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Utu-centric Philo-Praxis: Engaging with our common futures beyond the Anthropocene

Philo-Praxis centrada em Utu: Engajando-se com nossos futuros comuns além do Antropoceno

Filopraxis centrada en Utu: compromiso con nuestros futuros comunes más allá del Antropoceno

Cheikh Thiam [1]

Abstract: In this text, Cheikh Thiam starts from the postulation that even though the history of pan-African engagement has always been conscious of the necessity of an epistemic stance that underscores the need to "delink" from the pervasiveness of coloniality, specialists of Africana studies have too often created an imagined idea of Africa framed around its difference (or similarities) with the idea of Europe while they conceive of the African subject as a Black-way-of-being-White. Building on the decolonial Africana tradition, Thiam argues that a careful exegesis of African ontologies, epistemologies, and socio-political organizations founded on utu-centric worldviews offers an epistemic option that creates the possibility to think outside of the limits of the modernity/coloniality dialectic by providing us with a radically decentered epistemic framework. Such an endogenous and decolonial framework offers the possibility to engage differently with the idea and allows, in turn, a way to engage differently with some of the most critical issues that our world faces today, namely, "White Supremacy and environmental inequity pointed out by the recent outcry that followed the murder of George Floyd and the current COVID 19 pandemic
Key words: Decoloniality. Delinking. Utu/ubuntu. Modernity. Africa.

Resumo: Neste artigo, partimos da premissa de que embora a história do envolvimento

pan-africano tenha sido sempre consciente da necessidade de uma postura epistémica baseada na necessidade de se afastar da colonialidade, os estudiosos dos estudos africanos inventaram demasiadas vezes uma ideia de África pensada em termos da sua diferença (ou semelhanças) com a ideia de Europa que, infelizmente, leva a uma concepção do sujeito africano como a versão negra do "eu" sublimado do "homem branco". Com base na tradição descolonial, argumentamos que uma exegese cuidadosa das ontologias, epistemologias e organizações sócio-políticas africanas baseadas em visões de mundo utu-centradas nos oferece a possibilidade de pensar a África e o mundo fora dos limites da dialéctica modernidade/colonialismo. Um tal quadro endógeno e descolonial dá-nos assim a possibilidade de nos envolvermos de forma diferente com a "ideia de África" e permite-nos repensar algumas das questões mais importantes que o nosso mundo enfrenta, nomeadamente, a supremacia branca e a desigualdade ambiental realçada pelo recente clamor na sequência do assassinato de George Floyd e da actual pandemia da COVID 19.
Palavras-chave: Descolonização. Desprendimento. Utu/ubuntu. Modernidade. África.

Resumen: En este trabajo, partimos de la premisa de que, aunque la historia del compromiso panafricano siempre ha sido consciente de la necesidad de una postura epistémica basada en la necesidad de alejarse de la colonialidad, los estudiosos de África han inventado con demasiada frecuencia una idea de África pensada en términos de su diferencia (o similitudes) con la idea de Europa que, por desgracia, conduce a una concepción del sujeto africano como la versión negra del yo sublimado del "hombre blanco". Basándonos en la tradición decolonial, argumentamos que una cuidadosa exégesis de las ontologías, epistemologías y organizaciones sociopolíticas africanas basadas en visiones del mundo utu-céntricas nos ofrece la posibilidad de pensar África y el mundo fuera de los confines de la dialéctica modernidad/colonialismo. Este marco endógeno y decolonial nos ofrece, pues, la posibilidad de abordar de forma diferente la "idea de África" y nos permite repensar algunas de las cuestiones más importantes a las que se enfrenta nuestro mundo, a saber, la supremacía blanca y la desigualdad medioambiental, puestas de manifiesto por el reciente clamor tras el asesinato de George Floyd y la actual pandemia de COVID 19.
Palabras Clave: Descolonialidad. Desvinculación. Utu/ubuntu. Modernidad. África.

Introduction

One of the most critical observations to come out of the modernity/coloniality project remains Walter Mignolo's formulation that "the crooked rhetoric that naturalizes 'modernity' as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side: the constant reproduction of "coloniality" (2007, p.450). In other words, to think in terms of modernity/coloniality was already to beg the question, and to subscribe to the "perverse logic" that Frantz Fanon had warned about in the Wretched of the Earth and Black Skin White Masks (MIGNOLO, idem). The decolonial project of what Mignolo calls

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"epistemic de-linking" necessarily had to establish the option to engage with the world andthe production of knowledge beyond the limits of these terms. For Mignolo, the idea that knowledge itself "is also colonized and, therefore, […] needs to be decolonized" finds its most groundbreaking expression in the words of Anibal Quijano as he articulates the concept of coloniality as constitutive to modernity and argues for the necessity of the decolonization of knowledge (450-353). Quijano's and Mignolo's calls to delink from the totalizing modern paradigm - a paradigm that limits any possibility of thinking and engaging without the reproduction of coloniality - is not new, however. It is the same revolutionary outcry that we find in the famousscene of Alex Haley's Roots when Kunta Kinte struggles, to the expense of his life, to keep his name, thereby asserting the imperious necessity to escape from the pervasiveness of coloniality as he places his relation to the world outside of the colonial dialectic (HALEY, 1976).

Kunta Kinte's political and epistemic stance in Roots – his resistance to renaming – is emblematic of the resistant and ultimately inaccessible imaginary of enslaved and colonized subjects who, conscious that their survival was inseparable from the possibility to imagine their presence beyond the limits of their invention as the opposite of the subliminal white self, also invented a shared space, also called Africa. The genealogy of the invention of Africa unveils two competing Africas, both "imagined" points of epistemic departure – the first external, dehumanizing and born out of a desire for domination, the second resistant and life-affirming, forged in the belly of the Atlantic as a strategy of resistance and resilience. While V.Y. Mudimbe traces the "invention" of Africa to Western engagement with the continent from the 14th century onward, defining Africa as part and parcel of the Western narrative of itself (MUDIMBE, 1988), it is equally arguable that it is in the first experiences of colonization and enslavement by Europeans that Yoruba, Fulani, Wolof, and Igbo, etc., developed—invented—an Africa-centered imaginary, one that would allow them to conceive of themselves in their own terms. These groups understood very well that in order to engage in the crude and inhuman exploitation of African bodies, souls, and wealth to build what is now known as the modern West, Europeans had to invent a beastly place inhabited by non-humans, who could be used, misused, and disposed of at will, like property. This phantasmagorical place—Africa—imagined (produced) through the lens of a Eurocentric epistemic structure as the foil to the ideals set forth by modern Western paradigms undergirds the modernity/coloniality dialectic. But we should also be attentive to the ways in which—in order to survive the inhumanity of chattel slavery and colonization—the Zulus, Wolofs, Bambaras, Yorubas, and other groups, imagined, in their own terms, another idea of Africa as a place where their humanity could be conceptualized,

and where coloniality would lose its pernicious grip.

Put simply, what is at stake in the becoming African of enslaved subjects through the invention of an imagined conceptual space is the consciousness of the necessity of an epistemic stance that underscores the need to "delink" from the pervasive conceptual frameworks founded on the dehumanization and exploitation of the other—especially non-white and non-human beings. This epistemic stance resonates with later Africa-centered thinking, such as Cheikh Anta Diop's representation of Africa as the cradle of civilization (DIOP, 1954, 1959, 1967, 1981), the Afrocentric school's theories of the necessity to engage with the world from our particular cultural location, the Rastafarian and Pan-Africanist Zionist dreams, and numerous Africanists' engagements against modernity/coloniality. While decolonial epistemic stances that have led to Africa-centered inventions of Africa have frequently reified essentialists ideas of Africa, thereby reiterating the modern paradigm, I argue that African ontologies, epistemologies, and socio-political organizations founded on utu-centric worldviews can offer an option other than the modernity/coloniality dialectic by providing us with the possibility to frame our engagement with the world from a radically non-colonial and decentered perspective.

This philosophy, which Besi Muhonja qualifies as utu-centric (2010) is the most obvious expression of African vitalist understandings of being such as those of the Sereer, the Bambara, and the Dogon. Found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the African worldview, referred to as utu in Swahili, umundu in Gikuyu, umuntu in Merian, bumuntu in Sumuma, and most frequently referred by the Nguni word ubuntu constitutes an ethical attitude based on the understanding of "the dignity of the person as including the dignity of the entire creation, so that the cosmic dimension is one of its basic components" (2001). In this sense, utu-centric worldviews are fundamentally queer insofar as they allude to an epistemic stance founded on pluriversality and leading to an ethics of kindness and humility with living and non-living things, human and non-human animals. Such an epistemic stance has the potential to engage in a more durable way with at least two of the critical global issues that our world faces today: white supremacy as expressed in the failed politics of justice, diversity, equity and inclusion and environmental challenges.

This essay is not a naïve attempt to replace Western ontologies with African ontologies in order to fix global problems. Rather, I explore the epistemic and political potential that can emerge from one fundamental question: what happens when we read the modern/coloniality logic that has dominated global engagement in light of the ethics of kindness and humility as a queering relational alternative that is more interested in meaning than in ultimate truths proposed by utu-centric epistemologies? As a possible

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option among others, how can utu-centric ontologies and epistemologies make sense of two of the most important critical global issues we are facing today: white supremacy and environmental inequity pointed out by the recent outcry that followed the murder of George Floyd and the current COVID 19 pandemic. Before turning directly to these questions, it is worth returning to Mignolo's formulation of Kunta Kinte's iteration of one of the most persistent questions of the Africana Studies tradition: the ever pressing need to imagine our common futures beyond coloniality.

Epistemic Delinking

The first pages of Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks contain one of the strongest calls for a decolonial methodology and an invitation to engage with our worlds beyond the coloniality of knowledge. Fanon writes:

> At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the blackman lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell. Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation. If it is true that consciousness is a process of transcendence, we have to see too that this transcendence is haunted by theproblems of love and understanding**.** Man is a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world anantinomy that coexists with him. The black is a black man: that is as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he isrooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated. The problem is important. I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself. We shall go very slowly, for there are two camps: the white and the black. Stubbornly we shall investigate both metaphysics and we shall find that they are often quite fluid. We shall have no mercy for the former governors, the former missionaries. Tous, the man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him (1967, p.8).

This long statement functions both as a poignant appeal and a decolonial assertion of the in/humanity of the black subject in a world that conceives of itself in contradistinction to the latter, that is to blackness. Fanon postulates that any real critique of the pervasiveness of white supremacy rooted in the invention of the white subject as the subliminal other of the black subject demands an epistemic break. Framing blackness (or Africa, for that matter) from the perspective of the modern paradigm is bound to fail precisely because, within the limits of that paradigm, there exist only two options for the African subject: to be a black way of being white or to be placed in a subhuman category. In other words, to think of the very nature of the so- called black subject in a way that can make sense of their existence requires engaging humanness and humanity beyond the white supremacist paradigm constitutive of the world we live in. This finds particularly compelling expression in Tyrone

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Palmer's suggestion that the concept of "the World" itself and its grammars of relationality/becoming are incompatible with Black affect and require a turn to "the otherwise" (2020, p. 247–83). It is important to note that Fanon's radical intervention cannot be limited to just the black subject. It is a critique of coloniality writ large and its false pretense to create the possibility to think, rationally, our common humanities.

Fanon's call for epistemic delinking reminds us of the fundamental contradiction of the modernproject if it is read from the perspective of the Global South. It is true that, a priori, there seemsto be nothing wrong with the advent of modernity, the centrality of the subject, the rule of law, and the development of capitalism. Teleological narratives of these important developments in "World History" promise the betterment of our common humanity and the advancement of our societies. Yet, as the resistance of Kunta Kinte, the radical African and Africanists' call to center Africa, and the more recent decolonial outlook suggest, this teleology omits that, within the modernity/coloniality paradigm, the human is defined in contradistinction to what it is not, that which does not, for that reason, deserve the same rights: non-white, non-human, and non-living things. It is in this light that, for Fanon, there is no space for non-white humanity within the boundaries of coloniality. A parallel logic allows for environmental destruction, devastation, and extraction: the idea that all "non-human" things that participate in life—animals, earth, water, air, etc.—are stripped of the dignity of life and used and abused accordingly. The logic of modernity is the same that explains and legitimizes white supremacy and the supremacy of man in the Anthropocene. As Kathryn Yussof argues:

> The racial categorization of Blackness shares its natality with mining the New World, as does the material impetus for colonialism in the first instance. This means that the idea of Blackness and the displacement and eradication of indigenous peoples get caught and defined in the ontological wake of geology. The human and its subcategory, the inhuman,are historically relational to a discourse of settler-colonial rights and the material practices of extraction, which is to say that the categorization of matter is a spatial execution, of place, land, and person cut from relation through geographic displacement (and relocation through forced settlement and transatlantic slavery). That is, racialization belongs to a material categorization of the division of matter (corporeal and mineralogical) into active and inert. Extractable matter must be both passive (awaiting extraction and possessing of properties) and able to be activated through the mastery of white men. Historically, both slaves and gold have to be material and epistemically made through the recognition and extraction of their inhuman properties (2018, p.13).

The universalization of the provincial European human and its representation as Master and Possessor of nature is arguably the first step towards the normalization of modern racism and its detachment from the values of life and the dignity of all existing things. Descartes' theory of the subject is rooted in the same paradigm as the modern celebration of the mastery of technology that leads to the conception of Man as Master and

Possessor of nature. It is not a coincidence thatDescartes theorizes the idea of the subject and that of the primacy of the latter as Master and Possessor of nature in the same book, The Discourse of Method. These twin developments in Western philosophy and socio-political engagements are based on the same principles. It is therefore logical that the birth of the Western subject did not just announce the death of God. It also proclaimed the death of a particular understanding of the human—the pluriversal human whose existence is not based on the denial of others' humanities—and the slow death of nature. My characterization of Descartes' conception of the human as Master and Possessor of nature is necessarily (and self-consciously) schematic. But what I mean to underscore, in line with the black radical feminist tradition and more recent work in Africanist and decolonial ecocriticism (Yussof), is the way in which Descartes' "human" offers the premise and the conditions for the subsequent modern assumption of the primacy of man. This modern idea of the Western subject did not, for this reason, only lead to the dehumanization of the Black subject and to the naturalization of exclusion, racism, and heteropatriarchy. It also created the basis for current environmental crises that threaten our shared future, but which disproportionately affect and foreclose black futures. In other words, some of the most critical global issues that our world faces, namely, racism and the current environmental crisis are not anomalies, nor are they unrelated. They are, rather, the most logical consequences of the modern paradigm. And yet, entrenched in the Anthropocene, we are proposing environmental reforms or inviting non-white and other disenfranchised communities to an already created world that is founded on the denial of the dignity of their existences. Along the same lines, ingrained in the universalization of the provincial European self and the pervasiveness of an anthropocentric logos, efforts at "diversity and inclusion" are invitations of people of color to join a world that is not prepared to welcome them, rather than, as Fanon would say, rejecting the terms of that world, breaking that world.

This perspective denotes the modern tendency to treat the symptoms of a disease rather than thedisease itself. That is precisely why we are failing to see the needed radical change that would make a sensible difference to the major critical global issues we face. In the absence of a completely different paradigm shift, our actions will amount to little more than alternative versions of the same. As Mignolo, following Fanon, Quijano, and the radical Africanist traditions warns, they will continue to reproduce coloniality.

We have, thus, to read Fanon's call, in the same light as Kunta Kinte's philo-praxis, as an invitation to place ourselves in an epistemic location that can allow us to imagine the world in an utterly different way beyond the limits of the modern paradigm and the consequences of the global matrix of power. Fanon's invitation is, primarily, a

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methodological statement that is not only applicable to race but also to our engagement with environmental challenges and beyond. It is in this vein, that African ontologies, epistemologies, and socio-political realities offer a way forward by proposing new and different questions and putting forth solutions attentive to shared human and non-human futures and in ways that move beyond the limits of the modernity/coloniality paradigm. They advance, as stated, a perspective that allows us to queer our engagement with reality and imagine our futures from an utu-centric perspective**.**

In praise of an utu-centric outlook

The idea of Africa as well as the concept of the human in African communities offer an option to tackle the conditions of possibility of the very paradigm that, in the modernity/coloniality dialectic, has led to the centralization of the white subject and the anthropocentric understanding of the world to the detriment of non-white and non-living things. It is in this light that I explore the ways utu-centric African ontologies, epistemologies, and relations to the world can be understood as a heuristic device, a methodological tool, that can help queer our engagement with some of the most critical global issues that the world faces today: diversity, equity and inclusion, climate change, and environmental justice, etc. As opposed to the technological engagement with these issues that has had limited success in curbing these global crises, utu-centric worldviews suggest the possibility of a radical departure from the modern/coloniality paradigm. I use the word queer to demarcate a space of transgression that offers possibilities of thinking the pluriversal and fluid beyond limited dichotomies and fixed homogenous ontologies. In this vein, I follow the footsteps of Léopold Sédar Senghor who, as early as 1939, locates in what he called the Black African or "Negro" soul (âme nègre)—and which I refer to as utu-centric ontologies and epistemologies—a means of rethinking our common humanities (1964, p.23).

He argues that African cultures' conceptions of being and the resulting African understandings of the human function as an alternative to the pervasive colonial paradigm. To understand Senghor's conception of what he refers to as African cultures' relations to the world, we have to start with his understanding of African ontologies as based on the Bambara, Dogon, and Sereer cultures' conceptions of being. It is important to note that Senghor is a Sereer and was fascinated by Dogon and Bambara metaphysics. As opposed to the so-called revealed religions' conceptions that God created the world from absolutely nothing, the Bambara, Dogon, and Sereer understandings of creation postulate that all

beings are emanations of God and function therefore as different degrees and manifestations of the expression of the same essence, the spirit of all spirits. In these traditions, Senghor observes:

> Nature is, in its totality, animated by a divine spirit. And not only animals and natural phenomenon—rain, thunder, mountain, river—but also tree and stone transform themselves into living beings—Beings who keep their original physical characters as instruments and signs of their personal souls. That is the most profound trait, the eternal trait, of the African soul (idem).

Senghorian vitalism has ramifications that are fundamentally ethical. In his understanding of African cultures, all beings live and share the same dignity insufflated in them by God. The value of interactions is not determined by material and morphological engagements and the value of life, not by the capacity to breathe. Rather, existence, as emanation of God, is essentially valuable. Beings are not classified within an air-tight taxonomy. They are considered as fundamentally linked. While ego-centric cartesian ontologies lead to epistemologies and socio- political ethics of dominance and arrogance that center being at the level of individual experiences and interests, these African ontologies, based on the understanding of life as insufflated by the same vital energy, the divine energy, considers all beings as emanations of God and therefore as participating in the same vitality. It is illogical for such cultures to consider difference in terms of indignity, hierarchy, and lack of adequate worth since all existences are manifestations of the same vitality.

These utu-centric ontologies lead to relational experiences of humility and hospitality and foreground African socio-political philosophies such as nite, in the Wolof tradition, and ubuntu, in southern and Eastern Africa. It is important to note that the way we understand being determines our social and political organizations. It is, because of the birth of the subject that democracies were born; it is because of the centralization of the Western subject that racism is inseparable from the modern state: and it is, for that matter, because of African ontologies of life that understand that all existing things emanate from the same original vibration, that African societies are founded around the principles of ubuntu, omoluabi, and nite, etc. These concepts, grounding the worldviews of many African communities and found throughout the continent lead to social and political organizations that place emphasis on “being self through others” expressed by the Zulu saying “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” or the Wolof “nit niteey garabam” both rendering the African belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects, sustains, and values dignifying relations. Utu, the ontological nature of existence explains the values of utu, its legal, social, and moral

nature, determined by the state of being and each utu's relation with other untus (beings). The values of be-ing is determined by the nature of each being's standing inrelation to the community's wellbeing for the greater good. In this instance, ubuntu, the ethical contract that determines our actions and our relations to life is a dialectical moment inviting us to consider the greater good beyond a limited time.

This understanding of the human-in-relation is precisely what the modernity/coloniality centralization of the provincial white subject lacks and that without which, domination and hierarchization of being seems to be obvious and disregard of the environment and lack of diversity logical. The understanding of being, of being human, as an emanation of the Spirit of the Original vital energy, the original rhythm of life, is an ultimately humbling experience: a callto humility and respect for others, for nature, for all existing things. African ontologies manifested in the principles of Ubuntu not only function as calls for humility and respect for others, they are also opposed to the universalism of Western modernity, the corollary of which is the primacy of the human over other beings, the centralization of the provincial subject of the West, and the creation of second-class citizens. Universalism has this in particular, it either assimilates or it rejects.

The idea of the human that the concepts of nite and ubuntu denote and the promise of pluriversalism that they imply do not see difference as something that should be tamed and reduced for the benefit of the same. On the contrary, it encourages pluriversal engagements, an understanding of difference as the very foundation of life. That is why utu- centric worldviews propose a rich epistemic option for the development of our future and the rebuilding of our communities. The utu-centric conception of being does not just set the pace for a pluriversal and inclusive world, it also proposes a different engagement with all living and not-living things, thereby having the potential to engage with some of the most important issues that our world faces and that threaten our existences.

Looking Ahead…. Utu-centric futures?

The deafening status quo despite the strident global outcry incited by the assassination of GeorgeFloyd and the lingering COVID 19 pandemic reiterate the necessity to escape from the throes of the modern anthropocentric paradigm that naturalizes the devaluation of non-white and non- living things and show the necessity of a queering alternative paradigm to think of our common futures. Two years after the murder of George

Floyd, it is still difficult to make sense of the time we live in. George Floyd's death needs to be read as the tragedy that it is: the death of a father, a friend, and a community member ripped from his people. It is, in fact, difficult to fathom the tragedy that such a death can cause—the life of another black girl living without her father, the experience of another black family destroyed by the institution that is supposed to protect them, and the added burden to the long and global history of Black hopelessness.

The words George Floyd pronounced during the last moments of his life are the same words that are constantly pronounced by dying black folks across the world. The fear that was in his eyes as he was begging for his life is the fear black folks experience across the world. His sadness and despair as he succumbed under the knee pressed on his chest are reminiscent of that of enslaved Africans captured in the 15th century and of young black men caught in the industrial prison complex and in inner cities across the Global North, searching for a breath of fresh air in a world of which they constitute the dark side. Being black meant, before George Floyd, being possibly subjected to abuse. Being black remains, after George Floyd, being possibly subjected to abuse. There is no alternative for black folks in a colonial world rooted in the principles of modernity. As Frantz Fanon declares, "[t]he black is a black man: that is as the result of a series of aberrations of affect, he is rooted at the core of a universe from which he must be extricated" (1991, p.9).

Fanon's call to extricate the Black man from this universe is, as shown, a call to free the human by moving away from the principles of coloniality rooted in white supremacy. Yet, despite the outcry, the marches, and the fulgurant artistic productions across the world, people of African descent continue to be assassinated, daily, by those who are supposed to ensure the security of all lives. If change has not come in the past two years, it is because the paradigm shift has not happened and Fanon's call to think beyond the limits of Western modernity still has not echoed in the right place. Yet, as long as the very foundations of our world and the modernity/coloniality paradigm does not shift, George Floyd's death, like the death of any wretched of the earth, will not be an anomaly. They only reiterate the relevance and actuality of W.E.B Dubois' incisive rhetorical question, at the turn of the 20th century, "How does it feel to be a problem?" (p.7).

The consequences of the pervasiveness of white supremacy on issues of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion are similar and historically linked to the consequences of white supremacy on environmental challenges. The current COVID 19 crisis is a case in point. Like any global pandemic, Covid-19 has brought to the fore inequity and uneven access organized along race and class-based lines. Moreover, behind the widely mediatized

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vaccination agenda is the specter of colonial science: from the flippant suggestion of a French newscaster that the vaccine be "tested" in Africa, to the vehement resistance to the passe sanitaire throughout former colonies in the French Caribbean. We must also recall that, in the name of the colonial anthropocentric understanding of the world, human beings exploit the planet, its land, its forests and its waters at an unsustainable rate. This prevents nature from balancing itself. Deforestation has led us, for example, to lower CO2 levels, which in turn resulted in the climate crises we face today. One of the most rapid consequences of this climate change is the relentless destruction of animal habitats.

Added to all this is our treatment of farm animals, put in unsustainable living conditions in the name of the wellbeing of "Man." As a virus that spilled over from an intermediary wildlife host, SARS COVID-19 is clearly an effect of the destruction of animals' natural habitat or the disastrous conditions of hygiene and stress in which we put other animals and that facilitate the development and the transmission of pathogens. We are all familiar with the bird flu, SARS, mad cow disease, swine flu, and more recently monkey pox, etc. The outbreak of each one of these epidemics is either due to climate change or the living conditions of animals directly linked to the modern anthropocentric belief that human life is supreme to all other existences. The primacy of human desires legitimating the overexploitation of nature will undoubtedly lead to disasters such as this one. And yet, in the name of rationality, coloniality and global capitalism, legitimated by the exaltation of the provincial white human, master and possessor of nature, no radical change has been made.

If despite the general outcry caused by movements such as Black Lives Matter and the lingering COVID 19 pandemic, no radical change has been made, it is because we have too often taken the effects of the problem (anti-blackness and climate terror) for the root of the problem (the anthropocentric and white supremacist essence of Western modernity). Yet, utu-centric ontologies and their resulting epistemologies and socio-political organizations can be read as interesting pathways that have the potential to unlock different relational options to the seeming pervasiveness of modernity/coloniality. While the arrogance of the modern subject has led to the hierarchization of being and the conception of the Western human as master and possessor of nature, utu-centric traditions show the possibility to understand that life is dependent on the balance of all its inhabitants. In these traditions, the human, like all non-living things, is nothing but a link to the original vibration. Animals, trees, waters and even rocks are endowed with a force that leads to the creator. God does not create the world from nothing, they vibrate life through their own energy. These worldviews suggest the possibility to treat nature and

fellow humans with friendship and kindness. Such alternative worldviews indicate that there is no human except the one that aims at perfect communion with the world that welcomes us and thatlead to humility and teranga (hospitality, kindness in Wolof), thereby asserting the possibility of radical non-totalitarian options. Such a relationship to the world shows that it is by humanizing our understanding of the meaning of the human and the non-human that we can save ourselves.

Anytrue science, the goal of which is to increase and preserve life, must be based on ontologies of sympathy and an ethics of solidarity. These ontologies are not ontologies of dominance, but rather, ontologies of humility based on the realization that we all participate in the same vitality—humans as well as non-humans. What matters here is the possibilities that the utu- centric perspective proposes rather than any actual result it may lead to.

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