerges from the entire track of modern African thought and its provisional (un)fulfilments which require that proper hands retake proper charge of projections of the future, along with their foundations.

In fact, although they are the subject of programmatic alignments at the institutional level, the new projections of a prosperous future for Africa remain generally undertheorised, hardly conceptualised, even suspect. In less than a decade, without transition and almost by decree, we have moved from the long image disease of the “hopeless continent” and the “shackled continent” to an anomaly of thought that comes under the tropisms of “Africa rising”, “emerging Africa” and the likes, whose treatment is, to say the least, lacunary in African and Africanist thought. Moreover, unlike in previous decisive phases, contemporary thought itself

appears very unsure of its language, in the sense of the overall coherence of its logics and the questioning of itself and its own operations, objects, priorities and purposes.

Admittedly, African thought has not always shown the reflexive intensity reached with the debate on "African philosophy" and Afrocentric epistemological repositioning. But modern African and Afro-descendant thinkers have always been concerned with thinking together the critical grasp of the Negro-African condition and the adequacy of thought to its ends. Following the precursors (A. W. Amo, E. W. Blyden, M. Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, etc.), the powerful rise of the movements which followed the institutionalisation of the Pan-African Conference as of 1919 paved the way on two key thematic furrows: identity and emancipation which together pose the central problem of being-African-in-the-world and the responsibilities of Negro-Africans to themselves and the world.

What subsequently unleashed the artistic and literary creativities of movements such as the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and *Négritude* from the 1930s onwards was indeed the cognitive and protest treatment of the African racial condition, which contributed to the rise of global thinking on the human condition and the institutionalisation of the discourse of rights, including to self-determination. The emergence of a militant Black internationalism then consecrated the centrality of the problems and aims of sovereignty and unity at the heart of maximalist Pan-Africanism which would eventually be seized, *mutatis mutandis*, by all the thinkers and founding fathers of independent States and the Organisation of African Unity. It is undeniable that this half a century long conjunction of thought and its activation via movements of ideas supporting and directing socio-political movements of emancipation decisively contributed to the historical results of the 20th century, namely legal-nominal Independence and the principle of African Unity.

On the contrary, focused on the economy and institutions, the turn-of-the-century "African Renaissance" lost sight of the fact that the Renaissance was first and historically triggered, supported and accelerated by culture, creativity, imagination, thought. Because it was not thought out, the valid concept of African Renaissance has been hackneyed and expelled in less than ten years from the lexicon of the good political and strategic ends of the African Union. It has been replaced by the notion of "emergence" which appears as a paradigm without concepts which proceeds through heteronomous insinuation and does not rely on any systematisation nor any corpus of conclusive ideas. In the complex and conflict-generating interactions of 21st century power transition, the propensity to project strategic independence, effective Unity and structural transformation in Africa without a consequent and organised New African Thought is clearly redhibitory.

These erring ways also derive from a long impoverishment of African thought in terms of an overarching project. Having become essentially and over the decades a thought of regret over disappointing independence, it has neglected the exploration of reserves of vitality, creativity and productivity, instead privileging the disastrous fate to which African life has been subjected by power, or rather a certain African power over Africans. It is high time to put an end to this eclipse of reflection, to end the African civilisational decline that the eclipse prolongs, and to bring about the most decisive revival, a true and powerful renaissance of African thought capable of addressing the vital issues of the future.

To that end, CERDOTOLA International Conference 2022 proposes to debate this central problematic: a century after the First Pan-African Conference and given the diverse regressions and new stakes, under what conditions, on what foundations, with what objects and modalities, in what directions and for what purposes can a New African Thought be pertinently considered today? What movements of thought, creativity and collective action could be

engaged to conceptually specify, support and accelerate the desirable African transformations, whether projected or already at work? How to situate, activate and perpetuate a NAT in relation to all of its African and global legacies and in line with its adequate objects, priorities and purposes? At a time when world thought is faced with a crisis of rationality and largely dependent upon the structures and dialectic that it nevertheless knows how to overcome in order to better grasp complex interactions and bring about or account for emergence phenomena, how, with all useful methodological and epistemological influences, to activate African advantages in the move to overcome oppressive thought systems which are rejected by both the African emancipationist paradigm and Eurocentric critical theory? How to put an end to the dichotomy between the recognition of the need for Africa to become its own centre and continuing suspicions against Afrocentricity? How to enhance contemporary African thought to neutralize its individualistic atomisation and re-orientate it towards the transformational dynamics necessary for a NAT? What innovative dimensions in the diverse discursive formations should define and characterize the NAT in relation both to world thought, old and new, and to the registered stages of African thought itself? What would be the most appropriate paradigm within which the NAT could better produce its critical tools, define and control its approaches, constantly set relevant goals, justify to itself the procedures it implements to achieve them, self-capacitate to judge itself in order to rigorously establish that which within itself is relevant for the undertaking it constitutes, and rule on sanctioning the value and the limits of validity of what it produces, in order to ensure that it is always within reach and up to the task of what it affirms, projects or performs?

Aiming to define a new spirit with sector-based praxeological specifications (new social, political, economic thought, etc.), contributions are invited on five main thematic axes:

- 1. NAT of prosperity... for Reconceptualising and surpassing “development”.** Since Africa has been adhering to development schemes and strategies, the poor effects force us to pose, anew and without concession, the strict problem of the results and their corollaries, cognitive and praxeological. Rather than rehashing how Africa accepts or refuses development, reducing uncertainty requires preliminary appeal to re-conceptualisation. In view of the crises of both the concept of development and the failures of their implementation in Africa, the Continent is bound by the imperious obligation to proceed, from within itself, with the redefinition of development and the construction of prosperity. This requires setting more adequate coordinates and purposes, specifying innovative images of the desired end states, and articulating processes and means, endogenous in particular, to achieve them.
- 2. NAT on living together... to Reinvent the social bond, politics and institutions.** The institutional framework adopted in Africa has as its main components a continental Union with a federal or confederal future design, nation-states with intangible colonial borders, liberal democracy and market economy, all based on an approach to social bonds governed by the individualistic ideology and a concept of success locked in mimetic competition for conspicuous consumption. The most relevant thinkers, disciplines and fields of Social Sciences highlight the crippling errors linked to the individualistic prescriptions for social bonds in communitarian societies, and the foreseeable failure of market economy and liberal democracy transplants without translative adaptation to local culture and historical memory. It is aimed here to rethink African States and societies from the ground up, with an ingrained project on which light is already shed by such concepts as the economy of affection and solidarity, the multinational State, consensualist democracy, and other endogenous alternatives to be systematised.

3. **NAT on knowledge and being... for Re-founding education and research.** The specialized literature is almost unanimous on the fact that the education model in force in Africa today is still largely of colonial inspiration, while research suffers from strong political disinterest. Beyond the largely dominant diagnostic analyses, the NAT is to explore models that can ensure the achievement of the emancipation, construction and transformation objectives by producing, as envisaged by Kwame Nkrumah, honest citizens that are emancipators and builders of a new Africa. A NAT must resolve the issues of institutions, content, actors, methods and resources for education, research and innovation in relation to the aims of Africa's productive transformation and its competitiveness in complex interactions.
4. **NAT on Heritage and Civilisation... to Reengage the activation of Arts, Cultures and Heritage as levers of the Renaissance.** It is Africa's vocation and interest to establish itself as a continental state-civilisation. What is lacking in the institutionalised approach to this end is largely a matter of culture, of the arrangement of the constituent elements of a singular and unsubstitutable African ethos inherited from the great civilisational achievements of history and projected into the future in a vast Renaissance movement. With its theme for the year 2021, the AU has initiated a qualitative leap forward by joining the vision of Africa's greatest progressive thinkers hitherto ignored by the Institutions. In order to systematise this convergence and its formidable prospects, contributions in this axis will explore the ways and means for Africa to proceed like 16th century Europe, in particular with the Diopian project of African Classical Humanities, like Japan with the *Meiji* Restoration to build modernity on the solid deep-seated foundations of traditions, or like China, Russia, Turkey and others whose emergence is based on the reactivation of their traditions of greatness as State-civilisations in the pillars of the Arts, Sciences, Mystics and Philosophies that carry technological development.
5. **NAT on symbiotic power... for Strategically Rethinking Africa's Relationship to Power, Time and the Environment.** Rigorous strategic forecasting establishes that the failure of the AU's projections such as "silencing the guns in 2020" is exemplary of the most likely outcomes of the national, sub-regional and Pan-African agendas of the "emerging Africa" wave. The same is true for Africa's adherence to the reduction-adaptation agenda imposed by international agreements on climate and the environment. This axis will explore the elements of a NAT on Africa's rise to power in directions that activate the resources of Africa's environmental history and intelligence in order to serve as foundations, spurs and components of the projections, and to support the attainment of the objectives of official emergence strategies. To this end, examining the necessary effort to adjust these objectives is crucial, with a view to exceeding them in practice and by the deadlines.

Proposals (500-1000 words) in French or English, indicating three to five keywords and the institutional affiliation of the authors, must be sent **no later than 10 July 2022** simultaneously to the following addresses: charles.binam@gmail.com, biem@post.harvard.edu, and contacts@cerdotola.org.