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# *Nkolo Foé and Structuralism: Genealogy, Concepts and Categories of a Critique*

By – Adoulou N. Bitang<sup>1</sup>

*„Huldigen lernen. — Auch das Huldigen müssen  
die Menschen lernen wie das Verachten.“*  
Friedrich Nietzsche

## Abstract –

In his battle against postmodernism, French structuralism appears as one of Nkolo Foé's main philosophical opponents. It is in this respect that this school of thought is discussed in his book, *Le Postmodernisme et Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*. I propose to analyze the genealogy, the concepts, as well as the categories of such a critique, in order to expose it in extension and in intension.

**Keywords:** Structuralism, Postmodernism, Irrationalism.

## Résumé –

Dans sa lutte contre le postmodernisme, le structuralisme français apparaît comme un des principaux adversaires philosophiques de Nkolo Foé. C'est à ce titre que ce courant de pensée est convoqué dans son livre, *Le postmodernisme et le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. On se propose d'analyser la généalogie, les concepts, ainsi que les catégories d'une telle critique, afin de l'exposer en extension et en intension.

**Mots-clefs :** structuralisme, postmodernisme, irrationalisme.

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In *Le Postmodernisme et Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*,<sup>2</sup> Professor Nkolo Foé devotes an entire chapter to the systematic refutation of structuralism aptly titled "The Question of History". In it, the author denounces, the sinister compromise by which structuralism undermines the very possibility of the human through the rejection of historical chronology. The author then draws the conclusion that structuralism is closely related to postmodernism whose practical and social reign it announces in theory. At first glance, this criticism may appear massive and of intransigent severity, as it attacks structuralism on almost every point, from the concept of history to the notion of *utopia* by which the chapter ends. In this universe, whose feigned opacity is actually the symptom of a powerful spell that combines undeniable scientific competence with cleverly calculated mass deception, it emerges from Nkolo Foé's incursion that it is possible to establish a thought train with Michel Foucault (among others) as the guiding thread which reveals what is thought under the mode of conscious obfuscation of thought, resulting in the accusation of ideology.

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It is of such incursion that I seek to reconstruct the architectonics, the structure. This article therefore offers an extensive and intensive reading of Nkolo Foé's critique. It penetrates the twists and turns of the maze-like path it offers us insofar as the author claims to follow *à la lettre* the spirit of structuralism, related to postmodernism, the global philosophy of Empire. What follows is an attempt to expose the genealogy, concepts and categories of Nkolo Foé's critique of structuralism.

## I. – Genealogy

According to Nkolo Foé, Friedrich Nietzsche is guilty of having plunged European thought into a situation from which it is difficult to escape, namely nihilism, which must be rigorously understood as the radical critique of the values of civilization. His philosophy thus leads to a radical anti-humanism which primarily inspires postmodern discourse. It is in this capacity that the author of *The Birth of Tragedy* is summoned in Nkolo Foé's work, as the main inspirer and spiritual father of postmodernism. The criticism of this doctrine at the genealogical level therefore begins with Nietzsche.

<sup>2</sup> As the book has been published in French and has not been translated into any other language to my knowledge, I am therefore responsible for all translated excerpts provided.

*Anamorphosis and Topography:  
Nkolo Foé and the Portrait of Nietzsche*

Three books by Nietzsche catch Nkolo Foé's attention and the reader discovers them when she looks at the chapter of his essay that reveals the References of his analysis. These are: *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, *The Gay Science* and *Twilight of the Idols*. The choice of these books is not trivial, since it speaks of the philosophical commitment to deduce, then to grasp the essence of Nietzsche's thought, which is reduced according to Nkolo Foé's presentation, to a sharp criticism of rationality, a defense of instinct, an excessive praise of the present and a blind apology of force, which philosophically legitimizes "wild competition and predation" (Nkolo Foé, 98). It is therefore understandable why the author writes that "Nietzsche... inspires postmodernity" (Nkolo Foé, 196). The main reason for such an observation is that "Nietzsche's era... coincides with the rejection of Reason, science, history, and the great founding systems of the modern world" (Nkolo Foé, 196). More precisely — that is, more directly related to our subject, namely structuralism —, Nkolo Foé writes that "Nietzscheanism and structuralism represent the two complementary ideological figures of contemporary capitalism, idealized under the post-metaphysical paradigm" (Nkolo Foé, 98). Nietzsche's great crime in relation to this situation is that of having inaugurated "this epoch which demands the liberation of instincts." (Nkolo Foé, 98) a remark from which the author's analysis can shift to Spengler.

But it is first and foremost in connection with "The question of history" (which is our main focus here) that the reference to Nietzsche receives its most interesting content, and it is also on this occasion that the reader finds the longest dissertation that Nkolo Foé devotes to Nietzsche in his book. The culmination of this commentary is the idea of *eternal return* that the native of Obak deduces from a history that goes back further than Nietzsche, to his predecessors (Nkolo Foé, 94), namely Balzac and Flaubert. Nietzsche is said to have inherited from these two his taste for the social status quo, a taste of which the concept of eternal return is, according to the commentator, a stylized theorization as the sanctification of the present and its inequalities. Now, the sanctification of the present is *repudiation of history* (Nkolo Foé, 94), which is itself solidary with the repudiation of progress. According to Nkolo Foé, Nietzsche's skepticism about the moral progress of humanity is intelligibly

understood only in relation to this conservatism by which the human is forced to submit to the tyranny of what is, for the reason that, *ultimately*, nothing changes, everything is always the same.

This conclusion of Nkolo Foé's commentary stems from the examination of the thirty-seventh aphorism of the "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" in the *Twilight of the Idols*, which gives itself the title of a question which, from Nietzsche's point of view, is asked in a highly provocative way, in particular in connection with his essay *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Whether we have become more moral."<sup>3</sup>

And Nietzsche's answer can be summarized by saying that nothing is less certain. The reason? A *strange definition* (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...* 95) of progress and virtue whose essence is a physiological approach to morality, where the weakening of life — decadence — goes hand in hand, according to the Puritans of the modern era, with moral appreciation, and vice versa. From the criticism of *equality* that follows (Nietzsche already writes the term in quotation marks), the philosopher of the École Normale draws the conclusion that the author "superbly [exalts] social inequalities, differences in status, hierarchy among humans." (Nkolo Foé, 95)

Nietzsche thus appears as a *theoretician of inequality* (Nkolo Foé, 96). And it would be through this way that this philosopher with a hammer "rediscovered the ancient myth of Eternal Return" (Nkolo Foé, 96), as a tactical and devious response "to the irresistible rise of social and democratic movements" (Nkolo Foé, 96). But, in the process of unveiling this internal situation in which Nietzschean discourse inevitably leads, *Twilight of the Idols* is inoperative, this role incumbent, according to Nkolo Foé, on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>4</sup> It is through this last work, indeed, that Nietzsche satisfies, according to Nkolo Foé, his sinister "need to create anti-historical myths" (Nkolo Foé, 96) and thus obscure the legibility of the bourgeois world, in its decadence, as well as in its desire to maintain itself as the center of values, i.e., the center of life, even though bourgeois life no longer lives. These *myths*,

<sup>3</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 211 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Nkolo Foé refers to the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of "On the Vision and the Riddle," in the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the book. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 125 ff.



which Nkolo Foé also labels *aristocratic reveries* (Nkolo Foé, 97), "are part of a vast schismatic project aimed at isolating the rich from the poor" (Nkolo Foé, 97). In other words, Nietzsche is a thinker of brutality and its enlightened continuation, hence his usefulness for fascism, a usefulness that is nonetheless not that of a leading thinker, but of a "reserve ideological officer, always ready to serve" (Nkolo Foé, 100). And it is in this configuration that the philologist of Basel lets himself be seen in a profound way, by his apology of the *pathos of distances*, as Michel Foucault's master of thought and oracle of all the structuralist logomachy that the philosopher of the École Normale holds in horror and proposes to dismantle.

There therefore seems to be a contradiction that Nkolo Foé points out, even if he does not insist on it. For on the one hand Nietzsche is a fierce defender of the moment, (Nkolo Foé, 96-97) and on the other, he criticizes no less fiercely the present that he proposes to analyze, on the pretext that this present is a symbol as much as a symptom of decadence. At the heart of Nietzsche's philosophy, the progressive thinker is therefore faced with a dead end: there is no way forward except by retreating, and the retreat is not so much a return to the past as it is an acceptance of the present *as such*, on the grounds that the present is always as it is, always identical to itself, eternal. But by erasing the opposition between these extremes — the present and the past — to the point of analogy, Nietzsche produces a discourse of ideological occultation that takes the path of the past, of the archaic, for which Nkolo Foé has a very interesting concept, namely the *medieval present* (Nkolo Foé, 101) which one would fail to analyze correctly if it were interpreted literally, as a chronological reference to the past to which it refers.

When the disciple of Marcien Towa writes that "Structuralism has nostalgia for ancient social orders" (Nkolo Foé, 151), it is indeed a subtle way of highlighting its filiation with the Nietzschean thought that exalts the primitive in the name of the moment, and glorifies the moment as the ever-living, real and terrifying presence of the past and the terror it spreads around itself as atonement and revenge in retaliation of its past dismissal. It is therefore not surprising that Nietzsche's philosophy leads, as established by Nkolo Foé's demonstration, to *The heuristic of fear* (Nkolo Foé, 100), these *threats of the future* (Nkolo Foé, 100), which are actually mythical threats, the will to power of what was once. Thus emerges the gloomy horizon that leads humanity, like a flock, to the *end of utopia*<sup>5</sup>. Nietzsche is the high priest of this Dionysian

orgy, whose orgasmic apotheosis is the sacrifice, on the altar of the petulance of instincts, of Reason and its corollaries, namely morality, progress, utopia, order, history, ..., whose flesh the nihilist and his followers devour.

*An Attempt at a Self-Portrait in the  
Style of a Measured Praise of Barbarism*

Nkolo Foé writes that "the convocation of Nietzsche by structuralism, less than a decade after the historical defeat of fascism, has often astonished. The astonishment was justified as long as it was admitted that fascism was a pure accident of history" (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 98). Nietzsche can be presented in a slightly less cruel way, without this presentation necessarily inducing more charity either for the person or for the subject. It is indeed in no way reprehensible — it is the very spirit of a trial that is intended to be fair — to give the floor to the main accused when it comes to appreciating, from his own point of view, this crown (of thorns more than laurels) that is commonly attributed to him. Nietzschean intervention can be limited to the only congruent portion of the relationship to history that also implies submission to the moment, i.e., the fallacious maintenance of the archaic and non-freedom on the grounds of the promotion of force.

Nkolo Foé is not mistaken when he chooses the thirty-seventh aphorism of the "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man" of the *Twilight of the Idols* as his decisive anchor. This is first due to the nature of this writing, one of the last, in which the author, who has not yet lost his mind, summarizes his entire philosophy. It is then due to the tone of the aphorism, namely its sarcastic character. Finally, it is due to the nature of the reflection that Nietzsche offers

<sup>5</sup> In this portrait of Nietzsche and more broadly, in this topography of postmodernity that unfolds Nkolo Foé, Habermas' influence is to be noted, as it crosses the entire structure of the book of the philosopher of the École Normale, from the position of the problem to his "heart," (Nkolo Foé, 198) revealed in the conclusion of the reflection. It is noticeable that Nkolo Foé makes himself a disciple of the Habermasian reception of Nietzsche, in particular of the analyses exposed in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987). If we need to "Resist to the Habermasian reading of Adorno" as advocated by Jean-Marc Durand-Gasselin (*L'École de Francfort*, Tel (Paris: Galimard, 2012), 258 ff), why should we not resist — or at least be suspicious of — those who have, at least once, if not deceived us, at least made the path more tortuous than it had to be?

to the reader. The question that serves as the title of this aphorism is indeed *strange* (Nkolo Foé, 94) as noted by the disciple of Marcien Towa. In fact, it is immediately situated on the ground of history rather than on the ground of irony (which is revealed only later). This is surprising, since the author is supposed if not to ignore, at least despise the idea of a rational and chronological succession of events in time. For Nietzsche asks "Whether we have *become* more moral" (my emphasis), in a way quite analogous to Kant's approach to the question of the *Aufklärung* in 1784. The question, asked *in relation to the present*, implies *de facto* a determined relationship *with the past*, in order to establish or not a certain continuity that could then be called progress, assuming of course that the *τέλος* of such a movement is conceived as an improvement of the original situation (maturity as progress in relation to the minority in Kant; morality as progress in relation to barbarism in Nietzsche). In this, Nietzsche's question immediately takes on an undeniable historical interest, especially since, as the first sentence of the aphorism underlines it, there would be a *moral stupidity* that stands "for morality itself in Germany" because, if one believes the author, of a historical consciousness characterized by its lack of depth, its emptiness. This is what Nietzsche first reproaches philosophers of at the opening of his remarks on "'Reason' in Philosophy," namely their "lack of historical sense for one thing, their hatred of the very idea of becoming, their Egypticity."<sup>6</sup>

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And Nietzsche clarifies his thought: "They think that they are showing respect for something when they dehistoricize it, *sub specie aeterni*, — when they turn it into a mummy" (Nietzsche, 167). With these words, the philosopher with a hammer mocks the attitude that Nkolo Foé also castigates, and positions himself very firmly as a philosopher of history, aware of the *historical sense* of events and the *idea of becoming*. Nietzsche's main grievance at this level is to accuse philosophers of working on *mummies*, that is to say not only *ideas*, but also proposals that no longer have life, no longer exist, and which therefore remain in philosophical discourse only as traces of what they were. In this, the mummified philosophical language has something mythical, deceptive; its formalism is formalin, it spreads the mummification on what it touches, as the sentence under which succumb all the subjects on which it projects its fetishized categories. Such a discourse, Nkolo Foé would agree,

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<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 166-67.

cannot tell the truth, i.e., things in their movement, nor analyze them in the dynamism of their future and their being-for-reflection, except to adopt a Platonic point of view that equates the movement with corruption. Nietzsche argues that from such hands nothing comes out alive: philosophy is necrology, the philosopher a necrologist; wisdom a necrophilia, even though human beings are living beings. This is Socrates' crime according to Nietzsche, that of having attacked life and insisted that philosophy be the cult of death. Plato, who assimilates this teaching to perfection and actively contributes to reproducing it effectively, states what can be considered its most aggressive and representative formulation at the same time: "What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is not*" (Nietzsche, 167. Original emphasis). Morality is the theorization of this deception, its sin transformed into an object of joyful worship, its lie erected as a principle of truth, while *Twilight of the Idols* — that is, in fact Nietzsche's entire philosophy, of which it is the intensive summary — is then thought of as the resolved endeavor to put an end to this thought of death in favor of a thought of life, and of philosophy as an emphasis on the life of thought. This is how one should be able to read this book.

Now, the proof of life is, as far as nature is concerned, the extravagant freedom of natural phenomena in their lush petulance, and, as far as society is concerned, history, taken in the most trivial meaning of more or less chronological and objective succession of events. One can of course reproach this story for not being teleological, for not following a meaning determined in advance, and for not rushing more conscientiously toward the realization of an ideal. But such a criticism is less a reproach than a rather vivid manifestation of the first of the "Four Great Errors" of thought identified by Nietzsche, namely "The error of confusing cause and effect," (Nietzsche, 176) which The Crucified also calls "the genuine destruction of reason" (Nietzsche, 176). For one would judge the vitality of life by its death (the place where it becomes an objective and stable thing), instead of judging it by its life itself (its cause, the exuberance or the will to power). And since Nietzsche does not ask the question of the moral future of humanity from the point of view of the end that is morality, understood as a damaging petrification — because commanded from the point of view of non-freedom — of the exuberance of life, there is little doubt that his philosophy then leads to a sanctification of what *becomes* to the detriment of what *is*. But what is is the *moment*, conceived as a necrophilic abstraction that clumsily but not without skill separates events from the

vital continuum in which they are necessarily intertwined, and which consecrates by this deception the fragment as an expression of life<sup>7</sup>. This is the deceptive content of *reason* according to Nietzsche, its ghoulish taste for what is sick, weakened, senile or dead. The discipline it imposes on the undead to whom it applies fiercely, has something of the disgust aroused in the delicate person by the bad joke. However, the *delicacy* of which Nietzsche's era prides itself does not have in his eyes the value of real progress; it presents itself more as the price paid by the weak to be able to keep, despite the "physiological aging process"<sup>8</sup> that characterizes and defines them, even the appearance of life. In this perspective, one could legitimately consider Nietzsche as a critic of what Nkolo Foé rightly calls the *ersatz of movement*, (Nkolo Foé, *Le Post-modernisme...*, 89) and which could be called in Nietzschean language, the simulacrum of life: the myth, in what it contains of idolatry, and which therefore prevents it from the fetishization of which it is commonly victim in falsely dialectical language. This is why Nietzsche does not criticize reason, but its myth.

Yet, to be able to defend life in a consistent way against its ersatz that is moral stupidity called progress according to Nietzsche, we must return to the most intimate manifestations of life, namely the senses and instincts. Nietzsche, who boasts of writing books that are only accessible to a few, can afford to mock the *common sense*<sup>9</sup> that believes it can reduce the meanings of

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<sup>7</sup> In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: "If you believed more in life, you would hurl yourself into the moment" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 32). It would therefore be difficult to imagine Nietzsche as a philosopher promoting the moment, including from the point of view of the second paragraph of "On the Vision and the Riddle," because it seems there that the moment is not the resolution of the riddle of the existence, but the riddle itself, the error here being to consider the position of the problem as its solution. The key to reading is precisely the "historical sense" of the *Twilight of the Idols*, without which the moment appears as a being of reason, as valid in-and-for-itself, detached from the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future, which are nothing but the eternity of the will-to-live as it is expressed in time. To seize the moment is to grasp time in its dynamism, the moment when the personal will meets the Schopenhauerian will, without abandoning oneself to it. One must not stop at the entrance of the gateway but go through it, for better or for worse. The one who sacralizes the moment is a weak, for the moment is only *κρίσις*. As a moment, it does not and cannot bear the entirety of the action. Only the dead (and the dead can be alive) are prisoners of its present. To this effect, it can be enlightening to keep in mind the fact that Zarathustra is addressing a dwarf. It is by no means impossible to think that a such a predicate does not only focus on the physical characterization of his interlocutor, which it poetically transcends as a metaphor.

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 211.

these last two terms to their non-technical everyday meanings and oppose it more or less victoriously with the argument of the abyss of vital nothingness, the thought of the rational tomb as the highlighting of the thinking trapped in the vacuity of what is. And Socrates, the herald of this way of doing things, wants to make of the human being a machine, this non-free organism (i.e., not turned toward self-preservation) and not turned outward (i.e., devoid of meaning), all things that are given to the human being by the fact that the person is certainly spirit, but first of all body. Their contact with the world and with life is thus fundamentally a physical contact about which one is seriously mistaken according to Nietzsche when one hopes to be able to reduce the human being, with some success, to an interiority without exteriority. From this perspective, the faculty of feeling is not a sin as an important part of ancient philosophy thought; rather, it is the *sine qua non* condition of a conscious presence in the world by which thinking truly occurs, not as an abstraction of objective conditions, but as an internalization and labor of the latter, from the stimuli which they carry. To cut man off from this contact with life is, in Nietzsche's eyes, *the task of all higher schooling*.<sup>9</sup>

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It can be summed up in learning to die... even though philosophical wisdom claims at the same time to teach us to live. As for instinct, it hardly means, as barbarism believes, that subordinate function of the body whereby the animate organism is inclined to produce and reproduce only determined responses to determined stimuli, which responses are inscribed in advance in its being, and dictated also in advance and from all eternity by nature. Rather, instinct, at the peak of this concept, is a metaphor that conveys the physical and metaphysical inclination to achieve what one desires, or rather, to be free. It takes on its trivial meaning only when it contravenes this definition and therefore refers to some specific situation. It is in this second way that Nietzsche uses this term in the paragraph following the one of interest to Nkolo Foé in *Twilight of Idols*. In the Nietzschean perspective where instinct is not reduced to a definite meaning, the purest and most basic instinct of any organism is freedom, and the latter is not a view of reason, it has no abstract content, but is intimately linked to the senses, to sensibility. For this, it requires

<sup>9</sup> On this concept and how it relates to philosophy, see: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. and trans. Terry Pinkard, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 42 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, 206.

the existence of the obstacle from which it is possible to judge and gauge it, hence the praise of the strong (and strength is not only mastery of the other; it is also and just as legitimately, self-control, triumph over determined instincts opposed to the great fundamental metaphysical instinct as they lead to suffering) (See Nietzsche, 38-39). In relation to this situation, Nietzsche's equality is very far from what he himself calls a *fable*.

Nietzsche therefore speaks of the human being, in a vein that scrupulously strives to follow Spinoza's precious advice, namely, to treat human beings as they are rather than as one would like them to be. This is the sin of the philosophers from which he intends to protect himself, by applying it to all the objects on which his intelligence leans, all the objects, including the conceptual mummies established by the thinking that precedes him. And the maintenance of the senses and instinct plays in this perspective the same role as a serum of lucidity that prevents the thinker from falling into the abyss of the *fable*. One can hardly reproach Nietzsche for developing such a humanism by which he focuses on *describing* human beings rather than inventing their ideal portrait. For we have rarely seen (except of course to suffer from a rather acute form of schizophrenia) human beings who are only *spirits* — like those of whom Descartes dreamed by defining himself as a *substance* whose *essence* is to think. On the other hand, it is given to us almost on a daily basis, to see human beings who are only *bodies*, i.e., who are not or no longer really human beings, in the sense that we usually understand this concept, when we consider the human being, with some reason, as a unified psychosomatic organic compound: such are the corpses. When a more or less transcendent puppeteer animates them, they are zombies, i.e., ersatz human beings. And in any case, a lifeless body does not announce or present anything other than death, which must be understood in a rather banal physiological sense as the end of the human.

It is therefore surprising that a philosophy such as that of Nietzsche, which defends itself from being a meditation on death, but claims to be a reflection on life (and therefore on human life), be described as antihumanism, as if the aim of such a philosophy was not always the human being, conceived in a non-idealized, non-fetishized and non-degenerating manner. Indeed, the goal of the philosopher with a hammer is to resurrect the spirit that dies in the body of the modern human being because of the discipline of negation. In such a perspective, Nietzsche's self-portrait offers us the figure of a doctor

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whose specialty is physiotherapy, whose thought a fitness session, the patient the modern human being, their pathology decadence, their treatment, the maxim: "Have the courage to remember that you are (also) a body!"

## II. – Concepts

Two concepts structure Nkolo Foé's critique of postmodernism in his book, the first being only implied, while the second is explained. Indeed, the greatest reproach that the native of Obak addresses to postmodernism is the fact of being an ideology of irrationality, a position by which it ultimately presents itself as a doctrine, in the most perverse sense of this term. In this section, the aim is to see what such an argumentation involves, and how it unfolds in the text.

### *Postmodernism as a "Doctrine"*

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There does not seem to be a technical use of the term doctrine in Nkolo Foé's book and the author uses this word either literally or critically, to invariably designate a corpus of ideas chained more or less rigorously to each other and more or less explicitly aiming at a given argumentative perspective. It is in this sense that Nkolo Foé speaks of *doctrines of postmodernity* (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 35) of postmodernism as a *doctrine* (Nkolo Foé, 36) with reference to Francis Jameson, of the pragmatist *doctrine* (Nkolo Foé, 44) of the *doctrine of postcolony* (Nkolo Foé, 46) in Achille Mbembe, or of the *doctrines of post-history* (Nkolo Foé, 93) and of *post-metaphysical doctrines* (Nkolo Foé, 98), etc. At first glance, therefore, the term *doctrine* is not a concept in the language of Nkolo Foé, except that it is only a *first sight*. On closer inspection, the somewhat attentive reader cannot miss the idea that postmodernism is a *system*, a vast enterprise of prestidigitation that mixes science and ideology, philosophy and economics, politics and aesthetics in a deadly interweaving that signals the end of rationality, at least as we know it historically, and as the author recognizes it expressed for centuries by human thought. The subtitle of the book, a category on which we dwell only too rarely in the ordinary (Njoh-Mouelle has always been right to complain about it as far as he is concerned), provides here an important key to penetrating the



rationality of the text and determining that the criticism that Nkolo Foé addresses to postmodernism is a criticism that conceives this movement in a doctrinal way.

The book is indeed subtitled "On a Global Philosophy of Empire" and the immediate relationship with the title of the author's enterprise reveals from the outset what might appear only as a detail, but which, nevertheless, from my point of view, is indicative of Nkolo Foé's gesture. In their specific relationships, the title and subtitle do not play the roles to which they are traditionally attached, since it is customary for the title to express a general idea, while the subtitle specifies this general idea, often limiting it to a specific aspect or indicating the tendency of the enterprise, the direction toward which the tide *draws* and in respect to which it should therefore be *read*. Even when it voluntarily adopts a general wording, the subtitle does so very generally in order to clarify the intention of the title. For this book by Nkolo Foé, the data seems to be reversed, and while the title limits the analysis to the determined relationship between *postmodernism* and new spirit of capitalism, suggesting that the analysis would be reduced to the socioeconomic dimension of postmodernism alone, the subtitle considerably expands its scope and the clarifications it provides go much further than the title, for it is a question of determining a *philosophy* with a *global* scope, and which would be promoted by an *Empire* in an imperialist aim. Thus, the subtitle broadens the spectrum of the title instead of circumscribing it, which says a lot about the difficulty to reduce the intention of the text, to synthesize its enterprise, including for the author himself, whose embarrassment I share.

If this mini hermeneutic found some grace and inspired some favorable judgment, then one should be prepared to hear that the author's enterprise is much larger than what the title of the book says and that in *the end*, it is less a question of reflecting on the *New Spirit of Capitalism* than of establishing the *rationality* of a *doctrine* that serves as the foundation of the capitalism of our time, with this term of capitalism taken in a general sense that makes it appear both as an economic regime, but also as a social system dictating a certain relationship between individuals, but especially between nations. It is this social system that capitalism promotes that is assimilated to a *Philosophy of Empire* insofar as it rests on the structural principles of imperialism that it secretes at the same time. Its scope is universal, hence the idea of *philosophy* and the adjective *global* associated with it.

It therefore seems appropriate to me to argue that Nkolo Foé's objective in this book is to present postmodernism as a *doctrine*, in the *neutral* sense where the term doctrine presupposes a corpus of ideas and beliefs that form a unity; and in the *negative* sense where the purpose of such a system of ideas is the subjugation of the one to whom it is addressed, their alienation in the latter, in the sense that we speak precisely of indoctrination. In support of this interpretation, we can refer to the Foreword to the book.

The author presents himself as a fighter for truth, a liberated soul, reminiscent of Plato's cave, crusading against shadows falsely considered as truth. As such, he fights for a noble ideal of liberation whose obligatory step is the demystification of postmodern ideology, the highlighting of its *secret ends* (Nkolo Foé, 3). Nkolo Foé therein defines postmodernism as the *ideology of globalization* (Nkolo Foé, 3). What is at stake in the book is therefore to reveal the intelligibility of this ideology. The analysis aims to make it appear as a deceptive doctrine that promotes totalitarianism "while pretending to criticize the idea of totality" (Nkolo Foé, 3) because of the *polarization of the world* (Nkolo Foé, 3) that it carries within it and which it cannot get rid of. It is with these indications from the author himself in mind that we are then allowed to walk through the imposing labyrinth that is the work in which the native of Obak meticulously and fastidiously strives to flush out the postmodern hydra in each of its reinventions that make it grow a new head.

### *Postmodernism and Irrationalism*

The reproach of irrationalism is arguably the most fundamental criticism that Nkolo Foé addresses to postmodernism, in the sense that it is from it that it is possible to reconstruct the system of its criticism which rests on the idea that the system of postmodernism unfolds from irrationalism. But as said before, the term *irrationalism* has under Nkolo Foé's pen a very precise meaning that brings it closer to the postulates of ancient Greek philosophy, in particular the trio Socrates-Plato-Aristotle. For the term *reason* denotes in Nkolo Foé a pledge of rectitude and truth with the idea that rectitude is subject to truth, either as a condition or as an expression of it. The accusation of irrationalism is therefore not related to the idea that postmodern formulations and attitudes are devoid of intelligibility (logical rectitude), but rather, and more subtly, that such postmodern rectitude is not situated in a relationship

of determined dependence toward the truth. In other words, in such a situation, what one seeks is not the truth, but to be right: the *logic* underlying this attitude is not rooted in this imperative for truth, but chained to the will to persuade,<sup>11</sup> hence the original relationship that the author establishes between postmodernism and sophistry in general, (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 70 ff) or his analysis of the figure of the *feyman* (Nkolo Foé, 118 ff). The principle of irrationalism at work in sophistry as well as in the *feyman* is *trickery*, and the author ostentatiously abhors the latter term as it is a praise of deception, of the evil intelligence that aims to seduce rather than to found, to manipulate rather than to elevate. Simply put, trickery is the opportunism that feeds on bad faith (from the deceiver's point of view) and naïveté (from the victim's point of view).

At the beginning of the book, the author clearly displays his Platonism by defining irrationalism in the manner of *The Republic*. To do so, he relies on an anthropology that borrows from that of his illustrious predecessor its terms, its spirit, and its formulation. There would be, in the human being, a soul and a body, as well as activities related to the irrational functioning of the soul. Thus, the author can cite instinct, intuition, and vital impulse among the *irrational phenomena of the soul* (Nkolo Foé, 45) as all three are opposed to *logical thinking* (Nkolo Foé, 31).

Later in the text, it is such a sense of irrationalism that seems to be at work in the criticism that Nkolo Foé addresses to Eboussi Boulaga, on the grounds that *sentience*<sup>12</sup> is at the *heart* of his philosophy (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 155). Now, the author, in a Platonic vein, equates sentience with instinct, passions, the unleashing of petulance that characterizes the being that is not provided with reason, that is to say, at first sight, temperance (this is what Plato speaks about in the first place), and then rigor and discipline. And in such a space enclosed in oneself in the natural appearance of one's immediate being, there is obviously no place for truth, for the work on oneself.

<sup>11</sup> See on page 133, the distinction that the author draws all in power and in a flash, between *to convince* and *to persuade*, by analyzing the figure of the ironist whom he compares to the *classical philosopher*.

<sup>12</sup> This is how I propose to render Eboussi Boulaga's *sentir* in English. In doing so, I depart from the existing English translation of Fabien Eboussi Boulaga's *La crise du Muntu* (see Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Muntu in Crisis: African Authenticity and Philosophy* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2014), 211 ff.), in which are chosen the terms *feeling* and *sentiment*. I explain in detail the reasons for my disagreement elsewhere.

on emotions and other affections of the soul, hence a particular way of apprehending truth (in the metaphysical sense as well as in the social and political sense) that insists on "the diverse, the circumstantial, the contingent, the fleeting and the elementary" (Nkolo Foé, 155). If in the first case the irrational pointed to a tendency of reflection, in this second case, this term refers to a clearly identifiable objective content so that the irrational is not only a disposition, but a set of properties that generally oppose the ideal of clarity and understanding, it being understood that such an ideal is that of reason, while the opposite characters belong to the irrational part of the soul, or — the question remaining unanswered in the book — to the body, considered the *sine qua non* (Nkolo Foé, 31) of these characteristics and the phenomena related to it.

By intersecting these two meanings of the term *irrationalism* in Nkolo Foé, one obtains, in the affirmed continuity of Plato, the general definition according to which the irrational is either a *state* or a *functioning* that comes from the fact that there is no absolute, that the reality of the world is the reality of perpetual deceptive adjustment, that changes according to situations and interests, that the essential is the inessential and that as such it is to be related to what is inferior in the human being, whether it is the soul or the body (since the text does not settle this question). A phenomenon is irrational when it falls within the scope of this definition; a practice is irrational when its functioning obeys it; and finally, a reflection is irrational when these postulates serve as its premises and methodological compasses. This is the basis of Nkolo Foé's critique of American pragmatism<sup>13</sup> on the one hand, and French structuralism and, more precisely, of the idea of deconstruction on the other. These malicious opponents are clearly identified in the conclusion of the "Position of the problem" that opens and situates the book's problematics.

In making the accusation of irrationalism, the author oscillates in an adjusted way between the meaning of this term which highlights the characteristics identified above (among many others that relate to it) and the other meaning that rather aims at the functioning of a philosophy, a thought, or a doctrine. And postmodernism is not irrational by its characteristics but more

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed critique of pragmatism, see: Nkolo Foé, "Pragmatism as a Vision of the World and as a Method: A Philosophical Examination of the Challenges Presented to Contemporary Social Research by Subjective Idealism," in *Readings in Methodology: African Perspectives*, ed. Carlos Cardoso and J.-B. Ouedraogo (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2011), 3–16.

by its functioning, by the philosophy (in the general sense) that animates it and that unfolds through particular thoughts and doctrines.

We should be able to conclude that Nkolo Foé's criticism is not a factual criticism (as naïveté may be led to think by understanding the term *irrationalism* in an extremely vulgar sense where the conceptual content that Nkolo Foé lodges in it vanishes), but a criticism at the highest philosophical point. Its basic assertion is that postmodernism is a *Newspeak* of which structuralism is a cornerstone of the vocabulary.

### *Structuralism and Postmodern Doctrine*

Postmodernism is a philosophy (defined *lato sensu* as a more or less consciously articulated thought displaying a certain pretension). It is also a philosophy in the technical sense of the term, i.e., a precise implementation of this general thought according to determined principles. This is how Nkolo Foé can argue that the philosophies of postmodernism are on the one hand pragmatism and on the other hand structuralism. I focus here only on the second *doctrine* which fulfills the first insofar as it appears to be more totalitarian than the latter in the realization of the profound irrationalist purpose contained in the postmodern ambition to put an end to the great ideals of modernity, in particular to "refute the idea of 'objective truth'" (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 65), as argued by the author. Pragmatism, as a doctrine (in the sense determined above), of course displays a totalitarian tendency when it proposes, for example, to deploy its irrationalism on several fronts, particularly in the fields of philosophy, epistemology, and ethics. However, pragmatism does not attack the notion of history: this is its main limit as an irrational doctrine, the internal tipping point that pushes it to curl up on itself to leave room to account for the spirit of postmodernism to a more aggressive doctrine, i.e., situated higher on the scale of irrationality from which Nkolo Foé can judge the potential for philosophical nuisance, namely structuralism.

In themselves, pragmatism and structuralism are therefore identical in principle, while they differ for themselves, the first doctrine being confined at first sight to science, from where it slides surreptitiously toward areas more directly related to society that it can then rule from the instinctive abyssal background buried in the soul (or body) of each individual. For Nkolo Foé,

it is structuralism that completes the transformation of postmodernism into a *universal doctrine*.

Marcien Towa's disciple argues that "It was in the 1960s-1970s that structuralism began to prepare the ground for the current postmodern wave" (Nkolo Foé, 77), hence the remark that "A study of postmodernism would therefore be incomplete without a serious look at structuralism itself" (Nkolo Foé, 77), which the author endeavors to provide. The crime of pragmatism was the sin of not combining rectitude and desire for truth. The crime of structuralism is to insist on the unconscious nature of consciously studied objects and phenomena. But by recalling its origins, or more precisely its social foundations as a scientific doctrine, Nkolo Foé points out the fact that such an approach is ultimately commanded by a certain clearly identifiable world view that politically and socially *sullies* the formalism that was to guarantee it a certain epistemological *purity*. As such, structuralism thus appears as an ideology at the service of the administered world, hence the idea of "structure," which in reality refers to the *operative objectives* of capitalism that must be *concealed*. This is how the author discovers a "stabilizing and apologetic function" (Nkolo Foé, 80) to structuralism whereby it necessarily appears as an ideology of the rejection of history, with this term of history defined as the objective result of the conscious work of autonomous individuals animated by certain determined goals that guide their actions according to a certain rationality. Overhanging the individual — whom modernity defines as a conscious and autonomous subject, i.e., fundamentally as a free and responsible agent —, the *structure* reduces the latter to the position of a stooge, of a puppet of this impersonal and blind entity that crushes and manipulates them unconsciously. According to Nkolo Foé, it follows from what precedes that from a structuralist point of view, it is not only ineffective to try to reconstitute the rationality of events (therefore history), but more profoundly, it is scientifically impossible to do so, the most effective being to consider these fragments in their conceptual and phenomenal isolation which naturally refutes their *meaning* and therefore the idea of an explanation that can make them appear as part of a system, in the sense that this term implies a continuous, linear and architectonic understanding of events and phenomena. In such a perspective, history can never tell *the* truth; it results from arrangements of the one who tells or restores it; these arrangements are necessarily marked by the seal of partisan subjectivity that distinguishes events between those selected

as endowed with meaning and those who are rejected as being deprived; as an arbitrary rearrangement of fragmented reality, history is itself a betrayal of what is. The resulting *totality* has no *totality* but the name, hence the constitutive lie of its claim to tell the truth unequivocally. Structuralism therefore institutes a sanctification of the fragment which serves as an archaeological basis for "The structural contestation of history" (Nkolo Foé, 81), for the *liquidation* of such a thought, following author's wording (Nkolo Foé, 84). Structuralism makes a law of this requirement, namely *the law of fragmentation* (Nkolo Foé, 122 ff), that Nkolo Foé presents as one of the load-bearing walls of postmodern thought.

Therefore, the purpose of structuralism, its main idea, is not so much the idea of the existence of a structure that would overhang human, free action, but rather the idea of *deconstruction*. And in the name of the refutation of systems, structuralism poses itself as a system of deconstruction, with this term of *system* referring here to the idea of legitimate propositions by themselves, based on themselves, justifying each other in a self-referential way, and therefore turning in circles (Nkolo Foé, 86-87).

Nkolo Foé criticizes, rightly and with a force that can hardly be blamed on him, the semblance of movement that stems from such a theoretical position and its philosophical realization. The resulting stability has nothing to do with *progress*, but rather commands the servile repetition of the same at the same time as it prohibits the alteration of this vicious circle on the grounds of *fear of the future* (Nkolo Foé, 100), an argument by which the author can finally conclude that structuralism and its avatars are reactionary: the *eternal present* (Nkolo Foé, 101) which it justifies and defends, brings back archaically and in a very subtle way to the *medieval present* of which it realizes the sinister and pernicious actualization.

### III. – Categories

The concepts presented above belong in their own right to Nkolo Foé insofar as they are to be linked to the criticism that the latter addresses in a general way to postmodernism and in a particular way to the structuralist doctrine which presents itself as one of his theoretical outgrowths. These concepts are guided by the categories of the discourse of structuralism (and thus of the

entire postmodern discourse), three of which are of particular interest to the philosopher of the École Normale, in that they allow him to define in intention the postmodern intention: the fragment and deconstruction at the methodological level, and the subject at the sociopolitical level.

*The Fragment as a Philosophy of Structuralism:  
New Predecessors and Old Genealogy*

Basically, structuralism follows Eleatic philosophy on the question of movement. Both assert a suspension of time and its properties by means of fragmentation. Nkolo Foé states its principle, namely "to decompose trajectories and paths into an infinity of distinct and discrete units" (Nkolo Foé, 84), each of these units being what ought to be called a fragment. And the fragments are not related to each other in a necessary way, as shown by the analysis of Zeno's arguments proposed by Nkolo Foé (the argument of the dichotomy, the argument of Achilles and the tortoise, and the argument of the arrow), so that the fragmentation of time *ultimately* leads to the negation of movement, including the very negation of its mere possibility. However, as Nkolo Foé shows by referring to Heraclitus, the movement is history, life. Thus, to refute the movement is in a general and abstract way to refute the idea of a continuous movement that animates the world, an idea that translates socially into the acceptance of the world order (political institutions in particular) as made of data *ne varietur*, already there and therefore eternal. The stake of the thought of the movement is therefore more political than strictly philosophical, as Nkolo Foé rightly argues, since its postulates, allegedly theoretical, ultimately lead to the practical reflection on society,<sup>14</sup> which it is a question of justifying by philosophical conservatism and in *a priori* manner, at the same time the existence and the functioning.

Nkolo Foé sees in structuralism "the same disdain for movement, the same rejection of history and progress" (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 86) that characterizes the thought of Zeno and Parmenides, with the only difference that structuralism does not only repeat Eleatic philosophy in its desire to liquidate historical thought. In fact, it extends it in a finer way, to the point

<sup>14</sup> As far as the philosophers summoned by the author are concerned, the society targeted here is Greek.



of transforming into a law what was then a simple principle for the Ancient Greeks. And the structuralists are not content, like their predecessors Zeno and Parmenides, to apply reflection from the fragment to the abstract entities that are being and movement; the postmodern totalitarianism that animates their thought commands that the domination of the fragment goes beyond the domain of abstraction to reach its full existence, to flourish in effectiveness, where it can then rest in-and-for-itself, to become a *universal motto* (Nkolo Foé, 169). This is what happens, for example, as Nkolo Foé argues, when structuralism seizes the human being by striving to destroy the category of the subject that is traditionally (tradition being here modernity) attached to it.

### *Deconstruction and "Postmodern Subject"*

The strangeness of the *Postmodern Subject*, the concept in which Nkolo Foé's criticism culminates, is, quite surprisingly, the fact that such a subject does not exist, for the simple reason that it is only by abuse (which is said in charity for his opponent) that the author allows himself to speak of a *subject* in the context of postmodernity. This concept is more the mark of a desolation rather than a criticism strictly speaking; it grasps in one word (postmodern being only associated with it) the philosophical, economic, sociological, and cultural situation in which the modern concept of the human being is situated once it passes the threshold of this ideology. This is an essentially negative concept, exclusively defined as a deprivation of the modern subject. It is in the fifth chapter of his book that Nkolo Foé draws its most exhaustive portrait.

Broadly speaking, the *postmodern subject* is the *fragmented subject* (Nkolo Foé, 123), or *The human in pieces* (Nkolo Foé, 123) of which Michel Foucault is philosophically the father, since it is he who reveals it as "dispersed, mobile, flexible. Displaying no essence" (Nkolo Foé, 123). In a word, such a *subject* is the inevitable consequence of structuralism, which goes so far as to deny it any quality of subject as conceived by modern thought, which endowed it notably with the right to historical initiative, the latter implying *de facto* freedom on the one hand, and on the other hand responsibility. The author understands this 'desubstantiation' of the subject, so to speak, as a necessity of *globalization* and the *nominalism* inherent in it. No longer having social and objective benchmarks, a firm place from which to start, the *postmodern subject* is abandoned willy-nilly to *mobility*, the only way to be-in-the-world that is

still possible for it. But *mobility* is one of the *imperatives of the global market itself* (Nkolo Foé, 124). This is a way of saying that it is in fact commanded by capitalism, whose views it ontologically fulfills by turning human beings into commodities at its disposal. And since the very nature of the commodity is to circulate and vanish in consumption, the *postmodern subject* is also a commodity at the disposal of capital. Nkolo Foé can therefore affirm that the imperative of *flexibility* that goes along with and provides a contractual framework for *mobility*, is dictated through and through by the new spirit of capitalism that reinforces the alienation of human beings by depriving them not only of their labor power, but also of their strength as members of a larger social entity that gives meaning and intelligibility to their existence as individuals, representatives of it. By isolating the individual from these traditional structures and institutions that provides their sociability and life with a framework, postmodern thought makes the *subject* an empty shell, without a point of attachment, namely a fragment, to speak the language of the previous category. This is — the author does not mention it, but it has no incidence on his argument — a fairly classic predation technique that consists in isolating the victim from the herd in order to better kill them. Such individuals, cut off from everything, including themselves, have no choice but to present themselves naked and without the possibility of defense before the Moloch. The joyful acceptance of their situation from which they can theorize the world that terrorizes them is the supreme mark of their alienation, the sign that the process of training has been excellently successful: postmodernism is a discipline, in the sense that it is a question, by constraining processes, of making disappear a natural behavior to install a totally conditioned behavior, and this without even needing excitement anymore. According to this criteriology by Nkolo Foé, 1984 is a postmodern rather than a modern novel, especially if we consider what comes out of the mouth of Inspector O'Brien who questions Winston Smith and the character of this figure whose goal is explicitly to transform the revolutionary he has in front of him into a docile lamb. For it is not only a question of overcoming his recklessness but of making him internalize his defeat so that he is happy to obey, happy with his situation of being dominated. In this sense, the last sentences of the novel are written in the tone of an unbearable horror when they are related to Winston Smith's initial project to which they serve as a tragic ending: *But it was all right, everything was right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over*

himself. He loved Big Brother. By scrupulously following Nkolo Foé, one would have no difficulty in detecting what is intrinsically and authentically postmodern in these words of George Orwell.

At the time of monarchical Europe, authors (writers, artists, and philosophers) signed *Your most humble and obedient servant*, while making a mockery of their patrons and protectors whose foundation and authority they consciously undermined by their words or works. With regard to the *postmodern subject*, this delicious sneaky artifice loses its superbness and is only a shadow of what it used to be. When the latter signs their statement in this way, they are always literally true to this formula. Moreover, it cannot be otherwise, since postmodernism signs the end of metaphysics, i.e., also the end of ambiguous statements: everything must be immediately prehensible and understandable, transparent, without any opacity and of foolproof clarity. Authenticity is at this price. One must comply with it or disappear miserably. Thus, fragmentation is also the possibility of immediate handiness, without contours. Such a situation confirms the death of criticism and the impossibility even of even consider it. Therefore, freedom takes the name of degradation: at the level of the individual, it is renunciation to oneself; at the level of the state, it is adjustment, submission to *The ideology of governmentality* (Nkolo Foé, 143).

Nkolo Foé's *postmodern subject* is therefore situated in the negation, or to put it correctly, in the deconstruction of the modern subject insofar as it consciously undermines all the achievements of the latter and all the ideals on which it was founded and from which it drew its justification. But as the modern world was based on the modern subject, the rectification of the latter necessarily implies the rectification of the former, its rejection. The world it outlines, promotes, and tends to impose, operates on the imperial model, hence the idea of a *postmodern Empire* (Nkolo Foé, 149), which commands, and to which we are summoned to obey, not only mechanically, but thoughtfully, joyfully. For to hope for a hypothetical retribution from the postmodern Master, the essential thing is not to suffer it, but to sing its praises, to chant the hymns of its victory, so that everywhere on earth, every knee bows to its name. Nkolo Foé, who does hear these catchy songs, is not resigned to them, nevertheless; his ambition is to remain standing and to fight against this global indoctrination that strikes even the most penetrating minds. In this, his book

is on the side of the resistance. The author is justified in taking Samir Amin for a father.

*Almost-Digression to Try to Apply What  
Precedes Immediately to the Case of Plato*

Adoulou N. Bitang

With the help of Nkolo Foé's theory, or more precisely of his critique of postmodernism, as this trend of thought can be seen via the structuralist doctrine of which the philosopher of the École Normale draws the clinical portrait, it seems legitimate to us to attempt a singular rapprochement between a philosopher particularly appreciated by the author and the postmodern doctrine. Indeed, by the way in which it is summoned both explicitly and implicitly, Plato appears as a reference of choice of Nkolo Foé's discourse as he would be in many respects a representative example of what a philosopher should be.<sup>15</sup> But it seems to me that an important part of the work of this disciple of Socrates can be compared, both in spirit and in letter, to what Nkolo Foé and Jacques Derrida mean by deconstruction.

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Nkolo Foé defines deconstruction, in a determined way, as destruction whose sufferers are modernity and its concepts (ideals, freedom, truth, progress, Reason, ...). Relying on Derrida's philosophy, Nkolo Foé can write that deconstruction "is seized as an attempt to subvert the Western philosophical heritage or, also, an effort of problematization, of questioning the domination of the concept and of reason itself" (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 34). With these words, the native of Obak expands the narrow definition that Derrida himself gives to the deconstructive enterprise, namely a work on language and the *différance* produced by the unsaid that slips in between what is revealed and what is silenced. Deconstruction, therefore, does not have only one moment, and this is why reducing it to destruction is somewhat simplistic, since it must also be considered that the deconstruction enterprise is a

<sup>15</sup> It is true that Nkolo Foé distances himself from Plato on several occasions, notably when he castigates the conservatism of his social doctrine (Nkolo Foé, 86, 93), as well as its inegalitarian content (Nkolo Foé, 86). Nevertheless, in general, he is quite complimentary toward Socrates' disciple, whether it is to present him as a victorious hero in the fight against sophistry (Nkolo Foé, 182.), or as a master thinker of a utopian model of society (Nkolo Foé, 113), next to Karl Marx. This, of course, is not to mention other borrowings and positions whose paternity is not revealed or claimed explicitly.

reorganization of what is said (and hence of what is) so that the constitutive difference of its gesture of being is part of its process of analysis and reception as an object of reflection.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, deconstruction is not against the truth, but only against the mythological approach of the latter, where the contradiction is drowned in the immediate appearance of unity, by the lie of the univocity of the said.<sup>17</sup>

In this, deconstruction is not opposed, as *common sense* likes to believe, to reason, but rather to myth, hence the rapprochement with Plato, when we note that a large part of his doctrine is a tactical response to the advances of myth, especially to what he considers ontological, philosophical and political errors in those he applies to criticize.

Indeed, the critique of art deployed in *The Republic* is largely critical of the mythological content of the work of poets and mimetic works that attach themselves (myth obliges) to present error (a tendentious vision of divinity among poets and a tendentious vision of reality in the imitative arts) instead of truth. The opposition between *μῦθος* and *λόγος*, which is used by Plato to criticize poets on the one hand and by the Sophists on the other, fulfills the tactical need to oppose what, from its historical point of view, still has the value of *λόγος*, that is, the discourse carrying and holding the truth. Plato does not therefore attack myth as such, but what in his time has the value of reason, the value of truth. In this perspective, and by rigorously following the categories of the criticism that Nkolo Foé addresses to postmodernism, it is quite possible to postulate an original rapprochement whose conviction is to consider Plato as a postmodern philosopher, i.e., as a thinker who attacks the rational ideals (of his time), which he violently reduces to mythology, including when these ideals are political.

In the same vein, we should be able to see, in his critique of democracy, the fact that Plato positions himself fiercely against any form of equality between human beings, and therefore militates ardently for a fragmented society in which each individual (only from a general point of view, of course) is summoned to remain in their place, the latter being determined by nature.

<sup>16</sup> About *différance* and the work of deconstruction that it entails, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Corrected Edition (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); and Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Routledge Classics (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> See François Mary, "La Déconstruction et Le Problème de La Vérité," *Les Études Philosophiques* 105, no. 2 (2013): 221–38.

and from all eternity, as rigorously drawing a more or less indisputable demarcation line between those who are predisposed by nature, either to govern or to be governed. Plato therefore leaves, like the Eleatics — ancestors of structuralism and postmodernity in general — intact the question of social inequalities by breaking down society into fragments (what he calls the *classes*). The “noble lie” is in *The Republic*, the most striking statement of this *law of fragmentation* that runs through Plato’s political discourse in the desire to establish a utopian society in which happiness would be expressed in the participation of all in the march of the city, of all, even in inequality... With these convictions, one discovers in Plato a theoretician of adjustment, of fragment, as well as, at the same time, a severe critic of the ancient world and its truth, all characteristics that bring him closer to postmodernism as defined by Nkolo Foé by the means of Derrida’s concept of deconstruction.

76 But to say so is not enough and the rapprochement between Plato and postmodernism would not be accurate unless Nkolo Foé’s theory is amputated from its most powerful argument, namely the accusation of irrationalism. For it is not enough to deconstruct to be postmodern. This is why, to this idea of Derrida, the philosopher of the *École Normale* therefore adds the irrational content. From this point of view, the argument that precedes lacks the side by which Plato’s philosophy comes to position itself as irrationalism and as praise of such a way of being and doing. And as it is customary for the philosophical tradition to regard Plato as a fervent defender of rationality, this failure seems to negate the present attempt to broaden Nkolo Foé’s point of view to Greek antiquity and to this precise author. Fortunately, Plato’s work is not, as we shall see shortly, immune to the criticism of irrationalism. In fact, irrationalism is one of the first shortcomings noticed by the best disciple of Socrates’ pupil, making it, from a historical point of view, one of the first philosophical criticisms that Plato’s thought had to face.

Indeed, in his criticism of his master in Book Alpha of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle accuses Plato of obscuring reality more than necessary. According to Aristotle, even if the theory of Forms represents a significant overcoming of the conceptions that predate it in Greece, it suffers from great difficulty when it comes to judging its practical usefulness in the restricted and technical framework of the explanation of the causes of the things in the world. Aristotle thus argues that the greatest difficulty of Plato’s theory is to explain how “the Forms of perceptibles might contribute to the eternal things or to things that

come into being and are destroyed. For they are the cause neither of change nor of any modification for them."<sup>16</sup>

In short, the theory of Forms is unnecessarily abstruse, to the point where "they do not contribute in any way either to the science of the others [i.e., other things]" (Aristotle, 34). And Aristotle therefore concludes that the final usefulness of Forms (in relation to the explanation of the reality of things and therefore of their truth) is quite negligible. As such, "to say that they are paradigms and that other things participate in them is to say nothing and to give poetic metaphors" (Aristotle, 34). This is how, quite ironically, Plato, who fiercely fought against the poets, is given this name by his own disciple.

From what precedes and considering the concept of irrationality at work in Nkolo Foé's book, it is quite clear that Plato's theory of Forms is an irrationalism, as is his theory of the organization of society according to strata determined by the metal of which the souls of individuals are made. Indeed, in one or the other of the cases, Plato arguably produces a discourse that is rational (from the point of view of its internal logic, i.e., its *functioning*), but whose purpose or concern, is not the truth. In the first case, it is a question of masking the external reality, of denying it any ontological depth by situating it, in a phantasmatic way, in an absolute intelligible sky which is philosophically unnecessary, as argued by Aristotle. In the second case, it is a question of masking the reality of the injustice of the doctrine of natural privileges that his theory of society necessarily secretes. This is also why, according to Plato, it is necessary that the one who is in charge of the education of the members of the city be a liar, i.e., someone not true but pragmatic, to whom the disciple of Socrates assigns as a mission, in the words of Nkolo Foé, not to convince, but to persuade the people under their responsibility and control.

We are, with this portrait of Plato, far from the figure of the "classical philosopher, serious, rigorous, masterful, prisoner of the logical argument" (Nkolo Foé, *Le Postmodernisme...*, 133) that Nkolo Foé venerates, praises, and defends. Rather, we discover a Plato less prompt to defend the truth and more inclined toward lies (*noble*, in his defense) and the ferociously rational theorization of inequality between human beings, all things that lead, if we believe the native of Obak, to bring him fatally (at least to some extent) closer to his criticism of postmodernism.

<sup>16</sup>Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 34.

But since it is not to Plato that Nkolo Foé refers when it comes to providing references to postmodernism and more precisely to structuralism, it is not necessary to stop here any longer. Let us turn instead to the thinker who crystallizes the author's attention on this subject, namely Michel Foucault, trying, as previously, to argue five steps from the precipice that is barbarism.

*The Idea of "Structure": Nkolo Foé and the Shadow of Foucault*

According to Nkolo Foé, it is indeed to Michel Foucault that we owe (among others, but the case of Foucault is the most telling in the book), to have introduced into philosophy the structuralist gangrene and its dangerous rhetoric. It is in this capacity that the author repeatedly summons the book *The Order of Things*, to which he devotes two dissertations. (Nkolo Foé, 78-79, 102-4). The first of these dissertations undertakes to demonstrate the irrationalist character of Foucault's thought because of the distance it takes from the Cartesian cogito. This distance allows the French philosopher to maintain that the human being cannot be thought of correctly as being worked by self-consciousness, but to the greatest extent worried by the clear awareness of his finitude, i.e., their unconscious background that structures the thought as it is defined — as in the cogito — by its conscious character. Hence the preponderant place occupied by the unthought in modern thought, a situation that Nkolo Foé, according to the concepts of his analysis presented above, equates to irrationalism. In the second dissertation, Nkolo Foé extends his first argument by striving this time to unveil "the anti-humanist project at the heart of structuralism" (Nkolo Foé, 102), a project by which Foucault proves to be a resolute opponent of "the humanist utopia which assigned to itself the task of establishing the reign of the human being and achieving their liberation" (Nkolo Foé, 102). To this effect, it is necessary to liberate human beings from history and place them within historical singularities that do not necessarily have a relationship with each other: this is what Foucault does by bursts of irrationalism according to Nkolo Foé. Thus, the Professor at the Collège de France destroys, at the same time and by the same move, history, the human being, and the very possibility of a commitment of the thought.

There remains an ambiguity in this reading of Foucault, and it is relative to the idea of structure by which Nkolo Foé taught us that structuralism denied history and progress, in the manner of the Eleatics, i.e., by the negation



of the movement. Here, it would rather be the rejection of linear history in favor of fragmentary history, constantly turbulent, which would defeat history in the traditional sense of the word. Thus, we are faced with two contradictory interpretations where the fragment refers on the one hand to the cessation of the movement and on the other, to the impossibility of stopping the latter in order to identify an unequivocal, positive meaning that brings together, in a single shot, all the previous representations that it objectively stabilizes in a reified rendering, what one could allow themselves to call *knowledge*. But this instability of Nkolo Foé's critique, by which the latter unfolds in an enigmatic way, corresponds (this distinction is absent from the argument that it nevertheless helps to enlighten) to the two concepts of history in Foucault: when the term is used in reference to its functioning within the classical *episteme* or when it refers to an approach limited to the referential framework of the modern *episteme*. In the first case Foucault speaks of *History* (with capital H), while in the second he simply writes *history* (with a small h), the graphic difference translating the other more important difference by which History presents itself as the objective expression of the conviction that words directly mean the things they do not only represent, but also exhaust as they immediately say the being of the latter: such a history writes Foucault, is *natural* in that it supposes a smooth relationship, i.e., neutralized and faithful — *pure* — between words and what they represent.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously, Foucault argues, this is a mistake based on the illusion of a nature without depth, immediately intelligible and given as such to know it. This is why nature has not thickened in this movement that passes from the Renaissance to the sixteenth century: it is history which, with the help of the principle of representation and under the influence of the latter, has been made natural, emptied of any interiority, of all depth. The epistemological naïveté of such an attitude presupposes and relies on "the apparent simplicity of a *description of the visible*" (Foucault, 149. Foucault's emphasis). Such a history loses its superbness when one begins to suspect again a depth of things, a side by which they resist representation, i.e., their apprehension directly objective, positive; the side by which they appear as opaque or refractory to the rigorous classification that says once and for all what they are; in short, when one postulates, about them, an invisible part, a hidden meaning. And as in

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, Routledge Classics (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 143.

Nietzsche, much of the distance between History and history is the awareness of the *historical sense*. In this perspective, it is no coincidence that the privileged object of natural history was precisely subjects incapable of making history (in the chronological sense of sequence of events), namely plants and animals. But such a History is not *true* (this is Foucault's term), since events (which are not strictly speaking events, but which are in reality simple descriptions, produced by a faculty of observation reduced to its most elementary form) are not approached under the prism of the *irruptive violence of time* (Foucault, 144).

However, we should not believe that history loses this character of History; in fact, part of the life of the latter is preserved in the former in that a linear arrangement of the events is assumed, a linear character that is concomitant if not implicitly contained in the descriptive activity of History. To a certain extent, modern *episteme* retains this positive pretension of its predecessor that it tries to apply to its new object: human beings, which cannot be more clumsily understood as limited either to their aspect of reason or to their physiological aspect of externalization of a body, even if, in Foucault's view, the man as an invention, is indeed an illusion of the modern *episteme* and more precisely of the human sciences. This does not mean that there are no human beings *hic et nunc*, in flesh and blood, or in spirit; rather, it means that man as a positive object of science is a being of reason, a conceptual fantasy that serves to epistemologically justify the rise and foundation of the human sciences as they are not interested in man through the prism of one of his activities (life, labor and language), but as a complex organism defined by his inability to be defined, that is to say, to be circumscribed in a rigorously scientific way. Man is thus a large thick cloud whose essence must be pierced, the depth of which must be revealed, which lies precisely in the fact that he is not (entirely) subject to the intangible but fatal mechanical law that guides the course of things in the world. The naïve assurance of man's most positive approaches lies in the will and the pretension to herbalize this new object, to put an end to the shadow part that constitutes it and by which it has historically (and not Historically) detached itself from the classical epistemological domains that are life, labor and language. To reflect on man is thus to reflect on the totally abstract category that brings unity to these three separate domains without being united to itself. The *end of man* is the end of this naïveté or, if one prefers, of this claim to make man an object, as was once

the case for natural organisms in the history that is related to them; it is a question of returning man to his complexity, that is to say also to the moment by which he has been bound by orders that overshadow him and which, for this reason, orient this objectively positive surface of his being that is considered as an essential characteristic of his concept. It is therefore the end of several illusions and the recognition of certain situations that make the dilettante assurance of man as an object of science waver. Among these illusions is prominently the idea that it is man<sup>20</sup> that founds knowledge. Actually, Foucault believes, he is precisely the product of particular circumstances by which he comes to be thought of as the object of thought. His place is therefore not first in the history of knowledge. By this position which makes him an accident (a product of history...), man is no longer thought of as the center of the epistemological system, but rather as one of its products. One misses Foucault's argument if they imagine, for this reason, that the end of man is equivalent to the end of human beings, just as his birth would mark the historical beginning of humanity. Rather, what is at stake in Foucault is the epistemological kingdom of man — considered as a concept of knowledge — as a fundamental epistemic category. What Foucault's archaeological analysis shows is that there have already historically been theories of knowledge and knowledge itself, without having a theory of man or even a concept of man at the foundation of such theories and knowledge. In this perspective, there is therefore nothing fundamentally antihumanist on the one hand to recall these epistemic ages, and on the other hand, to see how such a situation is again occurring under the influence of psychoanalysis and ethnology in particular.

One should be able to find — as Marcien Towa found for the scientist in his approach to the relationship between religion, science and philosophy — a certain *neutrality* to this discourse of Foucault, an archaeologist's neutrality which makes his speech a simple *Report on knowledge* rather than a militant profession of faith. The death of man is not a *creed*, but the description of an observation in the development of the so-called *human sciences* and epistemological presuppositions that serve as their foundations. And since Foucault's analysis consciously invokes the category of history by questioning the development of knowledge in the Western world up to the time he writes, it is difficult to reproach the author for forgetting such a category and thus

<sup>20</sup> Not the objective psychosomatic compound, but the concept, as it was defined in an ideal way from the end of the eighteenth century by knowledge.

promoting its rejection. In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault — as he had promised three years earlier — explains the methodological perspective of his archaeological approach, which he actually presents as a *description* whose principle departs from the idea that “succession is an absolute: a primary, indis-sociable sequence to which discourse is subjected by the law of its finitude,”<sup>21</sup> so that one can argue “that there is in discourse only one form and only one level of succession” (Foucault, 169). As we know, such a way of proceeding intends to “treat as simultaneous what is given as successive” (Foucault, 169), “to substitute for its flux of events correlations that outline a motionless figure” (Foucault, 169). Archaeology thus insists on discontinuity, but the latter pre-serves in a dialectical way, with all due respect to *common sense*, a part of continuity without which it would be impossible for it to pose formally<sup>22</sup> as discontinuous. Without this more or less openly linear possibility (including when linearity is a derivative of negativity), there would be no possibility of accounting for history in an archaeological way, as Michel Foucault does. This is why the principle of rupture operating in the sense of the idea of disconti-nuity is not a positive principle: it does not mark once and for all the way of being of the analyzed being, namely history. As such, it does not function in a totalitarian way, like the requirement of linearity or the rule of antecedent and consequent, a practical translation of the positive scientific principle of causality. It is in such an architecture that the category of *structure* can take shape and should be analyzed in the prospect of identifying its explanatory potential.

## Conclusion —

This brief foray into the thought of Professor Nkolo Foé allowed us to see that structuralism, mainly represented by Michel Foucault<sup>23</sup>, is one of the designated opponents of the philosopher of the École Normale. The reason for this animosity was shown by following a thematic reorganization of the

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 169.

<sup>22</sup> Form: being the only concrete possibility of resistance to the totality of positivity in a sense that nevertheless deviates from any philosophy that naively assumes the distinction of form and content.

text that highlighted its genealogy, concepts and categories. The legitimacy of such an approach was also exposed, evaluated and returned to its context of enunciation. We thus hope to have contributed — even modestly — to a better understanding of the philosophy of this fervent disciple of the Master of Endama.

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<sup>25</sup> About what Michel Foucault himself think of this association of his thought with structuralism, it might be of interest to read the foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, especially its two last paragraphs. See Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, xv.

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