

Mother Earth: Discursive Trace of Ecological Emancipation in North and South?

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Abstract

At its most extreme, the Western system, based on a no-holds-barred economy orchestrated by technology and the pragmatic injunctions of efficiency and profitability, breaks with the socio-cultural foundations of a humanism, at least theoretical, inclined to support a living culture. In the face of this cultural and ecological annihilation, discourses attributed to autochthony and those of decolonial thought seem to converge through a decentering or epistemic detachment, and to nurture in concert the emergence or re-emergence of notions acting as political and discursive resistance, or even movements, here envisaged as traces of socio-cultural or even socio-political re-appropriation of an ecological sentiment. We question this dynamic using the concept of Mother Earth, considered from an anthropo-discursive perspective essentially supported by concepts from social discourse theory, and illustrating certain North-South variations and contiguities.

Keywords

Mother Earth, Mother Africa, decoloniality, anthropo-discursive approach, ecology, social discourse

Introduction

By returning to writing in his mother tongue, Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (2011 [1986]) emancipates himself from the cognitive hold imposed by colonial culture. He shows that language, the language of our origins, acts as a vector for the reappropriation of our culture, as a space for the decolonization of

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the mind, and thus as a possible expression of our authentic relationship to the living, to the land we inhabit. It is in language that the arguments of a cultural and political border thinking¹ with a decolonial vision are integrated.

Like the writer, by “decolonization of minds” we mean the traces perceptible in action and specifically anchored in discourse, which enable and mark the emancipation of thought from the ideologies exercised against an ecological vision of living things, and culturally expressed.

In fact, the coercive ideologies in question (capitalism and neoliberalism) were imposed through the destruction of

(...) indigenous social relations and [d] the forms of social and cultural organization they [colonized peoples] had generated. Despite the great diversity of their forms, they are centered on an agrarian, pastoral or forestry community logic, in which collective ownership by the family group and/or tribe and/or clan, etc., predominates. The central criterion of social choices is the reproduction of the group, with a consequent logic of food self-sufficiency and coherence with the balance of the natural ecosystem. It is the need to completely destroy this pre-colonial reality, to enable the generalization of capitalist relations, that explains colonial violence. (Bouamama, 2019, p. 8)

We will borrow from Felwine Sarr (2016) the notion of extraversion² with which he describes the economic and cultural situation of colonized countries, and we will extend it to the economic cultures of Western countries, which do not, in our view, represent a less “extraverted” system of the socio-cultural conditions of their episteme³. Indeed, capitalism and neoliberalism, as production machines built on a nihilistic and uncomplicated logic, break with the socio-cultural foundations of a humanism that is at least theoretical, retaining only the techno-scientific character that has given birth to the pragmatic injunctions of efficiency and profitability, and ultimately produce the ideological conditions of our extinction. Despite their historically enviable economic, material and political positions, the ills of colonizing countries are now reaching fever pitch: declining life expectancy, widening wealth gaps, environmental and social degradation, excessive debt, destruction of the commons, the explosion of mental illness, epidemics, wars... all point to the fact that the socio-economic systems of the dominant powers are harming a growing proportion of their populations, and that we no longer even know how to restore the democratic order necessary for debate on the priorities of living beings in our so-called crisis contexts.

Economic imperialism has stripped the countries colonized by capitalism of their ability to maintain their traditions, their social allegiances, their ancient modes of governance and protection against a one-way vision that at the same time tramples on the physical boundaries of cultural territories. For Bruno Latour, “to be modern, by definition, is to project everywhere onto others the conflict of the Local against the Global, of the archaic against the future, of which moderns, it goes without saying, have no use” (2017, p. 42). Thus, the landing place (i.e., political orientation) would be represented by the “terrestrial attractor”, considering the earth, as a full-fledged actor in political reflection, where “social class struggles”, now “geo-social struggles” need to redefine their common interests. This political vision questions the survival of ecological ecosystems and cultures in a global framework under the influence of capitalism, which rules the world through a developmental obsession based on communicational (Dean, 2009), attentional (Citton, 2014), mental (Franck, 2013), cybernetic (Ouellet, 2009) and surveillance (Zuboff, 2022) hegemonies. These hegemonies of world standardization deconstruct the socio-political, economic and cultural specificities of countries colonized by capitalism, and force them to think in terms of difference, inferiority and superiority in

1 “Border thinking is a way of being, thinking and doing of global political society.” (Mignolo, 2015, p. 190) “Border thinking [...] does not imply a negation of modernity/coloniality, which, all in all, can only be observed; on the contrary, it assumes modernity/coloniality, but positions itself from colonial difference to criticize it. In other words, it seeks to show the existence of different modes of thought, different epistemologies, that can coexist in the same space and subject, and, at the same time, to criticize and disarticulate the Western universalizing hegemonic discourse.” (Beauclair, 2016, p. 30).

2 Extroversion is alienation resulting from slavish imitation of political models developed according to imperatives that take no account of local cultures (See Sarr, 2016, p. 131).

3 By episteme, Foucault actually means a set of relationships linking different types of discourse and corresponding to a given historical epoch: “It is all these phenomena of relationships between sciences or between different scientific discourses that constitute what I call the episteme of an epoch” (Revel, 2008, p. 45).

a foreign language that assimilates and alienates. Theses against Eurocentric cognitive imperialism have been developed, such as the geopolitics of knowledge and the inscription of different places of enunciation (Mignolo, 2001). These trends are multiplying in colonized countries, just as people in the North are becoming familiar with mobilization in the face of social and climate emergencies, and with alternative lifestyles (at least from the point of view of circulating information and community experiences).

We therefore posit that struggles in the North and South, which defend a holistic representation of the living, *i.e.* a culturally-rooted political ecology, come up against a diffuse ideological hold, in the palpable forms of capitalism and/or neoliberalism, and that thus, our dynamics of opposition or discursive resistance deserve to be observed in concert in order to better document the geo-social actualization of struggles against capitalism and its excesses.

To this end, we adopt an anthropo-discursive stance, listening for the salience and (re)emergence of discursive elements marked by their reasoning (rationale, gnoseology⁴) and resonance with the discourse of the living: interdiscursive forms⁵, ideologemes⁶, doxic components, styles, topics, universes of discourse potentially already identified in ethnographically-documented practices and rituals, making it possible to consider shifts⁷ (Angenot, 2006) in the dominant discourse; discursive traces presented or interpreted as signs of socio-cultural or even socio-political re-appropriation of an ecological sentiment.

In this way, we'll illustrate the discursive salience of Mother Earth, which in Africa and Quebec manifests the revival, in discursive territory, of an endogenous perspective of political ecology in the broadest sense (touching on the fields of health, the environment, spirituality and sociality). In our view, its traces support a dual relationship of dissociation from the dominant ideology on the one hand, and association with culturally legitimized sources (indigenous or foreign) on the other. On the one hand, the implicit or explicit dissociation from the dominant capitalist and neoliberal ideology, notably through the epistemic detachment operated by the decolonial movement or through the evocation of intentions, objectives, values and ways of doing and seeing the world, radically distinct from, or even opposed to, capitalist and neoliberal logics; on the other hand, the historical and social reweaving of the local, ethnic or indigenous cultures.

Decoloniality thought by Africans: from epistemic detachment to Afrotopos

The concept of decoloniality was officially born at the Bandung Conference in 1955. Twenty-nine African and Asian countries joined forces to liberate themselves from capitalism and communism, but committed writers such as Frantz Fanon (1952; 1961) and Stanislas Spero Adotevi (1972) had paved the way to liberate the Negro from his inferiority complex towards the white man, while castigating the injustice of colonization.

4 "(...) a set of fundamental rules that decide the cognitive function of discourses, that model discourses as cognitive operations. This gnoseology corresponds to the ways in which the "world" can be schematized on a linguistic support (ways whose background is "natural logic"), these schematizations forming the precondition of judgments (of value, of choice). This gnoseology, which we posit as a fact of discourse, indissociable from the topical, corresponds to what has sometimes been called the 'mental structures' of a given class or era, or even more loosely, 'thoughts' (wild thought, animistic thought, mythico-analogical thought...)" (Angenot, 2006, p. 68)

5 "However, I retain from Bakhtin the idea of a generalized interaction, a global interdiscursivity. Individual sets, genres and discourses do not form complexes that are impermeable to one another. Statements are not to be treated as monads, but as 'links' in dialogic chains; they are not self-sufficient, but are reflections of one another, full of echoes and reminders, permeated by the worldviews, trends and theories of the time." (Angenot, 2006, p. 16).

6 "With this in mind, I've reworked the notions of intertextuality (as the circulation and transformation of ideologemes, small signifying units endowed with diffuse acceptability within a given doxa) and interdiscursivity (as the interaction and reciprocal influences of discourse axiomatics). These notions call for a search for rules or tendencies, which themselves are by no means universal, but are capable of identifying a given state of social discourse. They invite us to see how, for example, certain predominant ideologies at a given moment receive their acceptability from a great capacity for mutation and revival, moving from the news press to the novel, to medical or scientific discourse, to the 'social philosophy' essay, etc." (Angenot, 2006, p. 17).

7 "In social discourse, we must also perceive (in a second stage, if you like) "movement", aporetics, destabilizations, superficial or even more radical incompatibilities. In other words, the contemporaneity of social discourses must be perceived as a confused and partially heterogeneous reality, in which the very history of particular discourses, their relative autonomy, their own traditions and pace of evolution are inscribed." (Angenot, 2006, p. 92).

Frantz Fanon, in *Peau noire masques blancs* (1952) and *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), even develops a frontier epistemology, the sociogenesis⁸ of a being that exists where it thinks, in a pluri-verbal environment, which sets a politics of knowledge anchored in the body and local histories (Mignolo, 2015). Fanon fights alienation and racism by calling on black peoples (Haitians, Martinicans...) to value their ethnicity and culture. Stanislas Spero Adotevi (1972), in the same vein, calls for a break with capitalism and neo-colonialism.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2011 [1986]), sees the decoloniality of Negro thought as a struggle against the cognitive imperialism of the West, which, by popularizing its language, imposes its cultural, economic and political ideology. For him, "to control the culture of a people is to control the representation it makes of itself and its relationship to others" (1986, p. 38). Conversely, he defines decoloniality as a rejection of assimilation in the face of the prohibition of race, language and superiority. Like Wa Thiong'o, Enrique Dussel (1999) sees decoloniality as intellectual emancipation in opposition to Eurocentric cognitive imperialism. Mignolo (2015) defines this intellectual emancipation as epistemic detachment⁹, or epistemic disobedience.

This new generation of decolonial African thinkers came to the fore in the 1990s, offering a more open and enlightened vision of Africa. Achille Mbembé (2005), Felwine Sarr (2015) and Alain Mabanckou (2017) set about constructing Africa as the continent where the future of the world is played out through culture, economics and ecology. For Achille Mbembe (2005), decoloniality must be seen in terms of Afropolitanism: a cultural, historical and aesthetic sensibility that comes from here and elsewhere, presence in the here and vice versa. Mbembé is oriented towards an ecological vision of the living and the earth. Felwine Sarr (2016) "de-theorizes" and "re-theorizes" decoloniality as an African utopia that augurs a world where the living and the earthly escape apocalypse. He calls "afrotopos" this utopia of the world envisioned by possibilities larger than reality allows. Afrotopia is an "active utopia [that] sets itself the task of flushing out the vast spaces of possibility in African reality and fertilizing them" (Boukari-Yabara, 2016, p. 150). Like Dussel (1999), Felwine Sarr (2015) develops the thesis of economic and cultural interaction, in which the cultural foundations of economic choices are essential to appreciating the "value" of things. The resources for reconstructing the truth through and by colonized territories involve rebuilding the traces of decoloniality through the orality of African traditions that touch on current issues such as ecology, health, the economy, education, religion and expropriated cultural heritage.

Mother Earth, a salient feature of environmentalist counter-discourse with indigenous resonances

Just as Afrotopos guides the rehabilitation of African cultural foundations, we observe the notion of Mother Earth as an indigenous topical re-emerging in the West, a discursive symbol of an epistemic rupture at work, or at least a trace of discursive competition (Collette, 2007) engaged against an ideology broken by the fetishism of the material. It also appears as a trace of a discursive movement in a quest for spirituality turned towards beliefs and practices with primitive connotations.

For the Amerindian, the first mother is the Earth. Procreator of life, source of all life forms, Mother Earth embodies fertility and fecundity, the result of a union with Father Sky. It is Mother Earth that causes fetuses to hatch in women's wombs (Rodolphe Gagnon, lettres amérindiennes quoted in Languirand & Proulx, 2009, p. 27).

8 Sociogenesis is a concept introduced by Frantz Fanon that incorporates everything: déprise, border thinking and epistemological disobedience; the unbinding of phylogenetic and ontogenetic options, the dichotomy of territorial and modern thinking [...] Sociogenesis is contemporary with the consciousness of being "negro", not because of one's skin color, but because of the racist imaginary of the modern colonial world (Mignolo, 2015, p. 186).

9 Border thinking is at the root of de-Westernization and decolonization (Mignolo, 2015, p. 189). Border thinking, as mentioned, does not imply a negation of modernity/coloniality, which, all in all, can only be observed; on the contrary, border thinking assumes modernity/coloniality, but positions itself from colonial difference in order to critique it. In other words, it seeks to show the existence of different modes of thought, different epistemologies that can coexist in the same space and subject, and, at the same time, to criticize and disarticulate the universalizing Western hegemonic discourse (Beauclair, 2016, p. 37).

A concept derived from native representations of the earth as fertile, nurturing, generous, welcoming, protective, healing and hospitable, and home to a multitude of plant and animal species, Mother Earth has a spiritual dimension in that it embodies the power of being in the world and the priceless aesthetics of the earth's elements such as the gifts of food, medicinal plants, water and so on.

Necessary to the very life of peoples, Mother Earth is constitutive of our subjectivity and, as such, cannot belong to us: conversely, it is humans who belong to it and, in this sense, acquire the responsibility of caring for it. Mother Earth is the standard for the holistic representation of the world by indigenous peoples, particularly in their discourse on the defense and protection of their territories. It has also more widely penetrated common language, as a conceptual foundation associated with indigenous culture and environmentalist claims, in the mainstream press.

Mother Earth, multiple resonances in the form dynamic

We'll take a brief look at the interpretative horizons offered by this formula, understood as "a set of formulations which, by virtue of their use at a given time and in a given public space, crystallize the political and social issues that these expressions at the same time help to construct" (Krieg-Planque, 2009, p. 7).

First of all, the popularity of the expression and the environmental struggle ("the fight against climate change" in common parlance) seem to coincide, both in indigenous public discourse and in that of intellectuals and even official discourse (UN). The concept of Mother Earth far exceeds the universe of discourse from which it originates: it even emerges, for example, as a toponym, Mother Earth materialized and physically delimited, well below, or even contrary to, its original semantic traits (notably in terms of private property). Even further afield, the lemma Mother Earth is also used as a brand name for so-called sustainable products, as the title of a retreat or training seminar, etc., which means that fashion effects, even if contradictory to discursive legacies, are not negligible, particularly in their relationship to the advent of New Age movements¹⁰ and awareness of the limits of the Anthropocene¹¹.

The formula, in Krieg-Planque's (2009) sense, functions in a discursive event as an obligatory passage, the impossibility of not talking about it (a constitutive notion of the sense of ecology in the fight against climate change), just as it can conceal contradictory elements of meaning (designating a circumscribed place, a property, being the object of commercial transactions), depending on uses and discursive formations, or appear in variable formulations. It also seems reasonable to associate the Terre-Mère formula with the already-documented emergence of the name Gaïa in Western francophone discourse. Initially promoted by New Age movements, Gaïa became a hypothesis, then a scientific theory defending the interdependence of the Earth system's components in a perspective of balance and homeostasis, and implying, according to certain beliefs, the sacredness of all forms of life (Chartier, 2016). The qualities associated with Gaïa are the same as those attributed to Mother Earth, as are the ways in which she is regarded: a sacredness devoted to living things, commanding respect and gratitude. It also seems reasonable to consider the semantic proximity of Terre-Mère and Gaïa as interchangeable senses, but the observed occurrences would lead us to favor Terre-Mère in Quebec, in a socio-political context, correlated with the usage agreed upon in the (translated) discourse of the native peoples here, whereas Gaïa seems more to do with spiritual practices inherited from the New Age.

10 The New Age is a Western spiritual movement of the 20th and 21st centuries characterized by an individual and eclectic approach to spirituality.

11 In August 2016, the International Congress of Geology held in Cape Town, South Africa, thus received the recommendation to officially acknowledge the beginning of a new geological period: the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene, characterized by the major impact of man on the earth system, climate, including humans who have become the main force of change on the planet, surpassing geophysical forces. In other words, the Anthropocene can be described as the age of humans. In its traditional sense, it marks a break in the relationship between humans and the Earth, forcing us to think of a new geopolitical era, of the Earth, thus going beyond the field of geology to enter that of the social sciences (Gemenne, 2015, p. 233).

Mother Earth: a socio-economically reconstructed cultural heritage?

Conceptual entities have emerged, with ideological power that transcends tribal differences: Mother Earth, for example, is no longer the exclusive preserve of farming societies intent on worshipping a matricial female divinity, the source of agrarian fertility. Today, this concept is spreading uncontrollably, and has even found its way into tribes where the land has never been the object of particular veneration. Thus, through current variants of the New Age - according to the current expression in Quebec - among Algonquin hunters, who are above all “people of the woods”... (Galinier & Molinié, 2006, p. 23)

Caution with an essentializing conception invites us here to consider certain anthropological insights into the memory and revival of influential indigenous spiritual practices. In the South, the quest for spirituality by North Americans meets the emergence of a group culturally marked by the reinvention of their own roots, beliefs and rituals, the neo-Indians, who sometimes take on the guise of “tradition merchants”, or are seen as cheating by rewriting scientifically studied ritual scenarios. So there’s a culture of reinventing traditions, blending contradictory logics of identity that embrace the destiny of the world as a whole in a drive to rebuild glorious pasts, claiming lost identities while resorting to technologies and inscribing promises of harmony and a radiant future, in market logics (notably tourism). “Neo-Indians worship a cosmic, benevolent Mother Earth, very different from the divinity eager for human sacrifice worshipped by the Indians of the Andean Altiplano or Mexico, and extendable even to hunter-gatherer peoples who cannot practice an agrarian cult. In this way, an ethnogenesis bubbling over with vitality is bursting forth from the rubble of colonization. Behind the pathetic chorus of the bruised children of Indian history, begins the joyful saraband of the neo-Indians. In institutional encounters between “the two worlds”, neo-Indians are bursting onto the scene, blurring the lines of the nations of the North who intended to dialogue with those of the South, and who often find in their place transnationals of Indianness. They express themselves in the language of their tribes, and form new ethnic groups based on Internet networks”. (Galinier & Molinié, 2006, p. 10)

Driven by the desire for identity and cultural recognition, “(...) The exacerbation of the local, the authentic, the autochthonous has as its other facet the frenetic search for elective affinities with all those movements putting forward themes such as the harmony of the world and concepts such as cosmic energy”. In other words, in the absence of original filiation, or in tension with their alleged sources, movements that value the expression of the local, of autochthony, as values of spiritual authenticity or even truth, and that display an appearance of detachment from Western material fetishism, are building spaces of ideological convergence through the formal use of concepts such as Mother Earth. Thus, we see it emerging in an unexpected topography (due to its inter-doxical arrangements and transversality, its adjustments to modernity, etc.), compared to the representational affiliations that preferentially linked it to ethnic origins. In contrast to Angenot’s (1984, p. 41) “phenomenon of false novelty”, the Mother Earth concept is here put back into play on the discourse market as a recycled phenomenon exaggeratedly (or even falsely) attributed to historicity.

Mother Earth: political significance in the dominant ideological universe

Last but not least, there’s the political dimension of the lemma, which this time brings Mother Earth closer to the political meaning of the South American Pachamama. Indeed, in the 2000s, the indigenous movement in Mexico, Bolivia and elsewhere succeeded in getting their cultural conception of the defense of territories heard and taken up in the speeches of the UN representative, to such an extent that April 22 was declared International Mother Earth Day, now celebrated by large annual gatherings. However, the common title of these celebrations is “International Earth Day”, as if the maternal, original and spiritual senses inherent in indigenous peoples’ conception of their relationship with the Earth were struggling to cross the boundaries of an intercultural and political gathering. It’s also worth remembering that in the 2010s, following the UN’s recognition of

the rights of indigenous peoples, an initiative was launched to establish a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. Although it was voted on in Bolivia in 2011, it was not adopted by the UN (Morin, 2013).

Here, we can clearly observe a resolutely political limit to the passage from one discursive formation to another, and to the transcultural acceptance of the (considered) indigenous notion of Mother Earth. The equality advocated between all the components of the ecosystem in fact induces a fundamental paradigm shift in colonial capitalist culture, since it involves breaking with the very idea of nature as opposed to culture and available for the extraction and exploitation of its resources (Descola, 2011).

This means breaking with the idea of human supremacy over all other components of the interdependent system. In other words, questioning the production-consumption system comes up against its own values, as well as the inertia and complexity of the system itself. The political will to transform the system is clearly at stake, and is reflected in this resistance to the inter-discursive penetration of the politicized spiritual theme. Moreover, aboriginal claims to land protection are rarely heeded; examples are legion in Quebec, where governments disregard the obligation to consult aboriginal peoples and take their opinions into consideration prior to exploiting resources on their territories. Their political and legal rights are regularly flouted, as if the political significance of culturally-rooted conceptions of our relationship with the world were not taken seriously, or even as if these conceptions were relegated to the anthropological field of belief and folklore. In addition to the major consequences for our chances of survival, in terms of our ability to change our socio-economic paradigm, the drift towards folklorization of indigenous discourse seems tantamount to denying it political credibility. And indeed, on a more popular scale, the idea of Mother Earth, as we've seen, circulates without resistance in the field of spirituality: on the contrary, we find it evoked, gratified and invoked in discourses linked to meditation and healing practices inspired by New Age beliefs, indigenous cultures or other more culturally distant practices.

The conceptual contribution of indigenous peoples to the recognition and protection of Mother Earth, in a perspective of social and environmental justice, instills the idea of the possibility of societal transformation (disruption), through the establishment of a politics of the living. On the other hand, resistance to the reception of this concept, via semantic reductionism (beliefs, folklorization) and consequent neutralization of its implications in the field of politics, indicates a damaging cognitive disconnect (Angenot, 2006): misunderstanding or denial of the spiritual and political (associated) semantic significance of the concept of Mother Earth stalls the democratic process concerning the paradigmatic shift to be undertaken. So it seems that, despite its intellectual contribution, local cultural episteme is not discursively considered among political projections of possible futures. Contrary to political ecology - or even the very principles of democracy - this discursive stance (still) borders, in essence, on epistemic (neo) colonialism.

African imaginaries as sources of some concepts of identity and ecology

We seek to account for the dynamics of the construction and evolution of the meaning of the concepts Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and Africa-World in a context of discursive otherness between the imperialist West and Africa in civilizational, economic and ecological awakening. These concepts represent discursive traces that contribute to the deconstruction of Western "epistemic insularity". First, we'll look at how the concepts of Mother Africa and Mother Earth in African socio-cultural imaginaries contribute to an epistemic decentering of man's original space, a reconsideration of African civilization and its localization. We will then show how the concept of Africa-World, in ecological discourse, gives rise to reflections on the future of mankind and the earth, which challenge the human world as a whole.

Mother Earth and Mother Africa interrelation for an African renaissance

Through an internalist approach that seeks to reconstruct the history of Africa, the metaphor of the “cradle” in “l’Afrique berceau de l’humanité” indicates the beginning of complicity between Man and Earth on African soil, but also the denial of the imperialist thesis, since all continents are Mother Earths, but Africa is presented as the “cradle of humanity”. Indeed, the very first Homo sapiens were “negroids” (Diop, 1967). This scientific discovery led to significant changes in scientific and political circles in Africa and the black diaspora. A new vision based on an existentialist and essentialist discourse on Africa has emerged: the African Renaissance. This new vision functions through African and Afrodiasporic writing, with themes such as the return to the self, the sources of identity in Africa, by Africa and for Africa, and the call for the sublimation of the black “race”. All of this is built around discourses that mark a unique history, psyche and geography of Africa.

Afrocentricity is a philosophical paradigm that emphasizes the centrality and capacity of Africans to take control of their own history and culture. In this way, Afrocentrists clearly express an anti-hegemonic vision. This vision questions epistemological ideas deeply rooted in European cultural experience, which are applied to Africans or other peoples, as if they were universal principles (Asante, 2013, p. 7).

The African Renaissance thus represents a shared desire to live through race and in a space other than the one imposed on black people, and this requires a change of discursive paradigm, a new epistemic and cultural narrative that cannot be dissociated from the concept of Africa-Mother, whose resonance has the value of a slogan. In fact, this concept is nothing more than a kind of reappropriation of the concept of Mother Earth, through a geographical and cultural shift. It has a focusing and valorizing value, as it determines the space of representation of the evidence and sources of the African Renaissance, *i.e.* Africa as the original space of human life. *Afrique-Mère* has seen its semantic field widen: pays natal (Césaire, 1956), royaume d’enfance (Senghor, 1945), Our Land (Langston, 1926), and so on. The concept has become a battle cry against racism, xenophobia, colonial domination and the lucid oblivion of the first civilization. Langston Hughes (1926), figurehead of the Negro Renaissance in the United States, allusively and disparagingly presents Western civilization and supports the pride of the Negro for a return to his roots. In the same vein, Frantz Fanon, in *Peau noire masques blancs* (1952) and *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), fights against the humiliation, alienation and inferiority complex of black people in favor of racial pride. *Afrique-Mère* is also a political slogan, a kind of unison song, an invitation to African governments to reflect on Africa’s political future within a community framework established on Africa’s borders, taking into account the black diaspora baptized by heads of states as the continent’s 6th region. It is also a cry of revolt against the opportunistic and despoiling approach to the continent’s resources: “We are Africans, and our territories cannot be a part of France” (Dia, 2015, p. 114). Africa refuses to be judged under the paternalistic gaze and rhetoric of the West, and defends its status as a continent enamored of civilizational values.

This battle of ideas is also being waged on its own territory, the concept of Mother Earth is also widely used in the ecological discourse of Senegal’s social movements, leading to a proliferation of slogans in the “green masses”, such as “land can’t be sold, it can’t be rented, it’s lent or given away for free”, “land is a legacy from the ancestors”, “land can’t be fought over”. These eco-developmental claims are reflected in the slogans of Senegal’s new land defenders: “Aar luñ bokk” (Let’s protect what we have in common). The “Front pour une révolution anti-impérialiste, populaire et panafricaine” (FRAPP) also makes a claim: “Doomi reew moy tabax reew” (the development of a country must be the work of its sovereign people). We believe that young people are increasingly inspired by the Mouride brotherhood’s model of eco-development: “ñak Jariiño” (sweat pays) and “Jëf Jël” (you reap what you sow).

Mother Earth, a factor of epistemic detachment for Africa

The writings of anthropologists and ethnologists in line with an overhanging universalism (Mbembe, 2023) have wiped the slate clean of African civilization by deporting man's origins to other lands and races. However, counter-discourses in favor of the original African civilization occupy scientific and political space. Cheikh Anta Diop's *Nations Nègres et Culture* (1954) was the leading scientific discourse challenging the imperialist thesis that Africa was absent from the civilizational scene. He reveals the implicit and scenic aim of the West, which is none other than to dominate Africa culturally and economically. Mother Earth, as he theorizes it, augurs a reconstruction of the world by and through Africa through philosophical and anthropological thought, for "in all likelihood, African peoples are in no way invaders from another continent, they are natives" (1974, p. 11). In Cheikh Anta Diop's thinking, Mother Earth is Africa, the original place where man first appeared, the first land of life and the source of nourishment and fertility. The earth is receptive, therefore feminine and maternal (Bâ 1972, p. 128). In native discourse, the imperialist conception of appropriable land clashes with mystical thinking about the non-appropriation of land. For natives, there is a fusion of Earth-Man, Animal-Man and Earth-Ancestor. Native and African intellectual discourse reconfigures the limits of Mother Earth. Mother Earth does not represent the physical earth in its entirety, but is reduced to the physical and imaginary boundaries of the African continent. Its existence is linked to that of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Mother Earth is thus defined as a specific rather than a generic seme, as it does not cover the entire earth that can be superimposed on the world, but rather a part of the world considered as the first laboratory for the study of the genesis (of homo sapiens), evolution and migratory phenomena of mankind. Africa is "a vast continent with bits of flesh scattered all over the globe" (Mbembe, 2023, p. 57).

Mother Earth: a cultural and ecological alchemy

Mother Earth is also an endogenous and exogenous reflection that concerns the survival of ecosystems, from the perspective of an "eco-culture"¹² whose foundations are to be found in the ecological wisdom discourses rooted in African secret societies¹³, in the language practices of castes (fishermen, blacksmiths, griots, weavers, breeders, farmers). For these community groups, Mother Earth signifies order, spirituality and the celebration of ancestors. This mystical and spiritual significance is preserved in endogenous hermeneutic discourses based on social and/or cultural codes. In African cosmologies, Nature-Man-Ancestor interact in perfect harmony. For the Nuer of Sudan, the earth is the mother of all living beings, the ecological space where the links between man and his living space are forged. Among the Dogon, the myth of creation is linked to that of the revelation of the Word to mankind. Amma, the Creator God, "father" of creatures, wants to unite with Mother Earth, represented by the world's egg made up of a double placenta, to engender beings destined to promote his creation. According to the Dogon mythology, Amma's (God's) placenta is the cultivated earth. There is, in fact, a principle of consubstantiality between the earth and the human person. For Achille Mbembe (2023), there is a quasi-existential relationship of exchange insofar as the matter that is the earth is imprinted in us at the same time as it takes in our imprints, our memory and our traces, the material remains of bodies that have disappeared, the bodies of all those who, born of the earth, have returned to it.

- **Mother Earth in its cultic and ecological form**

We're interested here in the space of worship as a place of contact between the living and the ancestors, but also of representation of vertical or mythical discourses that escape the uninitiated, to grasp once again the concept of Mother Earth. Libations or offerings and sacrifices are channels for activating secret conversations between spirits and the living. The Earth is the meeting place where

¹² Eco-culture is adapted to food production and livestock breeding, and is essentially practised by hand on small, intensively cultivated areas. It takes up and adapts age-old practices of farmers in the South and North.

¹³ In traditional African monarchies, secret societies are neutral divinatory assemblies that act as intermediaries between guardian genies and humans. They are the guardians of laws, worship and prohibitions.

living and non-living forces interact. Among the Diolas¹⁴ of southern Senegal, the forest has a sacred value. It is a place of worship where diviners, ancestors and initiated men interact mystically, and where mythical epics are performed. The same is true of the Serer¹⁵, where symbolic and cultic discourse is the province of the *pangool* (fetishes, diviners, etc.). The *xooy*, for the *pangool* and the *saltigui* (guardians of sacred or mystical knowledge), is the space for the representation of ecological mystical discourses linked to meteorology for better preparation of the agricultural season with better yields. Among the Fulani, the pastoral or agrarian epic is a space for the fusion of nature, man and the forces of the cosmos.

• Mother Earth from a literary perspective

On a literary level, in *Weep Not, Child* (1964) or *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) deciphers the ecological links between characters and their environment, by intriguing life practices that are experienced without the knowledge of imperial discourses. For Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), the fusion of the forces of the cosmos spoken in an indigenous language is an act of eco-poetics, a discursive genre that develops an affective bond between the native and the land, a factor of cohesion and social stability in Africa. It's worth noting that, politically speaking, in South Africa, the Afrikaners monopolized the land. But since 1994, the creation of transboundary conservation areas (Belaïdi, 2016, p. 2019) has opened up spaces for (re)thinking the relationships between these states and their populations. The creation of protected areas, conceived as a means of managing territorial margins, transcribes international prescriptions in terms of sustainability and the participation of local populations, while remaining within the realm of state intervention (Mbembe, 2000). For Belaïdi (2020), border areas are a tool for environmental justice, an object of social cohesion and proof of a common goal.

Africa is therefore the vanishing point of the struggle for humanity's future. Achille Mbembé (2020; 2023), Felwine Sarr (2016), Pierre Mabanckou (2018), build a discursive paradigm in which Africa appears as a space for the staging of new utopias for Africa and the world.

Africa-World: epistemic reconsideration by Africa and for the World

In the same vein, the "Afrique-Monde" (the Africa-World) concept initiated by Mbembé and Sarr (2017, p. 63) positions Africa as the basis for thinking about world unity. Afrique-Monde means thinking and writing about Africa and the world. Thus, Africa is not an idea but a knot of realities: it is first and foremost a face of basalt, which, in the extreme West, opens up to all the seas and winds of the world. In place of a narrative of distancing and a quest for rupture between Africa and Europe, found in the African conception of the denominations Mother Earth and Mother Africa, the Africa-World form installs a new paradigm of ecological discourse that draws on foreign and African languages and oral traditions. For Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Afrique-Monde is first and foremost "Thinking Africa, thinking in Africa, is thinking in translation in African languages and the languages of Africa that are also Portuguese, French or English. It means thinking back and forth, from language to language" (Dibakana, 2018, p. 3). In fact, it's a question of enhancing African languages so that they become African resources, and then making them known through translation. Indeed, the true history of Africa can only be made from the oral tradition, where storytelling, song and the spoken word constitute teaching as well as entertainment (Bâ, 1972). The aim is to update African heritages in a modern context in order to combat solasology (Morizot, 2019), a "homesickness without exile" caused by the mutations of nature that mean that we can no longer find ourselves in the landscape or environment of our childhood, as we are outright dispossessed of it.

14 The Diolas are a community living in southern Senegal between The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau.

15 The Sérères live in central Senegal, in the Fatick and Kaolack regions.

Conclusion

The concept under study marks the evolution of decolonial discourse in Africa and the Black diaspora. Mother Earth marks the first phase, challenging imperialist theories of anhistorical Africa. Now considered to be the home of the world's first civilization, the continent of Mother Africa delimits the field of original civilization, giving black people back their history and dignity. Mother Earth and Mother Africa mark a withdrawal into oneself, a return to roots in a geographically localized land, a civilization contested then rehabilitated via a new decolonial vision, stimulating the African Renaissance.

As for the "Afrique-Monde" concept, it places Africa at the center of all the concerns, particularly ecological, that are shaking the world. It's a call to enhance the value of traditional African libraries, which preserve the secrets of the cohesion between man, the earth and the ancestors, cohesion on which the means of preserving ecosystems are based. Africa may be opening up to the world, but it remains at the heart of all possible solutions for saving life and the earth, despite the paternalistic rhetoric that has distorted its image for centuries.

The salience of the concept of Mother Earth is therefore intimately linked to the decolonialist dynamic of Africa's return to itself, driven and marked by the liberation of endogenous languages and cultures. This emancipation, which has been asserted to the point of essentializing the Africa-World, shows an eminently political movement, with no less spiritual resonances. In the North, however, the political scope of the concept of Mother Earth has little resonance, except in the discursive spectrum of indigenous territorial claims, as if discursive hegemony authorized it almost exclusively to occupy the topicality of spirituality, a field that has been almost free since we turned our backs on secular religions. Should we then assume that the ideological tensions at work confine the concept to patrimonial or optional discursive spaces, that they perhaps also tend to dissolve indigenous knowledge linked to Mother Earth within dominant capitalist and neoliberal frameworks, in the image of neo-Indian trends? The geopolitical, cultural, linguistic and spiritual dimensions of the concept of Mother Earth in Africa seem to oppose the colonialist and neoliberal spirit with a global, gnoseological conception.

His writings are about a different relationship between humans and nature. It's a "multidimensional" reading, in which history, anthropology, ecology and political philosophy are part of a more global vision, in which politics integrates ecology, which in turn, integrates politics. The concept of "earth as homeland" - for it is indeed a concept - suggests interdependence, encompassing global phenomena within each other and breaking down fictitious barriers. (Pena-Vega, 2021, p. 223)

We would then be tempted to associate the generic, plastic, semantically encompassing and historically indeterminate character of the concept of Mother Earth, neither really old nor really new, with a strong potential contribution to utopias in future discourses, in other words, something of the *novum*¹⁶ (Angenot, 2006).

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16 - "(...) distinguish the occasional emergence of an authentic novum, of indisputable acts of rupture, from the common process described above by which public "debates" persist in confirming by the tape a topique, values, interests, discursive tactics common to the antagonists; by which originality, cognitive, exegetical or stylistic, arises and takes on value only through the implicit homage it pays to ways of seeing and ways of saying that are already imposed." (Angenot, 2006, p. 88)

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