

## BOOK REVIEW

**“OUT OF THE DARK NIGHT: ESSAYS ON DECOLONIZATION”**By Achille Mbembe<sup>1</sup>Ermelinda Liberato<sup>2</sup>

Extraordinary! This is how we can characterize the present work of Achille Mbembe, a well-known and recognized African philosopher, political scientist, historian, intellectual, professor and researcher, in this work that, although it was originally published in French in 2010, only in 2014 was translated into Portuguese, a boldness by the Mulemba Editions of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the *Universidade Agostinho Neto* (FCS-UAN – Angola), in collaboration with *Edições Pedagogo* (Portugal). Through a fluid, assertive, firm and descriptive narrative, Achille Mbembe proposes, therefore, to make a general check up on the health status of the continent, both in physical, emotional and affective levels, analyzing key issues and at the same time the sensitive, such as colonization, decolonization, miscegenation, among others. The author thus clearly delineates a rigorously well-founded and bibliographically well-documented theoretical framework, equipped with contradictions and ambiguities, which at the bottom constitute the characteristics of the continent itself, which forces us to reflect more deeply and carefully.

The general objective of the work, the “interrogation about the decolonized community” (p. 19), is presented to us right in the introduction (p. 19-30) where the author reinforces the position on the need for debate and criticism around the subject matter. To this end, it begins by characterizing the concept

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of colonization: "immense abyss" (p. 19), based on a "network of dependence and supremacy" (p. 22), with a "capacity for proliferation and metamorphosis" (p. 19) impressive, fueled by the "force of the false" (p. 19), responsible for the implementation and consolidation of an economic system of extraction and predation (p. 23), a political system based on manipulations, "at the mercy of satraps", shackling Africans in general in a condition of "indignity, contempt and humiliation" (p. 23).

All of these issues are discussed and deepened in the chapters that follow. In chapter I (p. 31-48), *From the Skull of a Dead Man. Trajectories of a Life*, Mbembe uses memory and traces a biography of himself in the first person: "I was born" (p. 32), his childhood in his native country (Cameroon), adolescence and later his departure for the world (France and the United States of America), his experience "was largely the result of the early age of post-colonialism" (p. 35) and subsequent return to the continent where he settled at the University of Wits, South Africa, which is faced with a fragmented country, still shackled to the bonds of *Apartheid*. This circulation across the three continents made it possible to access and contact the "aspects of erudite culture" (p. 41), "the collection of human knowledge and thought" (p. 41), proudly transforming it into a "legitimate successor to this heritage" (p. 41).

Mbembe also dives into the origins of Pan-Africanism and *Négritude*, two political and cultural movements that were able to ideologically train the children of the continent, in order to register an *Opening to the World and ascension in humanity* (p. 49-77), but they also did not achieve their purposes. And to better explain his position, the author uses as examples Haiti, "the first born of decolonization" (p. 53) and Liberia, the prototype of the creation of "a christian, modern and civilized black state" (p. 55), two countries on two different continents but which have gone through the same process and, in both cases, the result is the same: "two failures" (p. 53), which support the idea that "decolonization was a mere political, controversial and cultural category" (p. 49) and not a true liberation of black men in all dimensions.

In chapters III and IV, the author addresses the colonizing role of France on the continent, as well as its position after the independence of its colonies, emphasizing the relationship between colonizer and colonized, dominant and dominated, exploiter and exploited, which allowed the establishment of a system of "proximity without reciprocity" (p. 79-99) that remains in the present. His "inability to think about the post-colony" (p. 86) led to a form of neocolonialism, that is, a renewed colonialism, but based on the

pillars of old colonialism. As France insists on its “cultural narcissism” (p. 87), convinced that it is still the “center of the world” (p. 88), there is thus the “decline of a crystallized nation” (p. 81) sailing in countercurrent, thus plunging into a “long imperial winter” (p. 101-139) characterized by “relative regression of a thought” (p. 103) and desire for provincialization (p. 122-131) that continue to feed a senile state posthumous diseases of memory (p. 131-139).

This continuous state of denial of the Other leads the author to qualify the continent as *the house without keys* (p. 141-163), which is characterized above all by a “new Creole and, in many ways, cosmopolitan urbanity” (p. 145). In this fifth chapter, the author focuses his analysis on the construction of borders on the continent, in its multiple dimensions, having as a starting point for his analysis the Berlin Conference (1884-85), which followed the period of the slave trade, until the submission of the first resistance movements, identifying oil and other natural resources as the new frontier that inaugurated “new cycles of extraction and predation” (p. 149). Events that defined the “colonial structuring of economic spaces” (p. 143) unequal, established according to the interests of exploitation. And the consequences are very visible: informality, structural adjustment, “atomized capitalism” (p. 146), accentuated asymmetries between rural and urban space, militarism and lumpen-radicalism, the institutionalization of violence as a way of life, among others.

As a result, new colonialisms were being built, using a softer vocabulary and under the mask of *Circulation of the worlds* (p. 165-190). In this last chapter, Mbembe analyzes concepts such as development, state and Nation, gender issues, rapid social changes, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, among others, and proposes a new current of thought, which he calls Afropolitanism, which it is characterized by a “political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, race and the issue of difference in general” (p. 187). What the author claims is, above all, the debate and criticism about the post-colonial in Africa, by Africans, in African academies, decentralizing, or decolonizing it in relation to the West, a “thought that thinks it’s possible outside of himself, aware of the limits of his uniqueness” (p. 192).

*Out of the Dark Night* above all portrays post-colonial Africa, its projects, its perspectives, its betrayed dreams, its disappointments, in short, Africa in its fullness as Africa, free from the bonds of the past, and its need to walk alone looking for its own existence. *Out of the Dark Night* is nothing more than “before life”, the search for “the brightest sun and the purest stars” (p.

20), that is, the construction of a better place to live, where the sun is born, the stars shine and the moon illuminates the most remote corner of the continent. It is urgent for the continent and Africans to face this reality and look "at what is new", because only then will it be possible "to discover new times, for itself and for humanity" (p. 194).

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