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### **Thinking about and Building the University of the Present in Africa**

**Lawani Ayouba**

Faculty of Letters, Arts and Human Sciences, University of Parakou/Benin  
07 PO. Box 0123 Cotonou (Benin); Tel : (00229) 96 96 2015 ; e-mail : [lawaniayouba84@gmail.com](mailto:lawaniayouba84@gmail.com)  
ORCID : 0009-0006-2762-1538

#### **ABSTRACT**

The African university is conceived without being conceived by Africans, and is therefore abstractly bad. It then began to be made without being thought of, in an activism that was also negative. It is these two moments that put into perspective the positive character of an intensified effort to build a true African university, which this article sets out to study. Our aim is to show that African university intellectuals must not, by selfishly, lazily and dangerously exploiting a certain African endogeneity, relieve themselves of their responsibility to make and think their university. This has led to the conclusion that the African university must reintegrate African values into a scientific, technological, literary and artistic culture that imperatively implies research into African realities, and that finally tends to forge a responsible personality, a conscious and active player in the development of the African continent. To achieve this result, we thought that a critical discussion of the university could offer us the possibility of better dealing with the subject, through the negative route of distancing ourselves from other ways of posing and thinking about the question of the university.

**KEYWORDS:** African University, Thought University, Built University, Culture, Universal.

**\*Corresponding author:**

**Dr Ayouba Lawani**

Faculty of Letters, Arts and Human Sciences,  
University of Parakou/Benin  
Email Id - [lawaniayouba84@gmail.com](mailto:lawaniayouba84@gmail.com)

## **INTRODUCTION**

The African University is thought about without being thought about by Africans, and is therefore abstractly bad. It then began to be made without being thought out, in an activism that was also negative. These two moments, coupled with the expected results of the African university, which continue to sink into the depths of a scepticism that hardly seems to move anyone, suggest that the positive character of an intensified effort to build a genuine African university should be put into perspective. This raises the question of what kind of university should be built, and why? This question forces us to formulate the hypothesis that the construction of an African university can only be achieved and determine itself as an instrument of a specifically African goal or ideal, without being thought out by Africans. How, then, can we think of a university that reintegrates expurgated African values into a scientific and technological culture, that imperatively involves research into African realities, and that finally tends to forge a responsible personality, a conscious and active player in the development of the African continent? What justifying and therefore motivating idea of the University to be built could have aroused an attachment, even an enthusiasm, commensurate with the importance of the project? In order to deal with this problem satisfactorily, we shall take a rather negative look at the two phases in the construction of today's university. Then, in a more positive vein, we will look at the conditions and the real possibility - that is to say, the limits that need to be recognised - of an African university that is enlightened about itself.

### **1. A STILL VAGUE IDEA OF WHAT A UNIVERSITY SHOULD LOOK LIKE**

“Build the university” has both the meaning of a slogan, “Make the university”, and the theoretical meaning of a question, “What does it mean to build the university?” For the reason for the slogan is that it has yet to be put into practice, that is to say, that the university it calls for does not exist. Now, such a university, which is to be built and which is even defined, in the slogan in question, by the fact that it is to be built, always to be built by Africans called upon to make a permanent existential leap, could not be of the same type as the one that Africans, tired of practising, undertook to build by freeing themselves from the university that trained them. The university remains the framework institution for the higher education of young people, but it is a question of making the transition from the university which is and which from the outset formed the African in and through it, to a university which the African genuinely builds by building himself. The innovative call to build the African university is, in essence, to desubstantiate or derealise its current content. In this way, this call can be understood as a

desire to link the African in a positive or immediate way, outside of any discontinuity, rupture or negation necessarily presupposed by a mediation, to this desubstantialisation, held to be liberating.

It is a call to the practical awareness of an immediate connection between the African and his university. Let's look at the content of this awareness.

African intellectuals seem to be rekindling their desire to build a university that will serve their community. But the reasons given for this change - namely, the need for university teaching to meet the requirements of an African education, or at least to provide students with a relatively high level of knowledge, but also to contribute to their training, to the blossoming and development of their personality, their tastes and talents, and to their judicious orientation, in the interests of both the student and society - suggest that the positive nature of the event should be put into perspective. This is all the more the case because of what we see as the fundamental reason for the reluctance, particularly political reluctance, to step up efforts to build a genuine university that fulfils the mission assigned to it by UNESCO, in the *World Declaration on Higher Education*, still seems relevant. Article 6 states:

- (b) Higher education must strengthen its functions of service to society, in particular its activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease, through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to the analysis of problems and issues.
- (c) Higher education must make a greater contribution to the development of the whole education system, in particular by improving teacher training, curriculum development and educational research.
- (d) Finally, higher education should aim to create a new society - free from violence and exploitation - composed of highly educated, motivated, integrated individuals inspired by a love of humanity and guided by wisdom<sup>10</sup>.

The reason why the university remained colonial, as well as domestic considerations, was the absence of an African motivation strong enough to override such considerations, and this absence refers first of all to the absence, in the African intellectual himself, of a sufficiently clear motivating idea of the university to be built. The project to build this university remains rather vague as regards the determination and the strictly political motivation of the university to be built. Undoubtedly, Africa, as a member of the Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) (African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education), which is already solidly constituted scientifically, is more concerned with a grouping of a few African countries - giving the illusion of African scientific unity -

than with the more primary need for the conditions for building its university. A realistic endeavour to build an African university is starting up again these days, albeit free of any ideology of Africa, but unfortunately also of any real idea of Africa.

The unpreparedness and lack of a coordinated policy are accompanied by a project to build a purely African university which, in its expectations, mixes interests and values, de facto necessities and ideal requirements in an arbitrary mishmash, from which there hardly emerges a simple and strong idea of the university to be built. What kind of university should be built, and, first of all, why build a university at all? The people of Africa could hardly have known. This is the reason why, deep down - with all due respect to the politicians - they are doing nothing about it. But African university intellectuals, sacrificed on the stake of reaction - it seems to us – don't know either. No one is yet fully aware that our universities must train young people who: achieve fulfilment through an education that prepares them to integrate and play a role in the development of their country; achieve fulfilment through their participation in the inevitable transformations of their socio-cultural environment; flourish as culturally liberated individuals, prepared to innovate and encouraged to take the initiative.

And even more radically, an African University, but to do what? It is very difficult to discover this through the practices of the current University, which is an eclectic mix and hardly specifies the instituted University as African. No justifying and therefore motivating idea is proposed for the African University, which could have aroused an attachment, or even an enthusiasm, commensurate with the importance of the project. The absence, so serious politically, of a practical normative idea of the African University, also explains the trial and error involved in the construction of a scientific Africa. The generous efforts made to develop a scientific Africa within university institutions, through exchanges and programmes of all kinds designed to standardise training and promote communication - most of which have been carried out by CAMES - have only been able to contribute to a formal unification, which in itself is precarious, and which could have been applied just as well in other parts of the world, since it lacked the specific guiding content of an Idea of the university capable of nurturing an African spirit. A university that is African by virtue of its location, but that does little to educate Africans in spirit. It seems to us that African politics and African pedagogy have suffered from the absence of a clear purpose, capable of both determining and strengthening each other, but also one through the other, if it becomes clear that Africa can only define itself by implying in itself, even fundamentally, a concern not only for its culture, but for culture, that is to say, for the very thing on which the University must essentially be built.

Let us be clear: we are not at all opposed to a University that is resolutely at the service of the African community. But we are simply saying that if you don't know in a simple way - in a coherent way that is free from the contradiction that weakens and compromises everything it affects - what you want to do, you can't do it. Now, the tragedy of building a purely African university, of building it in its entirety as a learned Africa, is that it has not been conceived and built at the same time, all at once. When our current university was first conceived, it was without us. So, the African concern for a university that is being thought of today has not yet been achieved, but a thought that is not experienced in action is lost in utopia and is not a true thought. Secondly, when the concern for a university that responds to the needs of Africans began to take shape, it did so without really thinking about it, but action that does not think about itself cannot be controlled and risks being lost in the activism of pure agitation, in attempts that do not become successes. This is undoubtedly the most immediately explosive of the adventures in which African universities are engaged, as best they can. For a thousand reasons linked to disenchantment, university intellectuals are inhabited by a confused idea of the university to be built. Lost in the promotion of a university that has become anomic (with no values shared by Africans), in search of rules, landmarks and meaning, university intellectuals are trying in every direction to inscribe their culture in a scientific tradition, but they are going about it so badly that the idea of the university to be built unfolds without standards or aims, responding to the tastes of each with all the amplifying force that can be mobilised, and managing the idiosyncrasies of others - who nonetheless harbour the same ambition - in such a way that they do not get in the way of their delirium. In the final analysis, it is a strange discomfort when an enlightened elite ostentatiously rejects the very thing of which it claims to be deprived; African university intellectuals act in the opposite way to what they want.

## **2. EUROPE BUILDS THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

The African university was conceived before it was built, and it was essentially built with the aim of reinforcing colonial domination in Africa. To develop this section further, we would like to take up John IGUE's analysis. Indeed, anxious to know whether the research carried out and the teaching given by Africans are concerned with the real problems of the development of the continent, he undertakes a veritable genealogical examination of certain disciplines, in particular geography, on which he ends up declaring that geography entered this continent not to promote development, but rather to serve the colonial cause in two areas: to provide information on the potential of the colonies, and to help each colonising power to define the limits of its possessions<sup>2</sup>. What we need to understand is that the

establishment of the first African universities was a response to the need to satisfy the causes of the coloniser. The teaching given in our universities is part of this Western way of thinking, the sole aim of which was to master Africa in order to exploit it better.

Indeed, the first frameworks for scientific reflection set up by the coloniser, namely the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) and the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre-mer (Orstrom), now the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), as well as the British institutes similar to those created by France: the International African Institute (IAI) and The West African Institute of Social and Economic Research (WAISER), all created before the African universities served as “the basis for the promotion of scientific research in West Africa. It was in the wake of these research institutes that the universities were later created, the birth of which became necessary to ensure the succession of whites after the independence of the colonies”<sup>2</sup>. The university served to assert the colonial spirit, initially through three scientific disciplines: natural sciences, human sciences and geography. This accentuated domination and dependence on Europe, particularly in the field of scientific knowledge. Better still,

Africans who have been trained on the basis of scientific knowledge about Africa obtained by researchers from the North continue to be dependent on this knowledge, since their scientific training is provided by researchers from the North. This scientific supervision does not always allow Africans to think for themselves, but rather according to the directives imposed by their European, American or Canadian masters. The result is a profound formatting of the latter, which is currently one of the greatest misdeeds of colonisation and the mindset that resulted from it<sup>2</sup>.

Before Igué, Odunlami quoted Houtondji, then Minister of National Education of the Republic of Benin, as saying: “the education system was [is] a machine for producing unemployed people”. In his view, the education systems of African countries had not undergone any significant change since their inception:

It is foreseeable that the same causes will produce the same effects, because all these countries share the following characteristics: they were colonised by the same Western European power, they are closely assisted by their former masters, they are poor despite the richness of their soil and subsoil, and they live the culture of the West...<sup>6</sup>.

As a result, there was no real university dedicated to the cause of Africa. This initial outline of a project to build an African university with the aim of consolidating a Europe and using colonial mental artillery and frameworks of thought as a means, is still basically valid after the nominal independence of

African countries. The African university is no more than a deceptive substitute; it is the power that mediatises and controls Africa. This is why we argued above that the African university is thought out before it is created. It is designed without us for others. And instead of a genuine revolution to overturn this swindle, we prefer to play with words. The university is the centre of knowledge, so let's not touch it any more, it will be better off, we seem to hear. Just think of the great projects of the past: the desire to change the world, the Promethean pride, have they not led to irreparable failure?

An entire rhetoric of resignation is mobilised to mask the university's difficulty in fulfilling its mission. We could go on *ad infinitum* about the way in which the State itself is taking on board, by making it official, this prevalence of preserving the university as it is today over the sacrifices required to build a new one. One of the curious excesses of the time is indeed that which sees the State renounce any symbolic or instituting function and transform itself into the indulgent - and mothering - therapist of a university of the past. This rallying of the State to the institution of a university that is still colonial is part of the contradictions of our education system in general that Ricœur<sup>9</sup> calls 'the political paradox'. The political paradox can act as a brake on the university's social mission, since the political rationality that is supposed to drive the university forward is its main handicap. Even if the theme of structural reform of the university fuels the daily chatter, we are not sure that the true extent of this imposture has been taken into account. We can really doubt it when we see the perpetuation of old reflexes, the quality of small reforms aimed at bringing the university closer to society, and unquestioning certainties. If the African intellectual senses the enormity of the error of his ways, he too often prefers to take refuge in pretence. Pretending, reviving concepts, playing with language, perpetuating old reflexes: we are decidedly reluctant to look squarely into the void. Part of the underdevelopment of the continent stems from this recycling of colonial achievements. The result is that laboratory equipment and the level of training are barely equal to that of a secondary school.

The idea of an African university took shape during the colonial period, and its realisation was carried out in a pragmatic manner, with little regard for African realities. From the outset, the construction of the university was a political undertaking, both in terms of its authors and its objectives. But the means used were not first and foremost real political means, i.e. with the necessary political effects. They were either political but ideal means, research institutes, or real but economic means. The promoters of this project were aware of the difficulty of achieving unity between the university institution and a political objective, and introduced the notion of development, which led to the proliferation of directly political development research institutes. As a result, the strength and scope of the research remains very limited

because of the subsidiarity that safeguards certain interests, and research on the African side is not full and complete.

### **3. AFRICA IS BUILDING ITS UNIVERSITY WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT IT**

Timidity on the part of the university with regard to African concerns may have been seen as indecision, and may have made dependence on the North less suspect. We cannot build an African university without clearing up this relationship and convincing Africans of the need to recover our dignity. The perceived or presumed difficulty of building an African university has demobilised the will to achieve the goal in terms of resources, and we have entrusted ourselves to a kind of happy historical necessity, manifested in the expansion of our universities. This expansion has been seen as a great step forward, due to a historical necessity that testifies to the greatness of the “African university”. Some see it as the awakening of the African people, a great university born by accident and fertilising itself almost naturally. The African miracle! But nothing lasting can be achieved without the intervention of freedoms, which are certainly not all-powerful, but responsible.

A process as innovative as the establishment of a resolutely African university could not fail to challenge an African will that had allowed itself to be politically led to maintain the same foundations for a building that was constantly crushing it, and, in an astonishing intellectual laziness, no longer thought about its undertaking, no longer thought about defining and justifying its objective, which was necessarily renewed by the extension of this undertaking. The proliferation of African endogenous chairs, symposia on the contribution of African universities to development and the question of the employability of young people trained in these universities, show that the African university had to be well defined and justified in its definition. What kind of university, and for what purpose? All these developments show that there is an urgent need to think about the African university, at last!

It has to be well thought out, and it has to be strong, deserving of the sacrifices and, at the very least, the pains of this Africa sacrificed at the stake of underdevelopment. To measure the institution of a genuinely African university by the yardstick of haphazard scientific research focused on a few African realities is to be gravely deluded. These actions could reflect simple individual egoism interested in discoveries that could be sold to Europeans in search of savagery. This alone was a poor motivation, and augured well for an African university that had been set up for reasons that were so negative in their purely self-interested nature. But a more binding construction of the African university presupposes a truly positive attachment to it, which would then be valued and demanding of itself. A positive African spirit is all the more necessary because this undertaking must be given a definite content - the University



for the University's Sake means nothing and allows anything - and only this content determined as a value or standard can form the basis of an effective African commitment. Such a determination or definition of the meaning of our university has not been undertaken to date.

Indeed, we cannot take seriously the wave of research currently being undertaken by Africans, which is by no means specifically African, and which we are formally content to ignore. As for the necessary anchoring of this institution of the African university in an African spirit that gives concrete expression to the values we have just mentioned, up to now it has hardly mobilised any serious scientist or revolutionary politician. University intellectuals have remained deaf to the caution urged by Ricœur<sup>8</sup> when he determined the conditions for the feasibility of a university: "I fear that, if this reform is not carried out voluntarily, it will be carried out in an anarchic and underhand manner and will be an additional factor of disorder". Care must therefore be taken not to upset the balance of the few features that make it possible to identify the cultural identity of the African man by projecting him into a scientific universe devoid of any cultural homogeneity, and above all of inter- and intra-recognition relationships that are conducive to a more traumatic uprooting. Secondly, we must prevent this African university from indiscriminately pouring out virulent scientific productions endemic to Afro-centrism, with the promotion of stereotypes rooted in African culture, amplified by an ideological, mystifying and mythogenic vision.

The main thrust of the university to be built from now on will be applied research. There are unexplored areas of research, for example in the fields of endogenous knowledge, which need to be stripped of all frills to see if it is possible to turn them into supports for science, i.e., instruments for creation and reflection, tools for scientific production. But in defining this scientific policy, we must do more than just carry out research; we must train scientists, researchers capable of providing expert appraisals, improving traditional techniques, modernising and popularising certain practices, and thus bringing great revelations to the civilisation of the universal. By identifying the traditional dynamics that structure certain endogenous practices, university intellectuals will be able to prevent them from becoming fixed in immutable totalities, and thus think of the substantial unity that cements the scientific order to be promoted as its lasting, almost natural, foundation. It is through this substantial unity, which creates the meanings that join together, by deepening them, the indigenous knowledge and the scientific knowledge that deny each other in their first superficial concretization, that we can easily elaborate the reconciling worldly project of a scientific Africa.

This specifically African scientific unity, the content of which would merit, and demand, the sacrifices to be made in order to achieve it, a value and a standard stimulating African intellectuals not only as Africans - which is relative - but as men, which is absolute. But setting such an ideal for the African university may seem gratuitous and fantastic if the university, which has remained colonial, and Africa's present do not bear witness to the fact that Africa has already made it its own, thus guaranteeing that its construction, which has already begun in earnest, is in fact possible, and that it has defined Africans at their best, in a specific way, so that assuming such an objective would be the profound human vocation of a scientific Africa. Of course, African universities cannot be defined solely by what they are and what they have been: the very fact that what justifies their current construction could not bring them to fruition in the past shows the limits of such a justification. But the construction of an African university can indicate the very thing that needs to be overcome, and the direction in which we need to work. Only then will we have the audacity to undertake the political realisation.

Hegel already told us that the completed change of thought determines that of the existing world: "Once the realm of representation is revolutionised, effective reality cannot subsist". That the construction or constitution of the African university is prepared and founded in this way in the political construction or constitution does not surprise us, because the implementation of this project can only be intensified by politics. It is politics that determines the existence of the university, which in turn determines the essence or meaning of politics. The university is the self-founding institution of politics in its plenary being and as reality and effectivity. This is why it alone is capable of organising the self-identity of the sovereign will of politics. This scientific policy, for which the university is the bearer of so many hopes, must lead Africans to understand their world, help the peoples of Africa in their search for the meaning of their contemporary world, and enable them to build themselves as independent, educated and informed citizens, capable of participating fully in essential social choices.

This self-differentiation of the self-identity of the political will can be made possible insofar as the political will is logically determinable and conceptually thought out in its truth as subjectivity completed in the self-determining will; so that what the university rationally establishes is politicised because it is at once logicity, ideality and reality. The logico-political mystification would have us believe that politics obeys principles that escape all logic. It is not a question of real politics, but of the idea we have of it. Better still, the idea that escapes political logic is the one that, in its extra-logical, properly political content, borrows only from the experience of politics, which deprives it of its actual meaning. True

politics is that which achieves the double negation of rationality and reality in an identity that consecrates the contemporaneity of the logical closure of what is thought and of politics.

To realise the project of this scientific Africa, it is necessary to bring together the idea of the university to be built, constituted in its truth, and proven political experience in its reality - the university does not have to make itself the servant of politics. Political experience, and therefore empirical experience, does not stand in contradiction to the true thought carried by the university, but is justified by it in its absolute necessity. Moreover, one of the essential functions of the university is invention, which “can only be fruitful if it takes the risk of being free, free of any instructions from the powers that be and any constraints on application, or even success”<sup>7</sup>.

Our critique of the university as a call for a viable common future requires the discernment of a unity of diverse contributions, but it must also be integrated into a projected and therefore necessarily innovative desire to live better. A current common definition of our university is therefore an unavoidable priority task. It is absolutely necessary, even if this does not mean that it is a sufficient condition for the achievement of such a scientific Africa. At the very least, it can be a means of increasing the university's output so that it is self-sufficient and better able to assimilate its processes and instruments, and of making the university's scientific orientation compatible with traditional African skills, so that it can better control the science that has emerged and put it to real use in the service of African communities.

#### **4. CONDITIONS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

If there is to be a purely African university, it will have to be competitive and efficient, and it has to be said that we are a long way from this objective of efficiency, which requires sacrifices for which we are hardly ready today. But such an objective can only be properly African if it determines itself as the instrument of a specifically African goal or ideal. This ideal can and must mobilise Africans - even more fundamentally than the legitimate interest they have in the cultural unity of Africa - to the point of leading them, if necessary, to risk their lives for it. This ideal must be a constituent part of our civilisation, and must be linked to the affirmation of an identity by which our university can be typically characterised. In so doing, the African university, at its best and most specific, will be to all, in the objective it has set itself, to be great in the service of the African community.

This objective seems to us to be commensurate with the aim of a true cultural Africa, which is to be the privileged architect of reconciliation with itself. In so doing, the African university will not be, as Alain Touraine puts it, echoed by Reboul<sup>7</sup> “just a laboratory but a conservatory”, a “*maintenance*” institution that “conserves, in the same way as a library or a museum; it conserves not just things, but knowledge and values... the primary task of the university is to preserve a cultural identity”. A scientific identity that we have never had, and which we are not guaranteed to obtain, would require real sacrifices that could be a deterrent in the perspective of a powerful Africa.

Such a vocation for a university that is culturally rooted in Africa can only have a serious aspect if it can implement a scientific policy that is specifically African - which forbids tinkering - but a policy that is itself implemented with respect for the universal. The justification for an African university is the universalisation of its goal: the universality of its culture, and of its means: the universality of its research tools. Such an affirmation by the African university of the universal can only make it welcoming to all nations adhering to such a mission, and this is the legitimisation of its construction. However, this construction is in a relationship of contradiction with the imperative of performance, that of an intensifying concentration of its unity. This is the ultimate problem to be examined: can the universalist essence of the African university and its competitive existence be reconciled, in other words, is the idea of a real cultural unity of universal Africa viable?

It does not seem insurmountable that the twofold essential and existential requirement of cultural unity mobilised by the university, that of its foundation and that of its attractiveness, could compromise it. The more we identify ourselves, the further we move away from the universality set as our goal. This is why a project of this kind must be wary of getting carried away if it is to achieve the unity of the universalist spirit of the African university and the affirmation of its - excluding - identity. We are not calling for a two-speed university, but for a culturally homogenous university, a university that embraces modernity by revealing the objective basis of its culture and using it as a weapon in the service of the continent’s development. In so doing, it will achieve, as Hegel would say, the unity of unity and difference, in other words, the “univocal saying-of-itself of the Idea” of the university to be built<sup>4</sup>.

A university rooted in tradition is an exceptional tool - for Africans if they know how to use it or appropriate it - to reveal to Africa and to the world, with scientific rigour, the dynamic depths of its authentic civilisation, its social and political institutions, the traditional tools that serve as a support for thought, works of philosophical, cosmological or epistemological reflection, and historical visions. In a word, this university is the consecration of what faith remains unformulated in the unlimited possibilities

of the African man. In this unveiling, we must grasp the scope and significance of the mutations that the insertion of African traditions into a scientific tradition can produce in a world profoundly shaken by Western science.

In other words, we must ensure that the myth of European knowledge dispensed in our universities is not replaced by a university that opposes the counter-myth of tradition and settles definitively into folklore. In fact, it is a question of making the university an enterprise of unveiling that recovers and renews African culture through a critical attitude; in other words, to develop a problematic of actuality, of the adequacy of the values of our cultures, which questions both the content and the meaning that foreign hegemonies had assigned to them, and which on the other hand corrects the judgement that our university intellectuals, for the most part trained abroad, culturally assimilated and alienated, cut off from their communities and their concerns, make of their own culture. It is simply a question of designing a university that reintegrates expurgated African values into a scientific and technological culture, that imperatively involves research into African realities, and that, finally, tends to forge a responsible personality - a personality shaped by the African spirit - a conscious and active player in the development of the African continent.

In this effort, which implies an awareness, if instruments can be borrowed from the countries of the North or elsewhere, the motivations that lead to their use must remain those of our countries. Our university must be sufficiently fluid and give it enough life for it not only to want to borrow, but also to serve as a framework for doing so. The African university can even consent to a destiny that negates itself and make itself the servant of the universal university - the European one - using its objective forces, which are themselves derived, to formally consecrate the self-motivating process of a university that instrumentalises it as it does everything else. It can even apparently justify this enslavement of itself by the idea that, even in its naïve protestations of self-construction, it is still or already the plaything of the latter, and that, consequently, the concern for lucid coherence must make it assume such a situation or condition by reinforcing, through the purification it brings to it, the great scientific-universal process that commands it. Through this quasi-saprophytic attitude, the African university would be positing itself as having only to do with itself, which would constitute it as a true, African university.

The most important thing is that this university should be able to travel back in time, so that human generations can be historically recapitulated in one and the same humanity, integrating into itself by drawing on their successive contributions. It must not freeze its identity in a simple cultural juxtaposition: static differences, without a living identity, or mingle, Indian-style, in the identity of a

metamorphosis, the differences that have been annihilated. A university built with the determinations we have just put forward is alive and meant to be reflected in a universal scientific philosophy whose subject is also the African man. In this way, Africans cast a universalizing gaze on their scientific and spatiotemporal situation in the world. He thus naturally sees himself in a “*cosmoscientific*” way. This university must be meta-cultural, even if it is always based in African culture, and asserts itself in its philosophy as supra-African insofar as it is African. This is an objective that it must not forget in this era of cultural anthropophagy, which makes the university more than ever, not a luxury, but an institution vital to humanity.

All this implies that the African university can only be seen, in its possible political translation, as the agent of reconciliation of humanity with itself in its different cultures. An African university can only be truly African if, as a specific player in the global game, it assumes its responsibility by promoting cultural pacification. This presupposes that the question of cultural disparities must first be resolved at the African level, i.e., the institution of a solid, compact African cultural centre and an open, flexible circumference. In other words, in the optimistic hypothesis of the construction of an African university, should we not be careful to maintain the rich variety of national cultures? An African university would be stronger and more attractive if it retained the cultural diversity that links it from within to all the African nations, thus giving it a unitary cultural structure that helps it to fulfil its role of reconciling cultural Africa. An African university is the Idea that justifies the achievement of a culturally unified Africa that transcends the achievement of the latter and is equally valid for each of its nations. By thus freeing the university to be built from the problematicity of its cultural realisation, we are thereby affirming its universality; the Idea of this university acquires a universalising character because, as an African Idea, it makes it assert itself by distancing itself both from its place of national affirmation and from its place of African affirmation, both of which are as such particular, that is to say, from the reality - one or multiple - of the culture of Africa.

No culture reaches the universal in a simply natural way. All universalism is implied by the movement we have just described, which seems clearly suited to the resolution of cultural diversity in the African construction of its university. A university built in Africa will be called African provided that it admits a constraint in line with the Idea of a culturally unified Africa, and consequently a restriction of its freedom by means of this universally valid determination. This constraint is not a decentring but a broadening of local culture, designed to overcome the conflict of national cultures. Thought of in this way, the university comes into its own as a totalising institution that educates for the

coexistence of African nations above and below it, not through the simple, non-liberating and therefore random tolerance of nations with their cultures, but through the critical abstraction that each can make of itself, in a kind of generalised Idea, the exemplary practice of which is philosophy. In this way, the African university would reconcile and liberate the mind. One might think that the institution of such a university, as a witness to the universal, would run the risk of being annulled as such. This will not be the case. The game of the particular mediating the universal works more or less like this:

If human action is to be full in the historical system, it must in some way emanate from the whole of reality in which it has a place. It is full in substance as in form if, on the one hand, the operation that carries it marries the individualised whole in a universal will and, on the other hand, if this will is inscribed in this whole, expresses it by recognising itself theoretically through it, by outlining its goal and, practically, by carrying it out<sup>3</sup>.

But this is a major reason for vigilance with regard to an African university *in the strict sense*. In any case, it is a question of building a university that fits into the normal game of scientific, technical and cultural evolution, of freeing the forces of expression. We are convinced that a university designed and built by Africans will enable young Africans to reveal themselves, to realise their potential and to take responsibility for themselves in all areas of scientific, technological, literary and artistic creation. In so doing, it becomes a centre of influence and social advancement, i.e., “an institution delegated to fulfil the ambitions and aspirations of the communities it was created to serve”<sup>5</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The African university is thought about without being thought about by Africans, and is therefore abstractly bad. It then began to take shape without thinking itself, in other words, in an activism that was also negative. As far as the university is concerned, doing something by thinking about it certainly increases the chances of success, but it also calls for a great deal of caution. This caution must take into account all the dimensions of African life, while remaining culturally homogenous and open to universality. Our conviction is that we need an African university, given that the peoples of Africa must express their cultural personality by offering researchers and thinkers the right framework for their creative mission and the opportunity to make known the scientific, philosophical and literary riches of their country. Behind the question of the university therefore lies the concern to prevent the rich heritage of oral traditions from disappearing, and therefore to collect them. The aim is to connect Africans with the foundations of their history, their sociology and their ethnic group. It's about finding a secure base

for values that will serve as a foundation for a scientific culture. African universities must be instruments that encourage African intellectuals to become aware of their specific responsibility, of their necessary participation in the daily efforts of their community. The American academic Huntington<sup>1</sup> has certainly not been able to theorise, even in passing, the idea of a connection between the development of the African university and the enhancement of its civilisational heritage, but we can dare to use Huntington's assertion of a clash of civilisations to link to this event the creation by Africans of a civilisational zone in which their capacity for invention, their strength of creativity and their ability to forge a university model conducive to facilitating their development can grow. All this is only possible if these values have their own religious and spiritual foundations, given that a people can only develop and impose its civilisation if it has its own or authentic religion and spirituality. The history of Westerners, Orientals and Asians shows that there can be no emergence or development, whether scientific or economic, without an authentic spiritual and religious foundation. As long as the African university, if it ever becomes one, is not what we have been talking about, the institution thought up by Africans, made by them and dedicated to them, and no matter how much work Africans do on their continent, Africa's cultural identity cannot be achieved. African university intellectuals must not, therefore, by selfishly, lazily and dangerously exploiting a certain African endogeneity, relieve themselves of their responsibility to make and think their university. In other words, African universities must assume their destiny, and their African destiny, as if it depended on them; for each of them, not for others.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

I certify that i have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patentlicensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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