



The Ink of the Scholars



This book is a translation of Souleymane Bachir Diagne's *L'encre des savants : réflexions sur la philosophie en Afrique* published in 2013 by CODESRIA (Dakar) and Présence Africaine Éditions (Paris).

The Ink of the Scholars
Reflections on Philosophy in Africa

Souleymane Bachir Diagne

Translated from French by
Jonathan Adjemian



Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
DAKAR

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Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, Angle Canal IV
P.O. Box 3304 Dakar, CP 18524, Senegal
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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Force of Living	9
Bantu Philosophy: A Contradictory Text	9
Ontology of Living Force	18
Languages and Translation	21
Proof by Aesthetics	30
The Time we Need	35
That Time we Call African	37
Words to Speak of Time	41
To Foresee or to Anticipate	44
Speech and Ink	49
Sense of Urgency and the Passage to Writing	49
Philosophy and Orality	53
Meanings of Timbuktu	56
Socialisms and Democracy	61
The African Path to Socialism According to Nyerere	63
Socialism, Consciencism, Spiritualism and Secularism	65
Senghor and Humanist Socialism	69
The Democratic Turn and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights	72
Conclusion: Lessons from the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights	79
<i>Notes</i>	83
<i>Bibliography</i>	101



Preface

“The Ink of the Scholars is more precious than the blood of the martyrs” is a saying from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that gives its title to this book. Ahmad Bâba, arguably the most famous scholar from Timbuktu, quotes that statement and makes it the heart of his work *On the Merits of Scholars*, a reflection on the importance of the pursuit and the transmission of knowledge. Such a title can certainly serve as an emblem for his hometown, as Timbuktu was, historically, an intellectual beacon, an important center of learning and written erudition.

So the title “the Ink of the Scholars”, being a reference to a work on *The Merits of Scholars* by a scholar from Timbuktu is meant to shift the focus from the usual discussion about orality and oral tradition to the consideration of a tradition of written erudition which is very important, still to be studied further, and an integral part of the reflection on philosophy in Africa,

But of course this title plays another crucial role given the current context prevailing in certain regions of Africa, in particular in northern Mali, where Timbuktu came under attack from terrorist groups who loathe what the old monuments and the ancient manuscripts in that city stand for: the love for humanity and its creations, the spirit of tolerance that comes with knowledge and wisdom. At a time when terrorists attack institutions of learning and express hatred for education and the pursuit of a knowledge they absurdly call “western”, it may be useful to recall that the very religion in the name of which they pretend to be allowed to take so many innocent lives with their own proclaims loud and clear that the only combat that can be deemed holy is the one for the enlightenment of knowledge, for the appropriation of the word of wisdom whatever its origin: the ink of the scholars is more precious than the blood of the martyrs.





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