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*The Roman Catholic church, and the hermeneutics of race, as
two contexts for African philosophy*

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EDITORIAL

The Roman Catholic church, and the hermeneutics of race, as two contexts for African philosophy

Volume XIX of *Quest* (2005) brings the journal up to date again. Its composition is again somewhat kaleidoscopic, with a fair selection of the general topics as defined in the 2004 Editorial. However, the contents converge around two topics:

- the prominence of the Roman Catholic church in African philosophy, and
- the hermeneutics of race.

Given the possibilities of misunderstanding, and the serious effects that such misunderstanding might have, we feel the need to devote extensive initial discussion to these topics, in the present Editorial.

The Roman Catholic church and philosophy in Africa

If it is true to say that academic philosophy in Africa has developed in the course of the twentieth century CE in critical exchange with North Atlantic counterparts, then the present volume illustrates one major context in which such exchanges have taken place: that of Christianity as a world religion. Here the example of St. Augustine, bishop of the North African town of Hippo (now Annaba, in eastern Algeria) suffices to show the long ancestry of this triadic connection between Africa, philosophy and Christianity. Especially the fact that the Roman Catholic church, as a universalising global organisation, made a considerable number of African male clergy go through the same formal training as elsewhere in the world, including two years of philosophical training, has created a considerable platform for philosophy in Africa.

To this institutional arrangement we owe, directly or indirectly, some of the great names of African philosophy, such as Abbé Alexis Kagame, and Valentin Mudimbe, once a Benedictine monk and now one of the leading African intellectuals world-wide. Even though Mudimbe lost his faith and became a fierce critic of the hegemonic micropolitics (Foucault) of Roman Catholic education in Africa in his generation, he still considers the phase of ‘clerical intellectualism’¹ as ‘an incomprehensible miracle’, since (in Mudimbe’s opinion) that was the context, largely, of the modern intellectual and spiritual mutation of Central Africa towards modernity and post-modernity. Part of that mutation – which for Mudimbe was effectively a ‘liberation of [African] difference’ vis-à-vis the dominant White expatriate clergy – consisted in the strategy of *retrodition*. Retrodition meant that African priests, who in fact had no other spiritual home left than global Christianity, still experimented with the recapture of the historic African world-view and religion, as – presumably – it had been in pre-colonial and pre-mission times. In Mudimbe’s case, retrodition, as a search for African historic religion and African self-affirmation, largely gave way to the agnostic universalism of scholarship – an intellectual stance which – for Mudimbe – no longer has much room for African historic religion, and which, however homeless in the last analysis, in the world today seems most at home in the North Atlantic region.

It has been *QUEST*’s great good fortune that Valentin Mudimbe himself has been prepared to share his personal view on these and related matters in our opening piece, his recent essay ‘An African Practice of Philosophy: A Personal Testimony’.

In other African cases, however, the tension between Roman Catholicism and African historic religion was often resolved in a very different direction. Thus after decades of adamant rejection of historic local forms of ritual practice, Roman Catholicism has sometimes become the very locus for the

¹ Mudimbe, V.Y., 1997, *Tales of faith: Religion as political performance in Central Africa: Jordan Lectures 1993*, London & Atlantic Highlands: Athlone Press; van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, ‘“An incomprehensible miracle” – Central African clerical intellectualism versus African historic religion: A close reading of Valentin Mudimbe’s Tales of Faith’, in: Kai Kresse, ed., *Reading Mudimbe*, special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, 1, June 2005: 11-65; also at: http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/mudil0.htm .

incorporation and continuation of local tradition (e.g. music, dance, puberty rites, funerary rites) in the modern African context – however great a price of format change, meaning change, and partial or total loss of African control had to be paid in the process. And even in the articulation and preservation – again, with a fundamental format change – of African historic philosophy (such as informed world-views, ritual and judicial practices, and everyday life, in pre-modern contexts), the Roman Catholic church and its officers have played a considerable though controversial role. The latter point is aptly illustrated by the case (however much contested) of Placide Tempels, the Flemish missionary who, in 1945,² published an account of the Luba world view. This marked the beginnings of African academic philosophy and hence has constituted a baseline to which African philosophers (also in the *Quest* context) have frequently returned, usually critically, even contemptuously – as was unavoidable and necessary given the colonial and postcolonial politics of knowledge. Yet for someone personally familiar with the world view of the Luba and related peoples,³ that cosmology is still highly recognisable through Tempels’ account, even if unmistakably influenced by Thomism as the philosophical template most familiar to him.⁴ Still,

² Tempels, Placide, 1955, *Bantoe-filosofie*, Antwerpen: De Sikkel, first published 1946; translated in French (1945, Lovania: a French translation to appear before the Dutch original), Lingala, English, German, etc.

³ From the early 1970s to the mid-1990s the present writer conducted anthropological and historical fieldwork among the Nkoya people of western central Zambia, whose language and culture are very close to those of the Luba. A fragment of the Luba ethnic group, specifically under that name, is found in the same region. Cf. Brelsford, W.V., 1965, *The tribes of Zambia*, Lusaka: Government Printer, 2nd ed., first edition 1956; Smith, E.W., & A.M. Dale, 1920, *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 2 vols., London: Macmillan; van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1992, *Tears of Rain: Ethnicity and history in central western Zambia*, London/Boston: Kegan Paul International.

⁴ Mudimbe, in his contribution to *QUEST* below, adduces two other possible philosophical sources of Tempels: the 14th century CE Flemish mystic Jan van Ruysbroeck, and (at the suggestion of the American anthropologist Ivan Karp) the early 20th century CE French philosopher Bergson.

The medieval reference revolves on Mudimbe’s adoption of Smet’s (a present-day Belgian author) comments on van Ruysbroeck’s expression *de honger der weet-gierigheid*. This obsolete and syntactically unusual Dutch/Flemish phrase can be decoded to mean, precisely ‘that particular kind of hunger that consists, not in a craving for mate-

half a century later, we see a prominent codifier of Southern African *ubuntu* philosophy, such as Mogobe Ramose, emerge as a product of, *inter alia*, a thoroughly Roman Catholic spirituality and education, crowned (not unlike Mudimbe's early career) with a doctorate from Louvain, Belgium. And in a very similar bracket is Achille Mbembe,⁵ who counted forms of African Roman Catholicism among his *Afriques indociles* ('*Recalcitrant Africas*'), and whose critique of the African postcolony features (with Mudimbe) in the present volume in the article by Carolien Ceton. In addition to priests, the

rial food, but in a desire for knowledge'. The genitive construction (*der*) is basically in the nature of an unusual embellishment for emphasis, for *weetgierigheid* in itself covers the same semantic field – with the same lexical element *geer-*, *gier-* that in other contexts has produced *begeerte* ('desire'), *gierigheid* (nowadays: 'avarice'), and the famous Geert Geertsen's Humanistic pen name Desiderius Erasmus. The equation of 'knowledge' with 'truth' is not given with the Dutch/Flemish phrasing itself, and derives from Smet's understanding of medieval mystical Christian usage. Mudimbe suggests a convergence between the Christian mystic's search for direct communion with divine truth, and a notion of dynamic, initiatory progress which Tempels understood to underlie the Luba world-view, and which was subsequently built into the Jamaa Christian movement in Congo. Here a consideration of historic religious forms of Congo could have been illuminating. It would have suggested a contrast between initiation into a specific cult or into adulthood (where the novice is certainly ushered into new knowledge that transforms the person – but not primarily out of the novice's own impetus and desire but out of the initiated elders taking the initiative for the novice's transition, extending their privileged access to the novice) and the *nganga's* (traditional practitioner), and *nganga's* apprentice's, quest for knowledge, which revolves on their personal agency in the deliberate desire for esoteric knowledge.

Secondly, Mudimbe argues the implausibility of Bergsonian thought penetrating to Roman Catholic Major Seminaries in Flanders in the 1920s (when Tempels studied there), or of such vitalism otherwise finding its way into Tempels' intellectual baggage – despite the correspondences in terminology between Bergson's *elan vital*, and the 'life force' which features prominently in Tempels' representation of the Luba world-view. Mudimbe's command of the intellectual history of the Belgium clergy in the first half of the twentieth century is impressive. Yet his negative assessment on this point may be reconsidered in the light of the absolute sway Bergson held over continental Western European philosophical life in the first decades of the 20th century. For that period, for instance, Bergson's influence in Roman Catholic clerical circles is clear from the case of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), one generation above Tempels, but, of course, in a francophone environment.

⁵ Mbembe, A., 1988, *Afriques indociles: Christianisme, pouvoir et Etat en société post-coloniale*, Paris: Karthala.

seminary – in Africa just as much as elsewhere – has always produced a large spill-over of dropouts who carried their relatively superior education, even when unfinished, to academic, administrative and political careers outside the church organisation, and often even outside the circle of Catholic believers.

Once more we are reminded how limited, and how potentially hegemonic, it is to adopt an exclusively North Atlantic perspective upon global knowledge production, in general, and *a fortiori* in relation to Africa. For the idea of the Roman Catholic church serving as one of the principal *loci* of philosophy in Africa is ironic, not to say embarrassing, from the perspective of North Atlantic philosophy today. The latter is saturated with the anti-clerical heritage of the Enlightenment, and with the subsequent secularisation of North Atlantic society in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries CE. In this connection one would associate Roman Catholicism rather with the management of the scholastic, especially the Thomistic, medieval tradition (with its enormous influence on Catholic theology and on Catholic thought in general), than with the current production of a philosophy catering for the challenges of the modern world. These challenges, world-wide, urge us to forge philosophical tools for articulating the contemporary experience (characterised by globalisation and commodification, technology, homelessness, the erosion of modernity and its state-centred political forms, the hectic proliferation and contestation of identities, and the rising tide of inequality, violence, and North American military hegemony); to define elements of meaning therein – if any; and to ethically direct our action. In this vital connection, the Roman Catholic church has largely relied, not so much on topical philosophy, but on church doctrine and ritual *sub specie aeternitatis*. The dilemma is sketched by the caricature of octogenarian Princes of the Church, at the end of a celibate life, officiating on such framing of human sexuality as rubber technology has made possible and as the absolutely devastating HIV epidemic has made imperative, especially in Africa.

Even so, the twentieth century has produced many prominent philosophers of a Roman Catholic signature. The names come to mind of Edith Stein, Alexis Kagame, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Rahner, Jacques Maritain, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, John F. Crosby, Jean-Luc Marion, Karol Wojtyła (more commonly known as the late Pope John-Paul II), Etienne Gilson,

Richard Kearney, Bernard Delfgaauw, Dietrich von Hildebrand, among many others.

And, albeit without quite aiming for that league of intercontinental players, the present volume of *Quest* confirms the prominence of Roman Catholicism in the African production of philosophy. Thanks to the generosity of the Editor of the Italian journal *Africa e Mediterraneo* (for Africanist and Mediterranean studies), and of the author himself who immediately responded favourably to *QUEST*'s reprinting request, we have an article by Valentin Mudimbe, as, perhaps, a post-Catholic. Moreover, the Jesuit Father Jean-Luc Malango Kitungano writes on Habermas, the civil society and the state in a way that promises African relevance. In a soul-searching contribution, Father Alozie Oliver Onwubiko, for several years co-director of the famous Bigard seminary in Central Nigeria, considers the dilemmas of cultural juxtaposition (imported European culture versus African traditional culture).

- Instead of allowing himself to be caught in a racially-defined African counter-culture,
- nor following the lure of universalism à la Appiah and Howe⁶ (one might have added: Mudimbe) – a universalism that has little, or no, time for ‘parochial’ African sensitivities in the identitary domain,
- Onwubiko suggests a third possibility: that African Christianity may well constitute a suitable domain to overcome the juxtaposition and to develop a cultural dialogue towards biculturalism, and ultimately transculturalism, in which also the African religious tradition will find its place.

To complete this series of clerical and post-clerical philosophers, in the section *Quest Laboratory*, the philosopher Abbé Louis Mpala Mbabula, from Congo-Kinshasa, offers us sizzingly spectacular polemical fireworks

⁶ Cf. Appiah, K.A., 1992, *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*, New York & London: Oxford University Press; Appiah, K.A., 1993, “Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism”, *Times Literary Supplement* (London), 12 February, 24-25; Howe, S., 1999, *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and imagined homes*, London/New York: Verso; first published in 1998. The reference in footnote 1 above discusses Mudimbe's universalism.

devoted to the specific philosophy of science that was developed by his colleague Frédéric-Bienvenu Mabasi Bakana, – enough to show that despite political and economic hardships, philosophy is still alive and kicking in that country.

Jacques Derrida

In a volume where the contradictory presence of Roman Catholicism as a world religion and a self-styled guardian of philosophy is so unmistakable, the need may be felt for a totally different philosophical perspective on religion. On October 8, 2004, Jacques Derrida died of cancer in a Paris hospital at the age of 74. His death marks the end of one of the most significant philosophical careers of the twentieth century. Born in Al-Biar, a residential area in the south of Algiers, Algeria, in 1930, from a Jewish family, he is in space and time an amazing counterpart to St. Augustine, and – strictly speaking – *another great philosophical son of Africa*. Derrida's explicit influence on African philosophy has been slight so far – although there are considerable Derridean parallels in Mudimbe's work, which may not all be attributable, indirectly, to these two philosophers having been similarly exposed to the Paris intellectual milieu of the 1960s. However, Derrida's thought on deconstruction, difference/ *différance*, presence and logocentricity, and more recently on religion, hospitality and terrorism, has contributed enormously to the development of a philosophical 'toolkit' with which we can approach the globalising world today in its complexity, its identity struggles and its violence, and in which, particularly, issues of interculturality can be articulated. Hence the inclusion of Wim van Binsbergen's article on Derrida and religion.

Race, Afrocentricity, and African philosophy

Let us now turn to the second, potentially even more controversial, topic of this volume, 'race'.

Teodros Kiros, professor of Africana Philosophy at Brown University and Du Bois fellow at Harvard University, both in the United States of America, deals with the role of Africa in the thought of one of the most seminal of Afrocentrist writers of the first half of the twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) – as a stepping-stone to what to some *Quest* readers will come almost as an uninvited guest, notably, a *systematic philosophy of race*.

Again on race is Sanya Osha's positive and enthusiastic assessment of the work of Pierre-Joseph Salazar on South Africa, so that at least two of the three co-editors of *Quest* volume XVI on *Truth in Politics* come together again in this edition.

Almost as a more general, theoretical rider to these two reflections on race, Carolien Ceton presents a philosophical approach to identity as evolutive, based on an examination of the work of four philosophers as diverse as de Beauvoir, Mbembe, Mudimbe and Taylor. Much in the same way, Tashikanda Kahare's review of the recent collective volume *Is violence inevitable in Africa?* suggests that intercultural complementarity and critical collaboration between African and North Atlantic identitary positions (in other words, *a colour-blind, somatically indifferent approach*) may lead us to insights in African matters of vital importance today. Similar South-North complementarity in the construction of African knowledge is revealed in the two reviews by Sanya Osha that conclude this volume.

How could a philosophy of race represent an 'uninvited guest' to part of the *Quest* readership? We consider it our responsibility as Editor to elaborate, especially since our publishing the contributions by Professors Kiros and Osha means that *Quest* fully endorses the academic stature of these two papers and their authors. Does that mean that *Quest* now invites open discussion in terms of 'race', as if 'race' were no longer a historically polluted, no longer an academically unusable word? No, it does not mean that. This journal encourages critical debate on the apparent or unmistakable racism of others; it would be irresponsible to try and avoid such debate in the African context to which *Quest* emphatically belongs. However, this journal will not, under the present Editorship, be open to explicitly racist arguments in their own right.

Let us recapitulate the relevant history of ideas, which in this case –as so often – may reveal the politics of knowledge of North Atlantic hegemonism.

As uninvited guests violently breaking such laws of hospitality as also obtained in their own countries of origin at the time, European, Asian and North African intruders extended a regime of slavery and slave trade to the sub-Saharan African lands they visited, at various times in the course of the last two millennia, and possibly already much earlier. In early Modern times (from c. 1500 CE onwards), early imperialism, Mercantilism and the subsequent colonial conquest of Africa needed, and invented, racism. In the hands of theoreticians of race such as Blumenbach (1752-1840) and de Gobineau (1816-1882),⁷ European racism's obsession with skin pigmentation, nasal and skull architecture, hair texture, and the shape of buttocks and genitals, did the trick of *conceptually expelling large sections of defenceless and exploitable humans to outside the category of common humanity*. And whoever finds herself outside that category, can – like an animal – be hunted, appropriated, raped, put to unpaid work, sold, and killed, at will and with impunity, by all those whose membership of the full human category went, apparently, uncontested (although, inevitably, their own membership becomes liable to contestation by virtue of their very thoughts and acts of racism). The mental construct of racist exclusion from humanity sufficed to justify (albeit only subjectively, and only for the time being) crimes against humanity that would scarcely have been tolerated in the respective homes of these traders and colonialists, outside Africa – except, when the heyday of colonialism was already over, in Nazi Germany from the late 1930s to 1945; then the victims were not Africans but Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and mentally retarded people.

When Africans, and their descendants the world over, began to confront racism in their writings and their political activism, they did so as long-standing victims of racism who sought to regain, and celebrate, dignity and

⁷ As is well-known but – until recently – little discussed, the founders of modern Western philosophy, Kant (1724-1804) and Hegel (1770-1831), made considerable contributions to the construction of North Atlantic racism; cf. Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, 1997, 'The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race" in Kant's Anthropology', in: Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi, ed., *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 103-140; Bernal, M., 1987, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, I, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1787-1987*, London: Free Association Books/ New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press; Poliakov, L., 1971, *Le mythe aryen*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy; and Idowu in *QUEST* XVIII, 2004.

freedom. Understandably, the language of anti-racism was initially predicated on the central concept of race, and went through a phase when the proud affirmation of African somatic traits had to put an end to Blacks' internalised self-negation imposed by Whites' racism (in ways explained by Fanon, and Sartre). Du Bois, Césaire, Senghor, and others of their generations, could still phrase both their indignation, and their affirmation of self-respect, in terms of *race*. For a long time, the discourse of race continued to appear as the most obvious way to articulate socio-economic inequality, exclusion, and the desire for emancipation.

However, the period when 'race' could naïvely be invoked as if it were a neutral, universal and self-evident category, has ended sometime during the second half of the 20th century. This shift in discourse was a consequence of the very success of the anti-colonial and anti-racial struggle, in Africa, as well as in American, Asian, and Oceanian former colonies, – aided by the global human-rights movement extending over more than two centuries, and more recently (from the 1940s onward) by the rise of cultural relativism in the social sciences and philosophy. These developments have combined, from the 1930s onward, with the demolition of the 'scientific' racial edifice by scientists (geneticists, other human biologists, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists), relegating racism to *pseudo-scientific* status ('man's most dangerous myth' – Ashley Montagu),⁸ and with the philosophical reflection on the dehumanising implications of racism both in the colonial and in the Nazi context.

Today, the United States of America is (along with South Africa) one of the few countries in the world where the concept of race has continued to be part of polite and sophisticated conversation and of official bureaucratic parlance – where the social construction of 'race' (not as a disreputable exploitative ideology or an obsolete, patently exposed pseudo-scientific illusion, but as a widely endorsed 'reality' – as a 'collective representation' – Durkheim) has survived into the late 20th, even the 21st century. This has special reasons to which I will shortly turn. Meanwhile, and regrettably, the hegemony which the United States of America has claimed in terms of military, scientific and media control during the last few decades, has created a

⁸ Montagu, A. (M.F. Ashley Montagu), 1945, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*. New York: Columbia University Press, first published 1942.

situation where the *collective representations informing everyday life in North American society today*, have gained an enormous impact on the perceptions and aspirations of people outside the United States of America. This includes people in Africa, and also in Western Europe. In the latter region, the massive influx of intercontinental immigrants, also in the course of the last few decades, has created socio-economic, cultural, religious and political tensions for which the concept of ‘race’ provides, once more, a ready (if naïve, muddled, deceptive, and dangerous) shorthand expression.

Despite the multifarious and intercontinental criticism of the term, ‘race’ has been able to survive as an apparently neutral, civilised concept in American society, and thus as a collective representation, because, for several centuries (ever since the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the plantation economy in the southern States), blatant socio-economic contradictions in that country have happened to coincide with Black-White somatic contrasts, thus acerbating class relations into the almost inescapable oppositions of ‘colour castes’. Major, but (as the New Orleans hurricane disaster of 2005 has demonstrated) still only partial, improvements in that situation were effected with the abolition of slavery in the mid-19th century, and the civil rights movement as recently as the 1960s. Thus, whenever African Americans articulated their proud identity as Blacks and as Africans, they would do so in a context where an appeal to race was indicated, not only by their own group history of exclusion on somatic grounds, but also by the collective representation in terms of race as held throughout American society.

Among African American identitary expressions of the late twentieth century, *Afrocentricity* has been most vocal, immensely influential, and often intellectually impressive, combining an American intellectual and activist ancestry from Blyden, Du Bois, Booker Washington etc., with the Diopian philosophical and historical inspiration from Senegal – and, in the last two decades, finding additional support from established White intellectuals engaging in the *Black Athena* debate which Martin Bernal had initiated. Afrocentrism came heavily under attack⁹ (most vocally from the part of the

⁹ Lefkowitz, M.R., & MacLean Rogers, G., eds, 1996, *Black Athena revisited*, Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press; Lefkowitz, M.R., 1996, *Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism became an excuse to teach myth as history*, New York: Basic

classicist and – remarkably – *feminist* Mary Lefkowitz) in the mid-1990s. This was a period when the United States of America, in the course of the so-called *Culture Wars*, had to invent and cultivate its own internal enemies (such as militant and defiant African Americans), for the sake of internal national cohesion at the middle-class and upper-class level. For, in a way scarcely imaginable any more today, as far as foreign politics was concerned the United States of America found themselves ‘in between’ convincingly demonised external enemies in the 1990s:¹⁰ the ‘Cold War’ had ended in the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989, and (despite the prelude, in the form of the First Gulf War) the ‘War on Terrorism’ was only to begin on ‘9/11’ 2001. Not surprisingly, now that external enemies are back with a vengeance, the whole political topicality of Afrocentricity at the national level in the United States of America has subsided; the eagerly prepared manuscript of the American version of a major French denouncement of Afrocentricity¹¹

Books. In retrospect, one is inclined to see Mary Lefkowitz, not at all as the arch-enemy of Blacks which she has been made out to be, but as primarily a passionate but misguided scholar, who allowed her relentless insistence on technically impeccable scholarship (a quality in which the most vocal Afrocentrist writers, including Bernal, do not exactly excel), to eclipse her awareness of the wider political issues involved, as well as her awareness of the specific kinds of solidarity history imposes on intellectual producers today.

¹⁰ Berlinerblau, J., 1999, *Heresy in the University: The Black Athena controversy and the responsibilities of American intellectuals*, New Brunswick etc.: Rutgers University Press. Incidentally, Berlinerblau shows considerable and deserving admiration for Bernal, yet he cannot refrain from pointing out the latter’s indebtedness to intellectual positions that had been held among African American intellectual for generations. This is why Berlinerblau jokingly characterises Bernal as ‘the intellectual Elvis’, sc. Presley, the latter being a ‘White’ who gained fame by appropriating and transforming a ‘Black’ musical style.

¹¹ Fauvelle-Aymar, F.-X., Chrétien, J.-P., & Perrot, C.-H., 2000, eds., *Afrocentrismes: L’histoire des Africains entre Égypte et Amérique*, Paris: Karthala. Cf. Obenga, T., 2001, *Le sens de la lutte contre l’afrocentrisme eurocentrisme*, Gif-sur-Yvette (Cedex)/ Paris: Khepera/ L’Harmattan. Although we may appreciate Obenga’s Diopian theoretical position, we may regret his sheer demonisation of the editors of *Afrocentrismes*. He showed himself incapable of any hermeneutical appreciation of their position. Like in the Lefkowitz case, that position does not seem to be primarily inspired by siding with the forces of White hegemony (the North Atlantic scholars in question would scarcely recognise themselves in such a characterisation). Their attack on Afrocentrism was prompted by, once more, their (somewhat myopic and uncharitable) blind love for technically impec-

is sitting idly on a shelf in Mary Lefkowitz's office.

Not surprisingly, a major version of Afrocentrist thought plays, once more, the racial card, affirming identity, dignity and even historical seniority and superiority ('Africa leads and Europe follows', 'Africa is the mother of all culture') on the basis of a unique birthright that, presumably, the possession of (selected) African somatic traits would grant, but that could not be claimed in the absence of such traits. However, next to this 'strong Afrocentricity' that claims a biological basis at the centre of its construction, there is also the other, 'attenuated' version of Afrocentricity, one where the unique and massive contribution of Africa to global cultural history is acknowledged and documented, in the awareness that, since culture is by definition acquired not through the genes but by a learning process, these riches of African culture (just like the riches of other cultures in the world today) are in principle open to any human being regardless of somatic appearance, language, creed or gender – thus forming an integral part of the shared collective heritage of humankind.

This emphatically non-racial version of Afrocentrism has much to recommend it,¹² and much of it coincides with scientific insights that are widely held today. Since the first,¹³ still tentative and defective scientific formulation of the 'African Eve hypothesis' nearly two decades ago, there is now almost global consensus among specialised scientists that Anatomically Modern Humans (a category to which *all* humans living today belong) did emerge in Africa c. 200,000 years BP (Before Present), and started on the Out-of-Africa Exodus only c. 140,000 BP, in a spatial movement probably spread out in time and involving, in total, about a thousand Africa-born

cable scholarship, and by their self-righteous, hurt (but humanly understandable) insistence on the integrity of their own particular love for Africa, which they (naïvely) considered beyond reproach, having devoted their entire scholarly life to it. The South-North politics of knowledge production on Africa are immensely complex and contradictory, and generate overwhelming emotions. We cannot do justice to this central problematic here, beyond voicing, once more, our conviction that South-North complementarity is, in the long run, the best strategy for valid, reliable and productive knowledge on Africa.

¹² Cf. van Binsbergen, W.M.J., ' "An incomprehensible miracle"', o.c., and further references there.

¹³ Cann, R.L., Stoneking, M. & Wilson, A.C., 1987, 'Mitochondrial DNA and human evolution', *Nature*, 325: 31-36.

women of reproductive age. Here we have solid, state-of-the-art genetic substantiation of the idea of Africa as our Mother – but mother, not only of people who today stand out as Blacks and Africans (which is, incidentally, a category displaying the greatest possible genetic variation), but literally of all of modern humankind. During c. 60,000 years, the whole of modern humankind shared an exclusively African history, was effectively African.

But the argument goes on. Many cultural (as well as somatic) traits were taken along on the Out-of-Africa Exodus, and recent comparative research into myths, into cultural near-universals, and into languages, now begins to allow us to identify and reconstruct fragments of the Out-of-Africa package.¹⁴ The Out-of-Africa Exodus started out for the other continents along two different routes:

- the oldest and/or fastest one being due east along the Indian Ocean coast;
- a later and/or slower one being due north into North Africa, West Asia, and subsequently east, north and west into Asia and Europe.

In the course of over 100,000 years the package was increasingly diversified and gave rise to many prehistoric local cultures. It was in this period that the somatic differences arose now commonly associated with ‘race’; they are (on the time scale of species evolution) recent, less than skin-deep, and merely amount to physical adaptations to different ecozones. When and where the two ‘Out of Africa’ demographic and cultural movements collided, the process of cultural and linguistic innovation and diversification was dramatically intensified. And finally, from perhaps 20,000 BP, certainly not later than 10,000 BP, a considerable *return migration Back-into-Africa*

¹⁴ van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2005, ‘Mythological archaeology: reconstructing humankind’s oldest discourse: A preliminary attempt to situate sub-Saharan African cosmogonic myths within a long-range intercontinental comparative perspective’, paper for the comparative myth section of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN) Pre-Symposium / 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable on ‘Ethnogenesis of South and Central Asia’, organised by RIHN, NIHU / Harvard University, the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, Kyoto, Japan, 6-8 June, 2005; forthcoming in the conference proceedings now in press, and meanwhile available at: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/mythical_archaeology/mytholog.htm .

took place.¹⁵ The latter brought back, to Africa, genes that had made the more than 100,000 years' detour across Asia – many genes detectably mutating on the way. The Back-into-Africa return migration also brought back, into the African continent, cultural and linguistic innovations from Asia. These would now begin to percolate all over Africa (perhaps least so in a belt of varying width along the Atlantic coast from Sierra Leone to Angola), interacting – in a fascinating feed-back movement – with the many innovations which the pre-Out-of-Africa package had meanwhile achieved *inside* the African continent. The latter innovations were highly significant: humankind's oldest sophisticated hunting implements (barbed harpoons), geometric art (the complex diamond-shaped geometrical pattern of Blombos Cave, South Africa), and representations of animals and humans (Tanzania), have all been attested in Africa, 90,000–40,000 BP. The result of all these developments has been: *kaleidoscopic diversity yet unmistakable shared origins as well as more recent convergence on a truly intercontinental scale*. Global cultural history emphatically includes Africa, but in this connection Africa has played

- not just the passive role of receiver of cultural achievements coming in from the outside (as a condescending, potentially racist North Atlantic version of history had it),
- nor exclusively the role of giver of cultural achievements, without receiving anything substantial from other continents (as the biologically entrenched, potential racist strong version of Afrocentricity would have it)
- but a combination of both roles of giver and receiver of cultural

¹⁵ Cf. Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., Piazza, A., & Menozzi, A., 1994, *The history and geography of the human genes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Cruciani, F., Santolamazza, P., Shen, P., Macaulay, V., Moral, P., Olckers, A., Modiano, D., Holmes, S., Destro-Bisol, G., Coia, V., Wallace, D.C., Oefner, P.J., Torroni, A., Cavalli-Sforza, L.L., Scozzari, R., Underhill, P.A., 2002, 'A back migration from Asia to sub-Saharan Africa is supported by high-resolution analysis of human Y-chromosome haplotypes', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 70: 1197-1214; Hammer, M.F., Karafet T., Rasanayagam A., et al., 1998, 'Out of Africa and back again: Nested cladistic analysis of human Y chromosome variation', *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, 15, 4: 427-441; and references cited in these publications.

achievements, on the basis not of biological/ somatic/ genetic, but of non-somatic processes of cultural transmission through learning.

This, I propose – as an informed personal synthesis – is a possible context in which to situate the debate on race in the context of African and Afrocentrist identity. It affirms Africa's, and Africans', absolutely crucial contribution to global cultural history, but does not make that claim dependent on the exclusive, and accidental, possession of such genetically transmitted somatic traits as are commonly associated with 'race'; and (in ways remarkably convergent with Kwame Appiah's argument on race – however, this is precisely the line of thought that is dismissed in Kiros' contribution below!) it emphatically separates the sociology and the hermeneutics of race as a collective representation, from the kaleidoscopic minutiae of humankind's minor somatic variations and ecological adaptations in the course of the last 140,000 years.

Thus, when Teodros Kiros proposes a Du Boisean philosophy of race, this does not necessarily amount to a plea for the strong version of racially-inclined Afrocentricity as defined above, and least of all is it an attempt at reviving de Gobineau. It is simply an invitation to join him, and Du Bois, in their magnificent and deeply moving hermeneutical quest for the *meaning* of 'race' – race as a collective representation (shared by both Whites and Blacks) of American society during Du Bois' life time. In this quest, Kiros, Du Bois, and the reader may join hands in recapturing the resources of culture and dignity that the experience of White racism had sought to deny them by forcibly making them members of an almost inescapable colour caste. And when Sanya Osha deals with race in his discussion of Philippe-Joseph Salazar's work on South Africa, it is not in order to reify the concept of race, but, on the contrary, because Salazar in his modern application of Aristotelian rhetoric (as a communicative technique of making the political desirable) offers¹⁶ a perspective *liberating us* from the pernicious reification of race – not as an objective scientific datum but as a man-made, deceptive, and manipulable collective representation.

¹⁶ Such is Osha's reading; cf. *Quest XVI*: 238-272.

The purpose of this (I admit) unusually lengthy, substantive and personal Editorial was not to dictate a particular view, but to explicitly identify fields of possible misunderstanding, to adduce additional background information, and to invite members of the *QUEST* constituency to make their own contributions to the ongoing debate; *Philosophical Discussions* was once the apt subtitle of this journal, so please live up to it, by producing, and submitting to *QUEST*, critical responses on the matter of race and on all other topics of interest to philosophy in Africa today.

Wim van Binsbergen

Articles

AN AFRICAN PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY¹

A Personal Testimony²

by Valentin Y. Mudimbe

Vestri capilli capitis omnes numerati sunt: nolite timere.
(‘All the hairs on your head have been counted: so have no fear’) – *Die 8 Nov. Ad Laudes.*

In the Tenth Anniversary Special Issue of the *Bulletin of the Society for African Philosophy in North America* released in 1997 (Vol. 10, 2), I introduced my reflection by stating a number of positions. They included a general suspicion concerning the concept of African Philosophy, the question of a supposed confusion of philosophy understood as *Weltanschauung* and, on the other hand, philosophy defined as a critical, auto-critical, explicit reflection bearing on language and human experience. Such a hesitation was signified in the privilege that the Society chose to give to the preposition ‘for’ as a way of naming its own tasks. In effect, to the implications of the genitive with its slippery issue of origin in the expression ‘Society of African Phi-

¹ This paper was first published in the Italian journal *Africa e Mediterraneo*; its publication here is has been made possible thanks to the author, and thanks to permission graciously granted by the Editor of that journal.

² This paper was read on February 10, 2005 at the one-day conference organized by Bill Olsen, professor of African Studies at Brigham Young University. I am grateful to him as well as to Anthony Mangeon, whose monumental doctoral dissertation on *Lumières Noires* (three volumes, 897 pages + appendixes), presented on the 17th of December, 2004 at l’Université de Cergy-Pontoise, was an invitation to re-evaluate my own ‘philosophical’ itinerary. Indeed, my thanks are addressed also to my Duke Assistant, Lesley Curtis, for her advice, technical support, and competence.

losophy' in which the adjective 'African' might seem to represent an intrinsic and essential difference, in sum the singularity of a nature, we chose the detour expressed by the preposition 'for,' as indicative of a project, its objective, the practice of philosophy by students of African descent, or by individuals conceiving their identities, in any case their perceptual, or their real behavior, as marked by an African geography, be it mythical, in any case simply representational. Such an epistemological prudence was to allow us, among other things, an elegant and critical handling of two metaphors: on the one hand, Heidegger's affirmation that philosophy is Greek; on the other hand, the pertinence of a common sense saying, no one speaks from nowhere; and, in practical terms, this meant a postulate, that any *parole* is always, in its difference, qualified by a locus, a time, the consciousness and, indeed the unconsciousness of the speaker.

In such an orientation, we were expressing a right and a duty, and also, simultaneously, the fact of a *Bindung* and an *Entbindung*, bond and unbinding, linking the African speaking subject to a self and to a locality, at the same time positing the subject as inextricably mingling with an alterity, with someone else, an *alter*, thus very precisely as unstable, insofar as such a subject cannot negate its own expansion, its existence outside itself, in the *alter* in whom it can bind to itself. It followed that it was only reasonable for us, African students of philosophy, to be attentive to Martin Heidegger's challenge, his pronouncement on philosophy as being essentially Greek. How could one avoid the Greek initiative, and the already long history of philosophical practices, while acknowledging the obvious around us, testimonies of intellectual investments witnessing its African experiences?

Let me replace such a question in its context, thus accentuating the fantasmatic arrogance of a dream and what, in its desire for, and fidelity to an ascetic discipline, it was positing in actuality, the fundamental principle of a practice, its capacity for detaching itself from itself, as well as from its own ordinary temptation of transforming itself into a triumphal system of definitive truths. Indeed, I am reading a *cheminement*, implying myself in a history, a practice, and these are, at once, mine and not mine, as is the language I am using, which is mine and, at the same time, is not mine. Yet I know that I have been inhabiting this language and its culture, in the way I inhabit my body. Such a perplexing indistinction in its own always-shifting ground must witness also to something else, its own conditions of possibility, say a scho-

lastic education, a socio-cultural context, and indeed the spiritual and ethical (in-)securities of identification (*mimesis*) with, and resemblance (*homoiosis*) to models; in sum, an intellectual history, its detours, and the vertigo of its internal logic. Thinking of, or imagining myself as detached from something that might be called philosophy, a dreamlike representation of my relation to possibilities of desire, condenses a *Weltanschauung*, and subjectively qualifies my own insertion in it. This vision, in some way, at its genesis, confused itself with a locality, the Benedictine monastery of Gihindamuyaga in Rwanda, founded in the 1950s by Belgian monks of Maredsous in Belgium. At the same time, my detachment signified a journey in a different kind of detachment: a travel, a choice under a multi-secular paradigm, *ora et labora*, in which my *anima*, existence, and *persona* were to correspond, in a permanent austerity and perpetual recommencement, to the annihilation of desire, and of all of it, beginning with a systematic weakening of the desire of desires. The “born-again” concept of some contemporary Christian denominations was already at the foundation, and in the whole structure of the monastic life as conceived by Benedetto of Nursia in the VIth century, and is symbolized in a major deviation vis-à-vis oneself, signified in the erasure of one’s identity, one’s name, and any attempt at a reconstitution of one’s *anima* and *persona*, inner and outer.

Thus the following paradox: it is in the language of phenomenologists that I can account, more or less correctly, for the possibility of a wish-fulfillment of the young monk I was before being exposed to phenomenology, namely that where, in my quest, I was supposed, really, to expect to find myself truly and at best, was only where I could reach that which was not myself. But in this process, then probably better than today, I knew that the subject of the wish, myself, was appealing to both a fundamental distinctness and its transparency, at the intersection of a number of polarities, more exactly, in difficult conjunctions of meditation and liturgy, inside and outside, solitude and community, free will and obedience, difference and structure, spontaneity and rule. In such a process of spatializing oneself, that is, in the blending of opposites and their effects, strictly speaking, what is expected is not the excruciating lucidity of a consciousness thinking of itself as a liberty of being in the world, but instead an intellect freely submitting to a vision of life and the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, and facing what has no name, perhaps a *Deus absconditus*, the mysteriousness of a presence, an

enigma, possibly a void, as a sign of a divine “apartness.”

And if the something hidden were elsewhere, somewhere in what I was expecting to be erased, a will to truth as will to knowledge? The question imposed itself on my life when, in 1960, I was introduced to Alexis Kagame, a doctor of philosophy, who was then a professor at the Groupe Scolaire in Astrida, now Butare, a few kilometers from Gihindamuyaga.

From the philosophy of *Anthropos*, in Vienna, to Placide Tempels, a Franciscan missionary in Katanga, and his contemporaries, Europeans such as Theodore Theuws and Raoul Van Caeneghem, and on the other hand, his African exegetes and disciples, including Alexis Kagame, André Makarakiza, François-Marie Lufuluabo, and Vincent Mulago, a common imagination was then expressing itself in practices, as well as in discourses caught between pre-reflexive and reflexive African indigenous cosmologies, ethics and systems of self-knowledges. These are discourses on local ways of existing; mundanely put, local conceptions on everyday life, their internal organization, rationale, and explanations of their genesis. As discursive practices engaged in seeking grids of, and as a matter of fact, for ordering particular, well individualized historicities, they perfectly witness the three qualifications used by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his introduction to *Structural Anthropology* in order to spell out the similarities existing between anthropological and historical approaches. Namely, these practices were and are,

1. firstly, objective constructs;
2. secondly, they are manifestly structures and expositions of an alterity external to the subject; and,
3. whatever might be their shortcomings, they are organized testimonies of a human reality and, as such, in their own ways, more or less good mirrors of the singularity of a community-bond, a *Massenbindung*, in Freudian idiom.

As it is easy to emphasize the similarities existing between anthropological and historical perspectives, it is important, after Claude Lévi-Strauss, to record the fact of a fundamental deviation between historical and anthropological methods, the former proceeding from consciously created data and materials in order to capture the unconscious of a cultural configuration, whereas the latter, the anthropological, moves from an immersion in a cul-

tural unconscious to its conscious renderings. Without discounting what the deviation between the two approaches might signify, we cannot fail to note what, in conjunction, the two imaginations do allow as expressions of cultural differences, but also their transcendence thanks to the paradoxes of concepts such as a ‘human nature,’ the idea of an authoritarian order in the sense of an Hegelian history, and the regimes of Judeo-Christian paradigms. Congruencies come to light, they include or evade mimetic and anti-mimetic testimonies and, as a consequence, empower possibilities of decoding, reading, and understanding, in their own right, original African practices in the field of intercultural and comparative philosophical literature. They are, in effect, injunctions for, and keys to exploring original domains as witnessed by the work of Alexis Kagame, offering a Bantu-Rwandese philosophy of being through Aristotelian categories, François-Marie Lufuluabo constructing a Luba theodicy by using Scholastics’ grids; or Vincent Mulago establishing overviews on African religions and visions of the world that relied on the “Colonial library” and an ethnographic questionnaire.

Listening to Alexis Kagame and Vincent Mulago, in the 1960s, the young adult I was then could seize upon their accounts of African cultures, as arguments unveiling an order, something like the nature of a basic, almost unchangeable, yet a dynamic something, a sort of immanent spirit, that their discourses were claiming to reflect; and, on the other hand, despite the rigidity of intellectual grids, their exposition of arguments were balanced and provided convincing statements on, and explanations of ways of existing in a cultural difference; in sum, manners in which, between others’ imaginations and reason, I could, happily, relate to myself as a divided-self dispersing itself in metaphors, their memories, and their knowledges. Was it only an illusion, a narcissistic fiction presupposed by an overvaluation of my cultural identity well translated and expressed by my African intellectual and spiritual parental figures? At any rate, I came to admire and like these accounts and their ambition for promoting comprehensive arguments in an exacting game of propositions based on strict rules; and, in its space, any element could comfortably be related to its own *ad intram* principles. In effect, there was an object-orientation from the outset of their essays, an explicitly idealized model of identification, an inaccessible prescription, Christianity and the Catholic Church, in which a difference, an alterity, was attempting to construct itself and to be fitted as part of a universal *communitas*. A desire in

the greatest degree of culture-integration, using *instrumentaria* from the model, would deduce abstract and concrete similarities and analogies, emulations and homologies, and possible fecundations. The describable and the described are theoretical constructs, frameworks for *distincta* and *indistincta*, their values, comparable systems, translation and interpretation; in other words, they are topologies concerned with issues about proximities and invariants, coherence and differentiation, unity and diversity.

Forty years later, the student of history of ideas I have become would wonder sometimes about the conditions of possibility of these accounts arrogantly aimed at creating regional ontologies, and the concrete contexts that gave rise to them, and sanctioned them as meaningful in the multicultural field I have been inhabiting. There were, and since the 1960s, already worked out well-informed demonstrations pointing to junctures, resources, mediations between, on the one hand, these African initiatives, their intellectual constitution, and, on the other hand, the obviousness, almost the fatality of determinations from the French language, and its epistemological constraints; and moreover, these conscious reflective activities had to be linked to other external demands, including academic requirements, and thus the influence of Pontifical Roman Institutions of Higher Education, attended by most, almost all these Central African thinkers.

Recently, putting together notes that go back to the 1970s, and which concerned this question of an African philosophy, I was struck by a neglect, a determining influence, and it brought to mind a metaphor used by Claude Digeon, the German crisis of French thought, in order to qualify cultural connections between France and Germany at the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth. I think I have come across something like what is meant by the metaphor; and, in this case, around the debate on African philosophy, a Germanic authority and influx. This inflow is extremely tidy and so visible that I wonder how it has not been more asserted, and clearly presented in the works of contemporary history of African thought. In referring to this more or less coherent, at any rate underexposed influence, I would use the image of a galaxy, as a figure of speech, and understanding it as a play of intellectual constellations around few focal points.

The first galaxy, dominated by Cyril Van Overbergh at the beginning of the XXth century, was somehow initiated by an International Congress that took place in Mons in 1905. Out of the meeting, came an immense question-

naire to be completed by Africa scholars and colonials of the time period. In this questionnaire, under the subdivision of a group of questions on the practical organization of African spaces and cultures, mention is made about the question of the existence of an African philosophy. The same Van Overbergh found himself, just after the Congress of 1905, President of the International Office of Ethnography which, by 1913, had already published ten major texts on the African question. The Flemish scholar, Alfons J. Smet, in his work *Histoire de la Philosophie africaine contemporaine*, establishes a connection between the spirit of this intellectual project and the colonial enterprise. The practical objectives were organized around three main entries, formation of colonial agents, expansion of schools for Africans; finally, the creation and implementation of a Tuskegee model adapted to Central Africa.

Smet indicates moreover something that I had missed up until now: this programmatic intent, presented to Leopold II in 1905, was related to the fact that Van Overbergh had visited the United States, paid careful attention to the American initiative at Tuskegee Institute, and from his conversations with Americans, including Booker T. Washington, had been led to a reformulation of colonial policies and directions as explicit and formally built procedures of acculturation.

Because he is the best known, to the point of being considered as “an epistemic individual,” Placide Tempels (1906-1970) who established what would doubtless become the most significant marker of this galaxy, a Bantu vitalist conception of the world, should, perhaps, be seen mainly as a missionary, essentially preoccupied with issues concerning the most appropriate methods of evangelizing, and thematising pertinent procedures for Africans’ conversion. He arrived as a missionary in the Congo in 1933. In 1946, on leave in Belgium, he published the original Flemish version of his *Bantu Philosophy*. Its precepts and aims are those of his Church, his culture, and his period. God informed all human cultures. Thus, it should be possible to find in Pagan experiential authorities stepping stones expecting, at once, an occasion and the right opportunity, to open up to Christian truth, that is to their ascent to the true God as providentially manifested in Western civilization. In this sense, the structure of the work of a Christian conversion, as well as the parameters determining its authenticity, are isomorphic and identical with those supporting the architecture of what is then, in certain circles,

qualified as Christian civilization. In practice, the missionary in Tempels, beyond the conflictual nexus of intellect and senses, rationalism and animism, engrossing most trendy theories of progress during this period, wanted to restore and affirm another privilege, in his view existentially stressed by the native culture in which he had immersed himself, the centrality of life as a permanent and constant sign of a fundamental epiphany, act of faith, act of fecundity, and act of love.

During a symposium on my *The Invention of Africa* (1988), at Rice University, the American anthropologist Ivan Karp raised a question wondering if Henri Bergson (1859-1941), the French thinker of process philosophy, flow of time and existence, a stern critique of naïve cults of scientific reason, could have influenced Tempels. I have been doubting such an intellectual filiation, not seeing how, in the vividly dogmatic climate of his philosophy training for the priesthood in a 1920s Flemish Catholic seminary, he could have accessed the works of Bergson; but, instead, and very likely, textbooks and publications in Flemish and German concerning questions of theology, missiology and, indeed, the normative scholastic philosophy of his Church.

Parallel to the work of Tempels, there are other works at the crossing of ethnology and evangelization; and we might bring out, as representative, cultural ethnographies by Pierre Colle and, for its interests in Ethics, studies of P. De Clercq analyzing concrete attitudes (anger, shame, etc.) of the Luba. Little known, yet highly influential, was the book by another missionary, Raoul Van Caeneghem, on the notion of God among the BaLuba of Kasai. A memoir of the Royal Colonial Academy of Belgium (1952), this work went practically unknown outside of Flemish and German circles because it was issued in Flemish; and the French version, *La Notion de Dieu chez les BaLuba du Kasai*, was published by the Academy only four years later, in 1956, as volume 22, fascicule 2, of its series. This is the version which became known to Congolese intellectuals. Disciple and, very probably, in competition with Tempels, another Franciscan missionary, Theodore Theuws, an ethnologist by education, would become a major inscription in researches on Luba worldviews. His *Textes luba*, edited and published in 1954 as a special number of the *Bulletin Trimestriel du Centre d'Etude des Problèmes Sociaux Indigènes*, was the first anthology of local narratives attentive to such important life-passages as 'birth', 'existence', 'dying,' and their rites. Most of his other publications emerge after 1960, and can be

considered as the scholarly side of Tempels' sacerdotal search for the best ways of converting Africans to the essentials of Christianity.

A significant fact, on which I stumbled only recently, by pure chance, is in Smet's *L'histoire de la philosophie africaine contemporaine*, and is related to the content of a 1936 article by Tempels on the Baluba-Shankadi vision of 'being in the world', published in the journal *Kongo-Overzee* (vol. 2, 1935-1936). It is about the 'foreign-ness' of the following concept, *honger der weetgierigheid*. Smet suggests as a translation of this expression, "need to know." In this context, I believe the expression corresponds exactly to what we understand today as "will to truth," or even the conceptually more dramatic, "desire for truth." The spiritual genealogy of the concept, Smet explains, goes back to the mystical Flemish language of the XIVth century of a Jean Van Ruysbroek. This seems to me extremely meaningful insofar as it intersects at the edges with the missionary idea of searching for native stepping stones of Christianity, and, perfectly overlapping its vocation, it expresses, moreover, a neat proximity with the concept of a *Deus obscurus*, the idea of a hidden God, the *Deus absconditus*, of negative theology. The concept of the Flemish mystic asserts the *itinerarium* of the soul toward the absolute unknowable, unnamable, the silence *par excellence* and, at the same time, affirms also such a mark as the faultless, unqualifiable, perfect completion of a spiritual search, indeed always unattainable. Cannot such a mystic process, be seen as a mirror for a somehow less cerebral procedure, the one conceived as its analogous by Placide Tempels, and expounded in his *Notre Rencontre* (1962), initiatic guidelines for conversion as a *cheminement* into, basically, what which is already there, unseen signs, concealed symbols, awaiting something, an unveiling and an uplifting, a recondition and a redemption. This precept, simultaneously idea and motion, is the cornerstone of what has been hailed by his followers as Tempels' *Mafundisho*, teaching and guidance. Its sociological representation was studied by Willy de Craemer, and its quintessence presented by the German anthropologist, Johannes Fabian, in the most comprehensive analysis of the *Jamaa* (family) movement initiated by Tempels after the completion of *Bantu Philosophy*. Philosophy, or theology of conversion, it is at once individual and shared, lived and, always, assessed as a communion of existing. To be, at least once, a Mu-Luba among the Ba-Luba, and feel it, live it, and evidence it. This was what Tempels admitted as his transcendence. Analyti-

cally, he expressed it in the symbolism of a translation, the transfiguration of a Pagan completion in Christianity.

1. Life, an intense life, a full life, a strong life, a total life, an intensity in being.
2. Fecundity, paternity and maternity, a strong fecundity, intense, total, and not only physical.
3. A vital union with other beings: isolation has killed us.

The accents of such '*a desire to be*' are mystical, and questions of philosophy find here their closure and, at the same time, their challenge: why should anyone bring them against such formulations?

A last galaxy, coextensive with Tempels' mystical dialectic of conversion and, more than probably, its source, is a highly structured space in which we should note as metacenter, Wilhelm Schmidt, the Vienna theorist of diffusionism, whose contribution to ethnology and religious studies is immense, as witnessed by his monumental work on cultural manifestations of God, published between 1933 and 1949. The research strived around the journal *Anthropos*, to which, spiritually or scientifically, are connected a number of Schmidt's fellow priests, and distinguished scholars; and among the most prominent, one heeds Frans Bontinck, Gustaav Hulstaert, and Paul Schebesta. The last, in the 1950s, was serving, in addition, as an expert in anthropology for the Vatican. Schmidt is, without a doubt, a rallying point. The field research that he animated and dominated with his followers was, *avant la lettre*, an interdisciplinary space that created a dialogue between anthropology, history, theology and religious policies of conversion. It cemented the basis of what, later on, in the 1950s and early 1960s, would become the locus for the fusion of a theology of salvation and a theology of stepping stones. Highly visible, Tempels is part of it, one of the thinkers of practical methodologies. He is remembered, mostly, as the charismatic leader of the *Jamaa* movement which, from the 1960s onwards, expanded throughout Central Africa like a sacred fire. Implementing his inspirations, his disciples refined them, sometimes adding to, generally sharpening his prophetic views and, between Christian and regional systems of beliefs, they contributed to the mapping of original contexts of mediation for depressed and repressed vitalistic pulsions and their spiritual credibility. In this capac-

ity, and in its own manner, Tempels' *Jamaa* was paving the way for a major event, the transmutations of the theology of stepping stones into that of "inculturation."

Within the interplay of cross-cultural networks in Central Africa, assuredly in the first fifty years of the XXth century, something simple, yet generally overlooked, imposed itself and massively, the enormous influence that some European intellectuals, bathed in a Germanic cultural atmosphere, had at the genesis, in the construction, and elaboration of debates on African philosophy, scientific projects, as well as programs for acculturation and conversion.

With the publication of his "Le 'Décollage' conceptuel: condition d'une philosophie bantoue" (*Diogène*, 1965, 52), outcome of a lecture he had delivered on March 15, 1965 at the Kinshasa Goethe Institute, Franz Crahay, a Belgian professor of philosophy at Lovanium University, created an event, expounding on external and internal conditions for the existence of an African philosophy. His exposé, all of it animated by a metaphor from aeronautic vocabulary, taking-off, intended to uncover and propose an absolutely new duty for the practice of philosophy, and aimed at fostering a new demand of rigor at the heart of the discipline. The lecture first, and then its publication in the Paris based journal, *Diogène*, expanded the discussion on the idea of an African philosophy, internationalized it; and its effects thoroughly modified an intellectual climate that had been dominated by clergymen, and mainly by missionaries who were spiritually attuned to what I have qualified as Germanic culture. Crahay assumed, in his presentation, an excessively idealized understanding of philosophy, never and nowhere achieved and, at any rate, nowhere attainable; specifically, philosophy as an explicit discourse, analytical, radically critical and auto-critical, systematic at least in principle and, in any case, open, and concerned with human experience, its conditions, meanings and the values it witnesses to.

I was in the room, and I still remember the religious atmosphere of Crahay's performance, how it brought to my mind the singularity of what it was in actuality, a secular representation of a solemn High Mass, with all its well-prescribed out liturgical requisites. After the lecture, Crahay invited me to the party that the Goethe Institute was organizing in his honor at a local restaurant, *Le Colibri*; there, he asked me to write a report of the event for the press. I wrote a brief account the following day, submitted it to him, and

a few days later it was published in one of the dailies of Kinshasa, *Le Courrier d'Afrique*.

Did I think that, apart from emphasizing a method and its exigencies, Crahay had dismantled anything? His intervention had problematized a practice; and, in so doing, raised new problems, which was what, in any case, is expected from any philosophical practice. He had established the difference represented by Tempels, Kagame, or Mulago, in its own right, as *une science, une connaissance, une vérité autres*, that which is out there, preceding historically new questions as their external conditions of probability. In 1968, at the Goethe Institute, in the very room where three years before, Franz Crahay, my former professor, had made his intervention, I was lecturing on '*Héritage occidental et conscience nègre*,' considering the disjunction between being this or being that, as that which, from a different viewpoint, was exceeded and transcended in the conjunction made possible by three new inscriptions on the body of an African history; namely, an acceleration of History, an epistemological discontinuity, and an alphabetical revolution. A surprised child of multiple memories, at the intersection of at least two philosophical traditions, I was stating my consciousness as being caught by its own self-reflections in, at least, two historicities, two languages, two cultures, and a multiplicity of *tradita*, givens, handed-downs, inheritances.

Such an exercise in historical and psychological connections and disconnections, with its obsessions and anxieties about methods and faithfulness, was one of the best introductions to masterful programmatic principles like those suggested by Georges Canguilhem in his seminal treatise, *Le Normal et Le Pathologique* (1966). They led me to a profound respect for any observation, reading, interpretation, even the most unruly apparently. Canguilhem, whose views I have been sharing with my students for more than thirty years, and over three continents, taught me the obvious, so often ignored, sometimes ridiculed, yet which is the only way to a good apprehension and understanding of anything, namely that it is not just the difference, the exception which proves the rule as a rule, it is the infraction which provides it with the occasion to be rule by making rules. Such an attitude, that might seem to transliterate a neurosis, at least in principle, seems to me a healthy statement in any discipline, and indicates also, and again in principle, the condition of a real joy, say, in the practice of philosophy.

From my confession, is there an assessment that can be made about the practice of philosophy by an African? Witnessing its own idiosyncrasy in an eccentric effusion, it has, essentially, articulated its own self-subversion and taste, even when it tried to shed some light on the usually unaccented presence of a Germanic influence at the genesis of the philosophical debate in Africa. In this sense, my testimony might not have served well the field and its complexity. A multifaceted domain, as recently illustrated by the magnificent *Companion to African Philosophy* edited by Kwasi Wiredu and published by Blackwell Ltd., apart from treatises on its history and geography, its languages and contexts, for methodological purposes, as a way of determining tasks and classifying the contents of an already impressive library, one could divide works pertaining to Africa and philosophy into two main sections: on the one hand, those belonging to semiology, that is studies localizing, analyzing, and organizing coherently socio-cultural signs; on the other, those belonging to hermeneutics, that is studies interpreting the meanings of these signs. In their diversity and variety, and beyond the sterile debate on the ‘existence’ or the ‘inexistence’ of an African philosophy, what affirms itself amazingly remains, simply, the vocation of something called philosophy, about which, I, personally, have no convincing definition, and which, in Africa as elsewhere, actualizes itself as a perpetual recommencement.

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LE ROLE DE LA SOCIETE CIVILE DANS LA CONSTRUCTION D'UN ETAT DE DROIT SELON JÜRGEN HABERMAS

par Jean-Luc Malango Kitungano S.J.¹

RESUME: L'exercice quotidien des droits des membres d'une société complexifiée par le pluralisme et la présence de multiples organisations non étatiques aboutissent à une fragilisation même de la primauté du droit comme principe d'un Etat démocratique. L'espace public politique a alors pour fonction de rétablir la cohésion sociale en établissant des règles de conduite basées sur la discussion rationnelle et à même de régir la vie des hommes. Tel est le rôle de la société civile. Pourtant, même la société civile est sous la menace de la domination qui prévaut dans toutes les sphères politiques.

MOTS CLE: cohésion sociale, discussion rationnelle, domination, droits, espace public politique, Etat démocratique., fragilisation, organisations non étatiques, pluralisme, primauté du droit, règles de conduite, société civile.

ABSTRACT: The daily exercise of the rights of members of a society, given the complexity of pluralism and the multiplicity of non-governmental organisations, leads to the fragility of the primacy of law as the principle of a democratic state. The political public sphere is thus called upon to restore the social cohesion by establishing behavioural norms based on rational discussion, and capable of ruling the lives of citizens. This is the role of the civil society. However, civil society is under the threat of the kind of domination that prevails in all political spheres.

KEY WORDS: civil society, democratic state, domination, non-governmental organisations, norms, pluralism, primacy of law, rational discussion, rights, social cohesion.

Introduction

Jusqu'à une époque récente, l'histoire ne connaissait l'opposition de la société civile institutionnelle que sous la forme de la résistance. L'opposition

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de la société civile, considérée comme une alternative de pensée et de comportement dans l'espace politique, ne s'est intensifiée que depuis l'apparition de la démocratie moderne des partis.

Dans cet article, nous tentons de dégager le rôle de la société civile dans l'instauration de l'Etat de droit reconstruit. Nous partons des intuitions de Habermas telles qu'elles se déploient dans son ouvrage *Droit et démocratie, entre faits et normes*; et notre analyse se base sur le huitième chapitre² intitulé « Le rôle de la société civile et l'espace public politique ».

Quel intérêt peut donc présenter une telle étude? La question d'un Etat de droit véritable se pose avec acuité dans le monde en général et en Afrique en particulier. Notre étude examine le rôle que joue la société civile dans l'instauration d'un Etat de droit à la lumière des réflexions habermassiennes. Nous allons préciser au premier point, quelques concepts clés. Nous dégagerons ensuite les réflexions de Habermas sur le rôle de la société civile dans l'instauration d'un Etat de droit à partir de l'approche critique des théories traditionnelles sur le système politique. Nous ferons enfin quelques observations critiques sur l'écart entre la théorie habermassienne sur la société civile et les faits sociologiques actuels.

Précisions conceptuelles

I. 1. La société civile et l'espace public politique

Par société civile, nous entendons, avec Habermas, une structure de communication ancrée dans le monde vécu par l'intermédiaire d'une base constituée.³ Pour notre part, c'est le cœur institutionnel de cette structure que nous

² Jürgen Habermas, *Droit et démocratie, entre faits et normes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p. 355-414.

³ Ce sens de la société civile se démarque de celui de Hegel, devenu inopérant dans les sociétés démocratiques modernes. Habermas estime que Hegel avait une compréhension de la tradition libérale qui résumait ce concept dans le sens d'un « système de besoins », c'est-à-dire, comme un système de travail social et de circulation des marchandises propres à l'économie de marché. Or ce sens est aujourd'hui démenti par la réalité des faits. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

appelons société civile institutionnelle. Celle-ci se compose des associations, organisations et mouvements qui à la fois accueillent, condensent et répercutent, en les amplifiant dans l'espace public politique, la résonance que les problèmes sociaux trouvent dans les sphères de la vie privée. Ces groupements sont généralement non-étatiques, bénévoles et non économiques. Ils rattachent les structures communicationnelles de l'espace public à la composante du monde vécu. Les concepts d'espace public politique et de société civile recouvrent chez Habermas des références sociologiques empiriques et ne représentent nullement des postulats universels simplement normatifs.⁴

I. 2. La discussion rationnelle et la morale procédurale

Par discussion rationnelle, Habermas entend, un agir intelligent des membres d'une société démocratique. La notion de discussion rationnelle est envisagée dans le cadre global de la morale procédurale, selon laquelle tous les sociétaires capables de juger moralement ce qui peut être valablement accepté par tous s'engagent dans un accord global reposant sur des principes en vue de l'harmonie et de l'organisation de la société. Il s'agit d'une démarche collective et individuelle dans un contexte des sociétés complexes où les conflits sociaux sont inhérents à l'illégitimité des processus de la génération, de l'attribution et de l'institutionnalisation des ordres juridiques et du pouvoir politique. Par la morale procédurale, Habermas préconise la reconstruction du droit, c'est-à-dire l'examen des fonctions et mécanismes du droit devant favoriser l'avènement d'un Etat de droit véritable.

Le rôle de la société civile dans l'espace public politique selon Jürgen Habermas

Habermas part d'un constat: toutes les théories de l'intégration sociale cherchent à résoudre la question de la tension entre la validité normative et la

⁴ L'espace public est différencié en niveaux en fonction de la densité de la communication, de la complexité de l'organisation et de l'ampleur du rayon d'action, allant de l'espace public épisodique du bistrot, des cafés et des rues jusqu'à l'espace public abstrait créé par les mass-media et composée de lecteurs, d'auditeurs et de téléspectateurs à la fois isolés et globalement dispersés, ainsi qu'à l'espace public organisé (*Ibid.*, p. 401).

factualité des droits des individus. Cette tension signifie que le rapport entre les lois et l'exercice des droits fondamentaux des citoyens deviennent anti-thétiques dans les faits. La question qu'il se pose sur le rôle de la société civile se résume de la manière suivante: A travers des espaces publics autonomes et susceptibles de résonance, la société civile développe-t-elle des impulsions suffisamment vitales pour permettre de transporter les conflits politiques de la périphérie du système politique en son sein même?⁵

La réponse à cette question procède de la critique de la politique telle qu'elle fut analysée par différentes théories.

II. 1. Critique des théories sur la politique

Dans la théorie du pluralisme politique, Habermas critique l'interprétation instrumentale de la politique selon laquelle le pouvoir politique et le pouvoir administratif ne sont que différentes formes de manifestation du pouvoir social. Le pouvoir politique est réparti entre le gouvernement et l'opposition. En ligne ascendante, le pouvoir politique se traduit par la concurrence des partis à travers les élections. En ligne descendante, le pouvoir conquis par les élections est employé afin de transposer et d'implémenter les projets politiques – issus des jeux des forces politiques – pour aboutir à des décisions qui ont force d'obligation pour tous les membres de la société.

A cette théorie on peut opposer la théorie des élites, qui recèle en son sein ses propres limites. A la différence de la précédente, elle se limite au rôle plébiscitaire opéré entre équipes dirigeantes rivales (partis, groupes d'intérêts, ...). L'approche élitiste surestime le rôle de l'administration étatique dans le système social. Comment l'administration de l'Etat ou le système politique se charge-t-il, à la fois d'articuler les besoins normatifs pour le public et de gérer les conflits latents, les problèmes refoulés, les intérêts échappant à toute organisation? Or le système administratif apparaît de nos jours comme ne disposant que d'une marge d'action réduite. Il est devenu

⁵ Une telle question reconnaît, implicitement, le rôle de la société civile comme outil stratégique de communication entre l'espace du monde vécu et le monde du politique. Elle cherche par ailleurs à saisir sa vitalité comme véhicule des rapports de communication de la périphérie vers le centre du système politique (Ibid. p. 356).

plus réactif que régulateur.⁶ Les systèmes fonctionnels et les grandes organisations se déroberont obstinément à l'intervention guidée de l'Etat.

Quant à la théorie économique de la démocratie, elle avait entrepris de réaliser au plan empirique certaines intuitions normatives du libéralisme, en démontrant la rationalité du comportement des électeurs et des hommes politiques. Cette théorie s'est avérée également limitée: elle suggérait que l'électeur agissait de façon responsable vis-à-vis de ses propres actions et usait d'une perspective méthodologique d'un examinateur qui est un expert en choix. Or les faits montrent qu'il ne l'est pas pour la plupart des cas et les actions de l'homme politique demeurent plus irrationnelles que rationnelles.

II. 2. Proposition d'une nouvelle approche de la politique

Toutes les limites des théories précédentes poussent Habermas à introduire au cœur de l'espace public politique le paradigme du pouvoir fondé sur la communication. L'Etat de droit pour Habermas, ne peut pas se concevoir comme un système autoréférentiel. Les garanties constitutionnelles ne suffisent pas à elles seules au cœur d'une démocratie, pour préserver l'espace public et la société civile contre toute déformation. C'est pourquoi il estime que les structures de l'espace public doivent être maintenues intactes dans la perspective de leur autonomie. Habermas plaide pour le changement de caractère du droit, tel qu'il nous est proposé dans le modèle libéral traditionnel. En d'autres termes, l'interprétation interne doit être faite du fondement même de l'aspect normatif de l'Etat de droit. Cette interprétation prend au sérieux l'exigence que devraient poser les citoyens à propos de la validité des normes établies au terme des délibérations collectives.

Le rôle de la société civile se situe dans l'hypothèse où: le maintien d'un régime démocratique n'est possible que s'il est porté par des groupes sociaux qui ont intérêt à ce qu'il en soit ainsi, et par une société civile suffi-

⁶ Si l'on considère le schéma systémique: du côté "entrée", la marge d'initiative du gouvernement et des partis est limitée par le caractère imprévisible des électeurs versatiles, bien informés ou susceptibles d'être mobilisés par le populisme, et dont le lien avec les partis ne cessent de se relâcher. Les partis établis craignent de perdre leur légitimité par la suite des votes protestataires et des abstentions. Du côté « sortie » du système politique ou administratif, l'Etat actif constate les limites de sa capacité de régulation.

samment organisée et dynamique pour intégrer le principe de la formation délibérative de la volonté collective selon des règles fixes. Cette idée postule que si l'on prend suffisamment au sérieux l'autonomie et la vitalité de la société civile qui caractérise les sociétés modernes et que révèlent les sciences politiques, on ne peut plus s'en tenir à la réduction de la démocratie aux quelques figures particulières de la représentation, acquises dans le cadre du libéralisme des siècles passés.⁷ Dans un tel régime, le centre de gravité de l'espace politique ne se situe plus dans l'élection des représentants mais dans la *discussion rationnelle*.⁸ La discussion rationnelle est fondamentale dans la morale procédurale pour l'avènement d'un modèle démocratique radical.

Le modèle démocratique radical, dans lequel la société civile a un rôle prépondérant qui conduit à un véritable Etat de droit, est celui qui prône l'exercice d'une large autonomie politique des citoyens. Il s'articule sur une sociologie politique de la démocratie fondée sur les concepts reconstruits de « société civile » et d'« espace public de délibération ». L'histoire de l'Occident montre les limites tant du modèle juridique inspiré par le libéralisme traditionnel et axé sur la défense des libertés individuelles que ceux du droit de l'Etat Providence. Le dépassement historique des modèles⁹ s'avère donc indispensable grâce à la généralisation et à la pluralisation des formes d'exercice de l'autodétermination collective.

Dans un tel contexte, la société civile cesse de présenter l'image d'une masse amorphe, les différents secteurs (mass-media, les Eglises, les organisations philanthropiques et culturelles...) ne sont pas enchâssés dans des cadres fermés; ils sont ouverts et se chevauchent. Pour être vivace,¹⁰ une société civile institutionnelle a besoin des modèles de socialisation appropriés, elle ne peut se déployer que dans le cadre d'un monde vécu rationalisé, sans quoi on assisterait à la formation des mouvements populistes qui

⁷ Stéphan Haber, *Habermas et la sociologie*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998, p. 120.

⁸ Le parlement serait alors l'un des forums où se construit la volonté de l'espace collectif.

⁹ Il s'agit de la théorie du pluralisme politique, la théorie des élites et de la théorie économique de la démocratie.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Ecrits politiques*, Paris, Cerf, 1990; trad. par Christian Bouchindhomme et Rainer Rochlitz, p. 139-162.

Le rôle de la société civile dans la construction d'un Etat de droit selon Jürgen Habermas

défendent aveuglement les traditions inadaptées d'un monde vécu mis en péril par la modernisation capitaliste.

Approche critique de la théorie habermassienne de la société civile et de l'espace public politique.

Les analyses sur la société civile et l'espace public politique prennent, chez Habermas, un tour parfois éclectique: tout au long de ses analyses, chaque nouvelle interrogation appelle un débat avec une nouvelle théorie. Habermas a le souci de décloisonner les formes de savoirs instituées afin de s'autoriser les prétentions d'une pensée globale. Il cherche à établir le lien entre philosophie et politique. Cependant, s'il s'agit de penser le politique et le social, par l'élucidation du rapport entre théorie et pratique, il s'avère que ses analyses qui se voudraient une conciliation de la théorie et la pratique finissent par déboucher sur l'espace théorique-idéaliste. En effet, sa théorie qui entend prendre pour objet la pratique humaine dans son ensemble ne parvient pas à se prémunir contre cette tentation idéaliste qui la porte à négliger la confrontation avec les faits politiques telles que dévoilés dans leur perversion par les sciences politiques et la psychanalyse contemporaines.¹¹

Il découle de l'analyse des faits sociaux que les sociétés civiles modernes s'efforcent de concilier la défense des droits individuels avec les droits collectifs qui supposent les institutions socio-politiques. La plupart des sociétés civiles actuelles militent pour l'instauration d'un Etat de droit selon le modèle de démocratie libérale que Habermas critique. Elles ne sont nullement des espaces neutres, elles sont tributaires de l'espace public international et des enjeux des groupes économiques puissants. Les sociétés civiles apparaissent comme des espaces qui sont travaillés par les factions du système politique. Ces sociétés civiles ne maîtrisent pas encore leurs propres contraintes en renforçant leur autonomie en face des systèmes politiques. Les

¹¹ Pour Habermas, la société est principalement une communauté de communication: or Haber estime que les travaux en sciences sociales et en psychanalyse démentent ce fait. Stéphan Haber, op.cit., p. 120.

citoyens ne sont pas encore parvenus à se concevoir à tout moment comme les auteurs du droit auquel ils sont soumis en tant que destinataires. La communauté juridique continue à se concevoir comme un contrat social impersonnel, au lieu de se concevoir en vertu d'un accord établi au moyen de la discussion intersubjective dont parle Habermas.

Néanmoins, toutes les critiques formulées ne nient nullement pas la valeur théorique des analyses de Habermas sur la société civile et l'espace public politique. La domination est un fait politique central qui le préoccupe. L'analyse de la conception de la société civile et de l'espace public politique à travers le danger de la domination apparaît chez Habermas en fait comme une élucidation de ce qui constitue le cœur de sa philosophie (et pas exclusivement du point de vue politique). En effet, à se vouloir ou même à se penser nécessairement comme critique, celle-ci est d'abord et avant tout philosophie de la domination – si on veut bien désigner par ce terme le sens pris par la réalité économique, sociale et politique que le philosophe a sous les yeux: penser la domination est en même temps penser l'émancipation c'est-à-dire établir les voies qui peuvent permettre de l'éradiquer. Si la domination est le point de départ, l'objet effectif de l'analyse sera donc bien le politique et en particulier, le pouvoir: un pouvoir qui désigne tout autant le fait d'être au pouvoir (et les actions qui s'y rattachent) que les processus par lesquels une collectivité est amenée (de façon contrainte ou non) à déléguer sa volonté. C'est donc en fait par sa dimension profondément politique que Habermas développe l'analyse de la société civile et de l'espace politique.

Conclusion

Selon Habermas, la société civile a un rôle de socialisation des membres d'une communauté vers la liberté communicationnelle. La société civile joue à ce titre un *rôle autoréférentiel* dans la pratique communicationnelle et stabilise l'espace public politique en diffusant cette pratique à tout l'espace public. L'espace public ainsi constitué se reproduit en produisant en même temps les structures de cet espace. La société civile renforce à ce titre la fonction critique de l'espace public. Mais si, d'une part, la société civile assure ce rôle, d'autre part elle doit fournir des efforts visant à assurer des

changements institutionnels en son sein, qui correspondent aux nouvelles significations, identités et normes créées.

Pouvoir et domination ressortent de l'analyse du rôle de la société civile et de l'espace public politique chez Habermas. La société civile et tout l'espace public politique sont menacés par l'enjeu du pouvoir et de la domination. Face au fait de la domination, le pouvoir désigne la matérialisation nécessaire de l'exercice politique, à savoir que la décision est nécessaire dans toute communauté, aux mains d'un représentant qui, même s'il en est le représentant fidèle, possède ce statut particulier de *vecteur*, de détenteur du pouvoir. La domination prend alors ici une teinte négative, elle serait dans un sens l'usage pervers de ce que désignait le pouvoir comme capacité de juger et non l'absence de neutralité et de légitimité qui résultent de l'exercice de ce pouvoir.

La domination devient un enjeu double: pour les uns, il s'agit de la rendre malgré tout légitime dans le cadre d'un ordre nécessaire à une communauté pacifiée, théories que Habermas a critiquées parce que, selon elles, le pouvoir politique par le droit se légitime en lui-même. Pour d'autres, elle est ce dont il faut purifier le politique afin de le rendre à nouveau transparent à lui-même. Habermas parle du principe de dialogabilité où le langage devient le principe facilitateur de la reconnaissance intersubjective des prétentions qui, au nom de la différence et par souci consensuel, se soumettent à la critique. Ce principe, pensons nous, est un atout pour la société civile et pour tout espace politique. Ce n'est qu'après critique que les prétentions à la validité seront assumées comme des obligations significatives.

AFRICA IN DU BOIS'S PHILOSOPHY OF RACE

by Teodros Kiros

RESUME: La philosophie systématique du racisme est un concept sous-développé dans la philosophie moderne. Dans cet article je présente une articulation rigoureuse et soutenue d'une philosophie du racisme dans les travaux de Du Bois. En présentant un architectonic du concept racial, comme l'a décrit Du Bois, les travaux de certains lecteurs de Du Bois d'aujourd'hui sont incorporés dans ce text comme Anthony Appiah et Cornel West. Cet article tente de présenter une philosophie du racisme Du Boisienne pour la première fois.

MOTS CLE: Appiah (Anthony), le concept racial, West (Cornel), Du Bois (W.E.B.), philosophie systématique du race

ABSTRACT: A systematic philosophy of race is an undertheorized concept in modern philosophy. In this paper I attempt to present a rigorous and sustained articulation of a philosophy of race in the works of Du Bois. In the process of presenting an architectonic of the race concept, as Du Bois called it, I engage the works of some contemporary readers of Du Bois, such as Anthony Appiah and Cornel West. This paper seeks to present Du Boisian philosophy of Race for the first time.

KEY WORDS: Appiah (Anthony), Du Bois (W.E.B.), race concept, systematic philosophy of race, West (Cornel)

Introduction

Variously described as the greatest African-American thinker of the twentieth century, Du Bois has recently commanded the attention of high profile modern thinkers. Ever since the arrival of Africana philosophy on the philosophical landscape, new readings of Du Bois' vast work are fast appearing. A very recent striking example is that *Philosophia Africana* devoted its fascinating August 2004 issue to Du Bois, with some remarkable new readings – with Edward J. Blum reinterpreting the role of religion as the power which existentially enabled slaves and others to sustain the savagery of racism in America, as forcefully present in *The Souls of Black Folk*; Babacar

M'Baye resituating Africa as backwards and in need of enlightenment in the narratives of W.E. Du Bois; Jonathon S. Kahn giving an inventive interpretation of “a new religious ideal” in *The Souls of Black Folk*; Jason Young arguing that Du Bois’s dream was the cultivation of a new modern man cleansed of the legacies of the past, and finally, Sandra I. Staton –Taiwo examining the effects of Cooper on *The Souls of Black Folk*. Indeed, Du Bois scholarship is rising to new heights again.

Among the luminaries is Lewis Gordon, a leading Du Bois scholar, and the first who excavated an existentialist foregrounding to Du Bois complicated race concept, by arguing that:

“Du Bois did not write about *being* Black but about its *meaning*. He announced a hermeneutical turn that would delight even his most zealous philosophical successors... The black, subject to interpretation, becomes a designation that could be held by different groups at different times and as such is both concrete and metaphorical” (*Existentialia Africana*, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 63).

Anthony Bogues, a leading Africana Political theorist, sees an originary heretic in Du Bois, who along with C.L.R. James were masters of the Western canon but also saw its radical limitations. As Bogues put it:

“If many radical critiques of modernity focused on questions of exploitation, human alienation, and politics as involving issues of political obligation, sovereign self, and citizenship, the works of black radical theorists like James and Du Bois shift our gaze to questions of domination, oppression, and politics as a practice of freedom. They offer a different optic on the possibilities of human emancipation” (*Black Heretics Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals*, Routledge, 2003).

Similarly, Robert Gooding-Williams, as an admirer of Du Bois has eloquently argued that Du Bois was a critical analyst of Crummell and the latter’s view of the race concept, and that Du Bois had a counter-sublime to that of Crummell. *The Souls of Black Folk* (Ed, Henry Louis Gates, New York: A Norton Critical Edition, 1999, pp. 245-263).

This paper focuses on the idea of Africa in Du Bois’s work, how this idea enabled Du Bois to develop a unique philosophy of Race.

The place of Africa in Du Bois’s philosophy of race has yet to be written, and it is precisely that project that I would like to engage in this article. What I wish to correct is the view that Du Bois is an essentialist, as Appiah in particular has contended. For me Du Bois provided a complicated race

concept ground on the idea that it is the material conditions of blacks and the identity confusions that poverty produces that forces him to look at Africanity as an empowering idea of blackness, and hence black humanity.

Part I: Du Bois on race and the Talented Tenth

Africana philosophers have compellingly introduced new readings of Du Bois's works. Lewis Gordon has provided a highly original phenomenological portrait of Du Bois as an existential thinker of high standing, who engaged the concerns of black people as "a problem people" and provided eloquent social cultural diagnoses of their problems.

The concept of race had been of an endearing to both, both existentially and politically. Existentially because he himself was of a mixed race and politically because he suffered in the hands of White supremacists, and was destined to fight back, to cement a place for himself under the sun. From early on, Du Bois knew that race was a problematical term. In the *Conservation of Races*, he tells us,

"When we thus come to inquire into the essential difference of races we find it hard to come at once to any definite conclusion. Many criteria of race differences have in the past been proposed, as color, hair, cranial measurements and language. And manifestly, in each of these respects, human beings differ widely...The final word of Science, so far, is that we have at least two, perhaps three, great families of human beings --- the whites and Negroes, possibly the yellow race...We find upon the world's stage today eight distinctly differentiated races...the Slavs of Eastern Europe, the Teutons of middle Europe, the English of Great Britain and America, the Romance nations of Southern and Western Europe, the Negroes of Africa and America, the Semitic people of Western Asia and Northern Africa, the Hindoos of Central Asia and the Mongolians of Eastern Asia" (*The Oxford W.E.B Du Bois Reader*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 39-40).

What we sense here is not a definitive commitment to the concept of race, but a judicious way of problematizing the idea of race as well as alerting the reader that we have here is a dangerously ambiguous idea that Science itself has not resolved. The concept of race retains its ambiguity and controversiality. Du Bois himself struggles with the race concept and is certainly not

taken in by a single definition. In a single essay we are told once that there are perhaps three races and in another moment perhaps eight, and may be more. The vacillation itself inconvertibly attests to the shifting nature of race, and its ever-changing configuration.

One thing is certain for Du Bois. Whatever race might mean, the so-called races have definite contributions to make to that amorphous vessel of the race concept. Whereas history had facilitated almost all the seven races to contribute to the global construction of the race idea, blacks had been systematically denied the right to register their contribution through their cultural and existential agency. That awareness leads Du Bois to treat blacks as definitive members of a race --- given the ambiguous nature of the race idea. Yet Du Bois is so eager to let the world know that the members of the black race too are historical people, who among other things gave the American continent their culturally rooted music and deep religious sense. In addition, the so-called laziness and immorality of the blacks deeply sedimented in slavery must be openly acknowledged and corrected by responsible education. These vices are not rooted in biology, but in culture. And they can be corrected by one of the most effective tools of culture, education towards autonomy and responsibility. Central to that mission is the cultivation of a functional and useful group of educated African-Americans to pave the way for the black masses mired in poverty, ignorance, crimes and alienation in alarming numbers. For him what is at issue is the lived fact that he was treated so differently, as if he did not belong to the same human species, that he had to create an autonomous sight of existence where he could be what he naturally is, black and different. It is this imposed sense of difference that led him to think that the difference needs grounding in his blackness, and this blackness in turn needs a further grounding in the idea of race.

Stressing his keen awareness that race is not a lucid concept, he notes, in a passage that would later remind us of Appiah's dismissal of the race concept,

“As to race mixture all the anthropologists said that there were no “pure” races and that modern peoples were all more or less mix” (*The Oxford Reader*, p. 58).

Why then did Du Bois emphasize the value of blackness so much? Here is a remarkable passage that gives us a subtle hint:

“It was in Chicago. John Haynes was talking. He said: I met two children - one as fair as dawn - the other as beautiful as the night. Then he pauses. He had to pause for the audience guffawed in wild merriment. Why? It was a colored audience. Many of them were black. Some black faces were as beautiful as the night. Why did they laugh? Because the world had taught them to be ashamed of their color. Because for 500 years men had hated and despised and abused black folk” (p. 59).

It is such existential situations which imposed the race concept on Du Bois. For he knew what he must do to empower the condemned. He must not only tell them that they exist, but exist as beautifully black, as beautiful as the dark of the night. This is how the sociologist intervenes as the necessary therapist, revitalizing the wings to an abused people by giving them a racial identity, a historical presence, a voice, an agency and an aesthetic all at once by reworking the meaning of blackness, and making it a metaphor of beauty, resilience, historicity and compassion. He reconfigures the seemingly racialized attributes by making them attributes of culturally shattered people - attributes of power, confidence, self-esteem and cultural pride. In this way he makes blackness a beautiful presence, and not a problematical absence. Orchestrated blackness gives way to humbled blackness. Black presence replaces black absence. Visibility in the rainbow of colors becomes a way of being in the world. Being black becomes another way of being human. His philosophy of race is a contour of these folds of humanity.

The race concept is also revisited in the renowned work of 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk*. There the arguments are much different than in the “Conservation of the Race.” The arguments for the race concept are drawn from black everyday life. Data is drawn from the world of the damned blacks. Their churches, homes, work places, and the streets of Harlem and Philadelphia are the sources from which Du Bois draws the facts of black life. Their blackness confines their activities, defines the spaces in which they can move, locates them in neighborhoods where they fester like swarms, to live and die there, without the world ever knowing when and how. Du Bois goes to these places, walks and works there and documents black life both as a participant and a detached observer, the first sociologist who combined the methods of the personal interview and statistical analysis as Paget Henry has observed in a forthcoming article. The race idea is treated with remarkable ease in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois the genealogist does not simply rest with a description of the problematical nature of

black everyday life, but rather goes behind the curtains of the present and the way that the black self is being problematized, and analyzes the root causes of the problem. His meditation on race begins with his own existential situation, the way that the white person would look at him and then either look away or look in intrusively. The black self, argues Du Bois, is not seen directly. It is either not seen at all, or seen too much. The black person is either abstracted or simply generalized as black, but not as this particular black person, but simply as this black like any other black. He is de-individualized. His concreteness disappears in generalities. He is recognized when he does not want to, or not recognized when he ought to.

In either case what does it mean to be a problem?

Du Bois answers,

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (*The Reader*, p. 102).

This striving is propelled by the race concept. Race cannot be erased, nor has it been concretely defined as he argued earlier. But the striving to overcome this two-ness, this fragmentation and alienation is the challenge that is put on the African-American in the American soil, where he is neither African nor American, usually both, and sometimes neither. The striving is a yearning for wholeness, for self-hood, for completion. With an innate musicality and spiritual comportment the black self strives, longs for wholeness, in a racist world that denies it self-hood, manhood and womanhood. This relentless and patient striving, however, swallows the bitter pill of disappointment, of sorrow, of anguish and self-doubt. The racist nation has yet to acknowledge its mistreatment of black bodies and souls since the days of slavery.

The struggle goes on, the striving black marches in slow speed towards the mountain top, propelled by prophecy, comforted by hope, and strengthened by faith, and always sedimented in love. As Du Bois put it,

“In those somber forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself, darkly as through a veil” (*The Reader*, p. 102).

The striving Negro had a deep understanding of the nature of his problem.

His poverty and his ignorance had shackled him to the past, from which he could not extricate himself. He knows too painfully that he had been kept ignorant, bitten and starved to silence, and that he must fight for his freedom, exactly as Frederick Douglas did in his classic fight with Covey, a fight that gave him his manhood, through his own revolutionary agency, as Lewis Gordon eloquently pointed out in *Existentialia Africana*.

The effect of this ignorance and its indelible race marking had its traces everywhere, as Du Bois painfully learned while he was a schoolteacher in Tennessee. He made it his duty to know the inner lives of his black students by visiting their homes and knowing first hand their everyday lives. That is when he discovered the abject poverty under which some of his students lived. That is when Du Bois discovered the absurdity of black life, the disappointments and deferred dreams. Their absences had painful reasons behind them. Some could not come to school because "Crops" needed them; others had to baby-sit. This was the summer world for Du Bois the teacher. He remembers these days with great fondness in *The Souls of Black Folk*. It is at these self-chosen sights – and this against West – that Du Bois immersed himself in the Black World, not as a hyperactive public intellectual but as a consummate writer, teacher and the sociologist of Harlem, strolling on its streets on a cane, and observing and living black life, and documenting that life in the lyrical passages of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois lived sociology and did not merely write it, by adding soul and music to its musings.

His life-long dream was to bring Tolstoy and Balzac, Aurelius and Aristotle, Shakespeare and Dumas to the children of slaves, so that they too could swim in the waters of that which humanizes us all - literature and the interior lives of other human beings. The life that this literature promises had grudged the children of Africa. Du Bois strove to make it available, so that without wincing the black masses could also move arm to arm with these great writers of humanity. This is not merely Enlightenment and Victorianism combined. Much more than that. This is the sovereignty of the imagination, to which blacks must have a right to enter, should they want to.

African-Americans had much to give to the world as members of the black race. Du Bois writes,

“The music of Negro religion is that plaintive rhythmic melody, with its touching mi-

nor cadences, which, despite caricature and defilement, still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil. Sprung from the African forests, where its counterpart can still be heard, it was adopted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope" (p. 199).

This is the contribution of those who have been scarred by the race concept, and whose skin color had been used against them. They can survive only if they say they are black, beautifully black, they need not add, beautifully black but superior to whites. That kind of racism is unnecessary. The duty of blacks is to love their blackness, the foundation of their humanity. It is this foundation that Du Bois' race concept provides.

He writes as well about all those born to greatness, but their dreams left unheeded in the hands of white supremacists. Alexander Crummel was such a man. A portrait of him is one of the best passages in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Consider these lines,

"This is the history of the human heart, the tale of a black boy who many long years ago began to struggle with life that he might know the world and know himself. Three temptations he met on those dark dunes that lay gray and dismal before the wonder-eyes of the child: the temptation of Hate that stood out against the red dawn; the temptation of Despair, that darkened noonday; and the temptation of Doubt, that ever steals along with the twilight. Above all, you must hear of the vales he crossed, the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death" (p. 212).

This then is the material out of which Du Boisian race matters are born. The facts are situational, existential, lived, dreamt, some unrealized, others utopian, but each of them marked by race. To Du Bois, race was a face, a fact, an experience, a situation, a context, an interaction, and sometimes all at once, but always concrete, out there, ready to be faced, to be dealt with for Du Bois. He neither willed it nor theorized it. He lived it concretely. As he told us, the race concept was autobiographical, and not a theoretical construct, like an Aristotelian category, or a Hegelian idea. Du Bois lived its effects, and he willingly becomes its brilliant genealogist. He was you might say the first African-American genealogist who sought to understand the presentness of the race concept, by studying its effects in the lives of the blacks who were lynched, burned, starved, imprisoned, impoverished, and permanently scarred. One of the lingering effects was the problematizing of

blackness, and Du Bois, I will argue in my concluding remarks not only asked the question, "What does it mean to be a problem?," but actually originated a method of solving the question. He gave sociology a method of studying the black question.

He revisited this question in *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, although a deeper and exhaustive treatment of it was given in *The Philadelphia Negro* of 1899. I return to that work now.

Du Bois points out that this question has sparked varied responses. At least two responses come to mind, and both by themselves are inadequate, whereas a blend of both might give us a complex answer, to a complicated question. The first answer is a simple this or that. The second is a hopeless disavowal of an answer. Du Bois' response is that this problem can be solved only by civilization and humanity, and also the participation of both blacks themselves and the whites who enslaved them. It is the duty of both races to solve this crisis of humanity masquerading as the black problem. There are no problem people but there are problems, which complicate any people's lives, blacks notably included, with good reason, because they were enslaved against their wills. Du Bois contends that:

- Blacks are here to stay;
- It is to the advantage of both blacks and whites to solve the problem;
- The Negro in particular must be responsible to address his plight;
- Whites in particular ought to guard their civilization by solving the problems of the blacks that they have created.

The *Philadelphia Negro* is one long sociological meditation that successfully originated a method of studying and proposing solutions to the black problem. He develops detailed responses to the four questions above in this landmark study. Du Bois argues, given what slavery had done to Blacks, they themselves are the first who need to nurse and heal their wounds, by first acknowledging that they have deep problems in their hands, which require their earnest attention. Blacks themselves must remove the increasing crimes in their cities, the debilitating poverty, the mental suffering, the laziness and hopelessness. These structural problems require structural analysis and race sensitive responses by blacks and whites. Blacks in particular need to develop a new work ethic to earn their living by any means

necessary and extricate themselves from the legacies of slavery, and the dependency complex that slavery has sedimented in black lives. Change begins with the proper diagnoses of the problem. It is the duty of blacks to dispassionately diagnose their condition so that they can determine the proper way of articulating their life chances. Denying problems when they glaringly stare at you is worsening your life chances and not improving on them. He proposes that the virtues of honesty, truth and chastity must be the new frames that contain revolutionary black life. These virtues must be included in the cradle, however hard it may be, to propose these virtues to these abused victims of slavery. Furthermore, blacks should see to it that they develop networks of collective self-help and develop industries and other work sites for their sons and daughters. As he put it,

“Proper cooperation among forty or fifty thousand colored people ought to open many chances of employment for their sons and daughters in trades, stores and shops, associations and industrial enterprises” (The *Oxford W.E.B Reader*, p. 350).

Furthermore, he proposes that the institutions of civil society, particularly the churches, should play a pivotal role in the redemption of black bodies and souls. Prayer meetings and amusing centers should be smartly used to help blacks to help themselves. Little girls and boys must be kept out of the dangerous streets during unsafe hours. Residents should be encouraged to buy their own homes and most importantly taught the virtues of savings by controlling their shopping habits. Day-nurseries and sewing schools, mothers’ meetings must be appreciated and developed into new socializing sites of civil society. Moreover,

“The spending of money is a matter to which Negroes need to give special attention. Money is wasted to-day in dress, furniture, elaborate entertainments, costly church edifices, and “insurance” schemes, which ought to go toward buying homes, educating children, giving simple healthful amusement to the young, and accumulating something in the savings bank as against the “insurance” society ought to be started in the Seventh Ward without delay” (p. 351).

The better-situated blacks should look after the negatively circumstanced blacks, since it is they who are at a loss, who have not mastered techniques of survival, tools of existence. Affected blacks must learn ways of survival. Those who know must show those who do not know. The destinies of the

better off blacks are intertwined with the destinies of the worst off. Du Bois forwards this shrewd suggestion in the sparkling pages of *The Philadelphia Negro of 1899*. He advises blacks to be patient with the better of the whites, and enlist them as their allies. As he put it,

“A man may be wrong, and know that he is wrong, and yet some finesse must be used in telling him of it. The white people in Philadelphia are perfectly conscious that their Negro citizens are not used fairly in all respects, but it will not improve matters to call names or impute unworthy motives to all men. Social reforms move slowly and yet when right is reinforced by calm but persistent progress we somehow all feel that in the end it must triumph” (p. 352).

Whites have duties also. They must engage their moral sympathy towards blacks who continue to struggle against prejudice with remarkable tenacity. The whites who know this must fight side by side with the blacks who do so. Such sympathy must be expressed through polished conduct and style of support and cooperation. The best of the blacks do not need pity, but understanding, not handouts, but solidarity, not empty words, but effective public policy. Change can be exacted only by public policy, not half conscious action, but the removal of prejudice and discrimination, not the promises of opportunities but their genuine availability.

It is at this point that Du Bois brings in the role of educated blacks in the form of the Talented Tenth (although he does not call them that), instead he speaks of the need of the best of the blacks to rescue those who are left behind. This imperative is a matter of historical necessity, and not an exacting requirement of the race concept. History and the legacy of slavery have imposed this moral duty on the best of the black race. At the crucial site where policy meets vision, he points out the importance of educating Negroes for social power. He notices that Blacks should internalize responsibility. That is the first step. But responsibility without power is empty, just like policy without vision is blind and deaf. Blacks should make themselves powerful also. It is blacks themselves who should lessen the intensity of poverty. Whites can sympathize with them but cannot and should not be so empowered to lessen black poverty. That is the duty of blacks. Poverty can be lessened only hard work. And work is a skill that can be learned only through training - in the form of a work culture, a work ethic. Economic emancipation requires a work ethic, through training in elementary schools,

through high school and college. The first two should be available to all, the last to the exceptional few. He writes,

“But intelligence and skill alone will not solve the Southern problem of poverty. With these two must go that combination of homely habits and virtues which we may loosely call thrift...more must be taught at home...” (p. 358).

Du Bois writes,

“The Negro Race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from contamination and death of the worst, in their own and other races... If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools-intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it-this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underline true life. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain” (“The Talented Tenth” in *The Future of The Race*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West, Alfred A. Knopf New York 1996, p. 133).

He adds that this is no easy task, since it requires some essentially necessary and sufficient conditions for the realization of the ideal. Very much like Plato’s Philosopher-King in *The Republic*, the Talented Tenth are also Philosopher-Kings and Queens in their own right, and that realizing this ideal requires no less a proof than the fact that

- their worthiness of leadership must be demonstrated, that
- the method of educating them must be elaborated and
- that their link to the Black community must be persuasively established.

This masterful essay elaborates on the three conditions.

According to Du Bois, a judicious reading of the past reveals that African Americans had always been great leaders, notwithstanding their invisibility through the racist gaze in America. For Du Bois, a long list of African-Americans had amply demonstrated leadership abilities. In colonial days there was Phyllis Wheatley and Paul Cuffe, who fought the iron bars of

prejudice with unparalleled valor, not to forget great names such as Dr. James Derham, Lemuel Heynes, or the revolutionary leadership of Frederick Douglas, Alexander Crummel, and McCune Smith. These and many able leaders were the exceptional constellation who fought for the future of the race. It is they who faced on the so-called Black problem and strove to provide a lasting solution, argued Du Bois. These leaders writes, Du Bois

“Are they useful men helping to civilize and elevate their less fortunate fellows?”
(*The Future of the race*, p. 141).

The answer is a loud yes. Yes, they were undoubtedly useful then and were destined to serve their race, as part of the exceptional talented tenth. This a destiny imposed on them by the plight of their fellow brothers and sisters. They respond to that socioculturally motivated calling with the willingness to serve and lead. This is the most idealized version of the argument as Du Bois envisioned it in the first version of the masterful essay. He revises the optimism later. In the first unadulterated form that was the vision.

(2) Now that Du Bois has eloquently demonstrated their historical presence, he proceeds to theorize their systematic educability. He chooses the modern university as the indispensable cite of their education. The best and able ones must be sent taught at schools and universities argues Du Bois. There they should acquire the necessary knowledge and be able and willing to transmit it to the future generation on the behalf of the race. Once they are schooled at these places then they must pledge to return to the black masses to in turn educate them as their teachers. They must be taught to teach. They must be schooled to serve. They must sacrifice their individual aspirations for the sake of the race. They must be trained not merely to be technicians but actual men of character who ably and willingly carry the destiny of the race on their burdened shoulders. As he put it,

“It is the trained, living human soul, cultivated and strengthened by long study and thought, that breathes the real breath of life into boys and girls and makes them human, whether they be black or white, Greek, Russian or American” (p. 148).

Once so educated (3) their organic link to the Black community, from which they were extracted must be fostered and maintained. The future of the black community depends on this organic link. This necessary link must be taught at the family, the neighborhood and schools and universities.

There, the notions of commitment, mission and vision must be emphasized as the venues through which the Talented Tenth must travel so as to realize their destiny, which is the leadership of the black community. Du Bois concludes this masterful essay with the revolutionary cry that

“Education and work are the levers to uplift people. Work will not do it unless inspired by the right ideals and guided by intelligence. Education must not simply teach work-it must teach life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people. No others can do this work and the Negro colleges must train men for it. The Negro race, like all other races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men” (p. 157).

His vision does not end there; he revisits the essay in his memorial address, delivered the Nineteenth Grand Boule Conclave, Sigma Pi Phi, in 1948.

In this address, Du Bois is shocked by the careerist turn that the Talented Tenth has taken. The notion of sacrifice and commitment to the black cause, which he hoped to nurture had vanished, and this distressed Du Bois, who wrote,

“When I came out of college into the world of work, I realized that it was quite possible that my plan of training a talented tenth might put in control and power, a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men, whose basic interest in solving the Negro problem was personal; personal freedom and unhampered enjoyment and use to the world, without any real care, or certainly no arousing care, as to what became of the mass of American Negroes, or of the mass of any people. My talented Tenth, I could see, might result in a sort of interracial free-for-all, with the devil taking the hindmost and the foremost taking anything they could lay hands on” (p. 162).

He was even more disappointed when the Talented Tenth begun to shy away from taking on the perennial problems of the race as an agenda, a cause to fight for, once they jumped on the bandwagon of capital and its alluring commodities and comforts. The future of the race is displaced by the future of the Talented Tenth, their personal ambitions displace the needs of the race, and their wealth and power displaces the squalor and desperation of the black masses. Moral responsibility and loyalty to the race is replaced by the particularity and individuality of the ever-changing desires of the Talented Tenth.

What is even more the Talented Tenth begins to deny that there is a Ne-

gro Culture expressed in the Negro Race. Du Bois calls for a new Talented Tenth, with character, uprightness and a clear vision of the race, with a deep understanding of economics, non-capitalist economics capable of framing a new agenda for the black masses, whose plight is increasingly worsening.

Africa in Du Bois' philosophy of Race

The idea of race had haunted Du Bois for years. It is one of the cardinal themes of Du Bois' sociology. He confronts it in all his works. *The Souls of the Black Folk* is one of its central homes. But he also articulates one of the most powerful understandings of race in the revised version of the "*Talented-Tenth*", in which he writes,

"Moreover, biology and sociology were reconstructing my idea of race. This group was not simply a physical entity: a black people or a people descended from black folk. It was, what all races really are, a cultural group. It is too bad that we have to use the word "cultural" for so many meanings. But what it means in modern scientific thought is that 15,000,000 men and women who for three centuries have shared common experiences and common suffering, and have worked all those days and nights together for their own survival and progress; that this complex of habits and manners could not and must not be lost. That this race must be conserved for the benefit of the Negro people themselves and for mankind. I came then to advocate, not pride of biological race, but pride in a cultural group, integrated and expanded by developed ideals, so as to form a method of progress" (*The Future of the Race*, p. 164).

I will argue later that Appiah, one of the most ardent critics of Du Bois, had clearly overlooked the importance of this passage, in which Du Bois has developed a highly original understanding of race, decoupled from any tinge of racism. Race in this passage stands for a habit that grows out of suffering and anguish in the hands of power holders in "bad faith" to borrow a potent concept from Lewis Gordon. In the passage, we sense Du Bois struggling to separate racial essence from culture, contingent practices from static biological essences, behavior from culture. The passage is simply speaking fluid, careful and original. I will return to this crucial passage when I examine Appiah's interpretation of race in Du Bois.

Discussion

Appiah's critique of Du Bois' race concept is based on a misunderstanding. Whereas Appiah argues that the race concept is an inheritance from the 19th century race theories that Du Bois inherited from his Western education, there is no textual base for this view, since Du Bois himself does not directly inform us what he thinks race really is. Infact, Du Bois is at pains, as I have indicated above to share with us his agonies and frustrations with the race concept. He himself does not really know what the concept means, what he knows for sure is that he suffered in the hands of those self-acknowledged experts of the race idea and the ignorant masses of people who think they know what it is, and who discriminated his ancestors, their ancestors, and finally his very self, inspite of his mixed ancestry. What is at issue then whether or not Du Bois himself is a racist, but rather his existential situation, his and his children's life in America where he grew up and lived most of his life.

It is in the USA that he was reminded everyday that he is black, condemned, wretched, inferior and born to suffer. It is that everyday existence that determined what he thought of the race concept. He was told everyday that he did not belong. So in one poignant moment, he tells us,

“In a wee wooden school house, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting cards - ten cents a package - and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card, -refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil” (The *W.E.B Du Bois Reader*, p. 102).

A close reading of this revealing passage is that it is not Du Bois who is choosing race consciousness. It is the racist world that environed his everyday existence that is imposing its brutal force on the young man, and he responds by fending himself against it proudly and heroically. He does not beg to be accepted. Instead, he gets even, by seeing to it that,

“That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot race, or even their stingy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the worlds I longed for, and for all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine” (Ibid. p. 102).

Again note the careful wording. There is no counter racism here, because he does know the epistemic status of the race concept. That arrogance he leaves to the racists, who portend to know what racism is. His task is not to counter racism with racism. No. He holds his ground by refusing to be defined by the racist as this inferior nigger. He fights the niggerization by beating the racists in their game. He is excellent at everything he does; he fights them leg and leg, task to task, and talent to talent. He is not defensive either. He neither begs nor concedes to otherization. He puts himself on the same par on the human platform of talents, challenges and opportunities. He is super at tasks given him, with self-imposed standards of excellence, an excellence that he demanded of his black brothers and sisters everywhere.

Souls of The Black Folk is filled with this sense of the black self in a racist world. Its pages sparkle with black self-confidence, resonating with the poetic sense that humans in the African world have something special to give to the world. Music, compassion born out of suffering in the cruel hands of time, time as suffering, literature and art, are some of these contributions to a reluctant racist world. Du Bois celebrated these historical contributions coming out of the wings of Africa, and always intended for the humanization of a self-coarsening world contaminated by the negative moments of the race idea. No bitterness or anger accompanies this powerful passage of joy embodied in the human body and soul. Rather, the sociologist illuminates the dark moments of humanity with the potential of the human self to withstand suffering and agony, and maintain an arresting sense of hope, redemption, transformation and illumination of the human spirit.

The poet sings,

“Shout, O’children!
Shout, you are free!
For God has brought you Liberty!

The genealogist of the black experience is not naïve or foolishly optimistic, as West thinks. No. Du Bois is a mature student of time, a theorist of redemption, and a steady harbinger of change. In his hands, time and maturity, ignorance and knowledge, racism and transformation move together, however uneasily. He too moves with these paradoxes of life, the stones of history, and the enemies of human possibilities. He does not despair, nor

does he think that the human dramas can easily be solved by heavy dosages of critical theory. Critical theory is a product of human thought and not a word of God as some of its advocates think.

Where is the grounding then for Appiah's contention that Du Bois, himself is a racist? Where does he say he knows categorically what the race concept is, as precisely as one and one are two, and that he knows too what Blackness, Whiteness, Brownness and Yellowness are in the same way that the does mathematical knowledge.

All that he tells us in a rightly famous passage is that:

“The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (Ibid, p. 107).

That is not a problem that he created. That is a problem that the racist world has created and what all of us will have to deal with, as some of us, the darker types in particular, will have to suffer, and develop strategies of dealing with the hurt, the wound, the trauma, and the perennial insult and badge of insult-as we move with the passage of time, in a racist world, that neither wills change, nor knows how to construct substantial change, beyond the meaningless increments of shallow public policy.

We all know that this color is a living reality, and not simply, as Appiah seems to assume sometimes, a construct of language, or a distortion of rationality that we can will to existence. Sometimes, I wish that I could whisk away racism like a fly. But as Lewis Gordon has brilliantly argued racism is not merely a distortion of rationality but an exercise in bad faith. As Gordon put it,

“Bad Faith is a life to the self, one that involves an effort to hide from one's freedom” (Lewis Gordon, *Existential Africana*, Routledge, 2000, p. 75).

The proponents of the color line gleefully believe in that world of humans separated by the artificiality of color, hair texture, bone structure, language and ethnic tapestry. They like that the world. They benefit from the advantages of being white, as opposed to black. They would like to keep the world that way. Whiteness is an investment with material rewards, and blackness a disinvestment with material loss. That is the world of the color line, that Du Bois inherited, and not a belief in the race concept, as Appiah incorrectly

argues in the pages of *In My Father's House*.

There are powerful power holders who believe in it, who are convinced that race is an actual concept with corresponding types of human beings who belong to its superior and inferior categories, and who never wish it away. Du Bois knows these types and their theories of human nature. It is these individuals with bad faith, who gave us the dystopic Orwellian world of the color line, against whom he warns us, and with whom he combated throughout his long life, brilliantly and patiently.

In the end what we witness is the resilience of the human spirit, the combat of hope against hopelessness, love against hate, redemption against doom, strategy against concession, triumph against defeat, realization against giving up, proof against defensiveness. The tides of time move with paradoxes and Du Bois documents these moves as history through the agencies of a historical people, the blacks of the African World. The pages of the *Souls of Black Folk* are replete with representative black men and women striving to overcome the dark waters of a racist America. There the genealogist treats to the sorrow songs of the children of the African continent fighting for their lives, and slowly but surely succeeding with the flow of time.

As he put in a characteristically poetic tone,

“I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and opportunity” (The *W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 135).

This is Du Bois' black world. Tiny, neatly organized and tightly held by a community of the condemned trying to survive, to live in hope. They are glued together not by the race essence, but as Du Bois informs us the experience of racial suffering at the hands of white supremacists. He documents their lives with unsurpassed precision, combining the sensitivity of the writer, the accuracy of the historian, and the imagination of the sociologist.

The savagery of racism is revisited with a stunning poignancy in *Dark water*, where Du Bois writes,

“O Silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery has left our ears an-hungered in these fearful days-
Hear us Good Lord!

Listen to us, Thy children: our faces dark with doubt are made a mockery in Thy Sanctuary. With uplifted hands we front Thy Haven, O God, crying: We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!

We are not better than our fellows, Lord; we are but weak and human men. When our devils do deviltry, curse thou the doer and the deed, -curse them as we curse them, and do to them and more than ever they have done to innocence and weakness, to womanhood and home” (The *W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 497).

Here we encounter the sociologist drawing from his religious sensibility, an attribute he appended to black people, and ask God to punish the perpetrators of the hatred of blacks. Ultimate agency is not in the hands of black people, but the reflective transcendent. He simultaneously examines The Souls of White Folk, thereby reminding future critics like Appiah that he is not consumed by the hatred of whites. On the contrary, he appeals to the transcendent to cleanse them, to morally civilize, or to use Appiah’s own phrase to distort their rationality. Consider the following passage from that angle,

“Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, born of their thought and flesh of their language...I see the workings of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed; now furious...my word to them is mere bitterness and my soul, pessimism. And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rags of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them every stripped, -ugly, human” (Ibid, p. 497).

Here we have Du Bois grounding himself with the absurd, with the dark, but also with the human, too human. He knows the ugliness of the human and the embarrassing ugliness of the human in Whiteness. He openly confesses his bitterness, ultimately ground on the absurdity of the human condition. He mocks whites for their embarrassing attempt to hide their ugliness, and blame their weaknesses on blacks whom they maim, rape, kill, and harass with racist laws. It is all there in this remarkable paragraph, condensing it all, telling it hard and fast, intelligently and compassionately, all at once, in a single breadth. Courage mediates this profound thought, this dissection of the interiors of hate, of cruelty, of indifference to the black presence in the American soil, by an insider, “a native” as Du Bois confessed. He warns,

"I am white! Well and good, O Prometheus, divine thief! Is not the world wide enough for two colors, for many little shining of the Sun? Why, then, devour your own vitals if I answer even as proudly, "I am black!" (p. 509).

The Hands of Ethiopia will save us all, he tells us in a melodic language of hope and pride. He writes,

"On its black bosom arose one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of self-protecting civilizations, which grew so mightily that it still furnishes superlatives to thinking and speaking men" (Ibid, p. 511).

Where the racism is that Du Bois is professed to inherit, according to Appiah? In which text and in which paragraph. Since when did the description of a fact become an endorsement? Is listing the number of races or what he beautifully calls "little shining of the sun" became an equivalent of a definitively captured race concept? These are some of the questions that come to mind when I read Appiah's Du Bois. I simply could not recognize in the same texts that Appiah and I have read. I remain unconvinced that Du Bois, himself is a racist. The autobiography of a race concept is no more or less than the narrative of a brilliant and sensitive soul, who discovered who he is as a consequence of being told that he is black, therefore, an other, an inferior and a non-being.

He asks us if white folks allow themselves to describe themselves as white and great, why can not I the child of Ethiopia also say, "I am black and great, I am a being, a person, with a history and a definitive contribution to the world. In what way is this self-conception, an affirmation of blackness, an acknowledgement of difference, in anyway, a surreptitious celebration of racism?" Questions pervade my mind as I read Appiah's Du Bois as carefully as I can.

Dark water ends with a hymn to the people of the world. Du Bois writes,

"Save us, World-Spirit, from our lesser selves!
Grant us that war and hatred cease,
Reveal our souls in every race and hue!
Help us, O Human God, in this Thy Truce,
To make Humanity Divine!" (p. 623).

One of the greatest thinkers of his time, the child of slaves freed himself from hate. He calls for the divination of us all, black and white, victims and

oppressors. To them both he invokes redemption and revolutionary transformation as the answer. Love, profound love based on a penetrating analysis of the architectonic of hate is the Du Boisian solution to the irrationality of bad faith and the distortion of rationality.

All these problematics now lead me to confront West's cavalier attempt to present Du Bois as a mild elitist, who has no patience with and respect for the black masses.

As we recall, Appiah accused Du Bois of internalizing 19th century racial talk by making it intimately his own, and West charges Du Bois of being affected by the excesses of the Enlightenment project and Victorianism. I have addressed the first, and I should move on to tackle the second. What is upsetting about both accusations is that not only are they speculative, but they also reduce this mighty thinker, who stands alone like a lone star in the sky, to the status of a derivative thinker. And that Du Bois will never be. He is much too original to be handled this way. All his cardinal themes, such as the Black Problem, The Talented Tenth, and The Race problem are profoundly original to be derived from Western discourse. To begin with, the problems that he analyzes are black problems, which required black frameworks and concepts. Western tools of analysis could not handle them. He had to originate western frameworks to frame the themes and develop culturally relevant and existentially situated concepts with which to resolve them. This requirement is lost on Appiah and West. They both insist that Du Bois uses western tools of criticality to address the black problems. I disagree with both for insisting on this unnecessary requirement.

West contends that the Talented Tenth are elites who are disconnected from the black masses, and that Du Bois was wrong in proposing them as the rescuers of the race. I think West is gravely mistaken for this view. That Du Bois thought that the black masses were too ignorant to stand on their own. Lucius Outlaw has aptly disagreed with West and wrote,

“Here Corn's articulation of his judgment of Du Bois is problematic, at the very least ambiguous. Du Bois certainly wrote and spoke of what he took to the prevailing induced ignorance of many black folk—that is, his judgment of their lack of knowledge ‘of life and its wider meaning.’ It is also the case that that Du Bois distinguished ignorance and backwardness, induced conditions he thought suffered by many Black folk at the turn of the century” (Cornel West: *A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, ed. George

Yancy, 2001, p. 267).

Outlaw is right but he does not say enough. Infact, all that Du Bois does in all his writings is introduce us patiently, lovingly and systematically to the subtle and brutal way by which hegemonic ideas insinuate themselves in black life, beginning with slavery and down to early modernity. Blacks are enslaved by backward ideas, lack of the knowledge of economics, consumerism, and uncritical attachment to tradition, crimes and lies. The sociologist advises blacks to save, to buy homes, to shop smartly, to plan for their children, to protect their neighborhoods, in short to empower themselves. *The Philadelphia Negro of 1899*, a text that West avoids, does everything but blame the victim. The text analyzes the process by which the technologies of the black self are constructed. Layers of oppression are laid bare, for the reader to see. Blacks are explained to blacks and whites. The Black problem is systematically addressed on many levels. Consider the following paragraphs from *Souls* diagnosing the human condition among blacks.

“A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems. But alas! While sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair. Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defense of culture against barbarism, leaning against ignorance, purity against crime, the “higher” against the “lower” races” (The *W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 105).

Notice the irony. Whereas West contends that Du Bois played lower blacks against the higher blacks, Du Bois himself is astutely aware of the disparaging and racist use of hierarchies to be trapped by it. He speaks about the conditions that produce backwardness among blacks by the forces of evil. He describes dispassionately how blacks are kept backward and ignorant, conditions that he himself analyzed in the most moving passages in *The Philadelphia Negro* and *The Souls of Black Folk*, followed by penetrating diagnoses and perceptive prognoses, all in one piece. Consider another passage from this perspective,

“To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance, -not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities...” (Ibid, p. 1050).

It is this passage that licensed West to attack Du Bois, based on a deliberate misunderstanding. West, as a shrewd reader of Gramsci, the philosopher of hegemony, knows for sure how the masses are kept ignorant, particularly how the masses are prevented from moral and cultural organization, and the organization of the self. Only the organized self is capable of self-leadership in the realm of culture. Above Du Bois was addressing himself to the various ways by which the blacks self is denied the inalienable right of self-moral and cultural organization, a problem that the great Du Bois thought could be solved by something like the Talented Tenth as purveyors of leadership as the organic intellectuals of the black community. I am sure this point was not lost to West himself as the historical member of the Talented Tenth, the organic public intellectual of the African-American world in the USA.

Du Bois's vision about the Talented Tenth as West is well aware arises out of historical necessity. It is not an instinctive interiorization of the notion of the great man idea that West argues compelled Du Bois to believe in this modality of prognoses. Du Bois was much of a learned humanist and an organically linked leader of the then prevailing black community to take the notion of the lower and the higher beyond what they are: prejudices. His writings radiate with love, compassion and care for black people everywhere from Tennessee through Ethiopia and Ghana, a place where he chose to be buried for his Pan-African ideals. It is the plight of ordinary blacks, systematically kept ignorant and backward that he championed. It is their historically generated problems that he made the cornerstone of critical sociology and historical genealogy.

Lewis Gordon has persuasively argued that,

“The issues of problematic people are well known among existential and phenomenological theorists...They cease to be people who might face, signify, or be associated with a set of problems: they become those problems. Thus a problematic people do not signify crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies; they, under such a view, are crime, licentiousness, and other social pathologies...Thus Du Bois focuses on the *social* is already a theoretical advance. For in his time, the tendency was to approach the study of a people in terms of either phylogenic or ontogenic considerations...by focusing on the social, then, Du Bois has, in one sweep, taken the U.S. discourse on blackness onto unfamiliar ground” (*Existentialia Africana*, pp. 68-69).

Exactly. A major advance indeed. Instead of engaging this major ad-

vance in the discourse on the technologies of the black self, and the much needed articulation of how blackness itself is produced through an analysis of social forces, which is what Du Bois did, both Appiah and West take Du Bois on-on that which matters least, the race concept, the black race concept. Du Bois was least concerned with the genealogy of a term and more with the effects of that term on the lives of black people. Gordon has smartly captured that politics, that conceptualization of the black self. It is Du Bois who originated the appropriate concept of the social to analyze black life unsentimentally by exposing the technologies of self-perpetuating conditions of backwardness and ignorance. Whereas, West the public intellectual is shocked by these facts, the genealogist describes phenomenological that which is out there, blocking the black masses from fighting internal and external oppression of values, habits and customs. Du Bois is not shocked by what he observes. He exposes its being there, he unravels its status of being taken for granted, as part of the life world.

The life world is described with arresting honesty, passion and commitment to transform it. Transformation, however, is preceded by description of what is out there, part of black life, the affirming and negating, the positive and negative, the horrid and the fulfilling. He spares no one, and does not refuse to turn the most resistant stone. He goes after reality with zest, coolness and precision. Du Bois' project is as Paget Henry, will argue in a forthcoming article, foundational sociology, a combination of the engaged and the disengaged, the personal and the social, interviews and statistical analysis, all mastered in a single enterprise for the masses and about the masses.

The argument for the Talented Tenth then requires a context, which West deprives it. The pervasive presence of backwardness and ignorance among the black masses, which is not to be equated with an inherent fact that these masses are naturally backward and ignorant, a belief that is far, faraway from Du Bois' world view, requires a desperate measure. That measure is the active developing and training among the black mass, a few individuals, male and female, who can be chosen, trained and socialized to take on leadership positions, on the behalf of their brothers and sisters. It is an ideal argument that may or may not produce the needed results. Du Bois pushes this ideal with remarkable courage and brilliant outline.

Desperate situations require desperate solutions. This is precisely what Du Bois did in that seminal essay and also earlier in *The Philadelphia Negro*

of 1899.

Gates, clearly following West has observed,

“The black middle class has never been in better shape-and it has never felt worse about things. Du Bois had conjured up a Talented Tenth that would be a beacon of hope; it is ninety years later, and they are, instead a stump of gloom. Middle-class messianism has given way to middle-class malaise” (*The Future of The Race*, p. 19).

This is an accurate observation as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The blame should not be focused on a concept, a desperate idea, meant to address a desperate situation. Nor should it be left on the observation that the middle-class feels terrible. Why does this class feel terrible? How did it delink itself from the black masses that it was supposed to rescue? What other measures of link should be established now between the Talented Tenth, embodied in the Middle Class, and other relevant modalities of linkage.

At this point, I would like to make a few observations following West and going beyond him. First, I wish to suggest that something like the Talented Tenth, Du Bois’ vision and what I wish to call following West a participatory model of democracy embodied in the activities of public intellectuals like West can work in tandem. There is no need to replace Du Bois’ vision and strategies of overcoming with West’s Pragmatism. Both visions could exist complimentarily in the following way. The Talented Tenth remain to be useful sources of filling in the void in the lives of the black masses. There is still much work to be done by those who are able, competent, resourceful, moneyed and well connected for those masses of black people who linger on the interstices of civil society in the Americas and beyond to the territories of the Diaspora. There are connections in the fractured lives of black people globally, which require the attention of something like the Talented Tenth, or their equivalent. The international dimension of blackness, conveniently ignored by West and inadequately attended to by Appiah, was dear to Du Bois. His love of Africa is evident in his Pan-Africanism and in the choice that he made to be buried on African soil. Du Bois loved Africa and African in turn loved him. Some of its leaders treated Du Bois with a reverence rarely accorded to a non-African by birth.

Du Bois was an exception. He was American by birth, but African by choice. While many African-Americans were ashamed of their African heri-

tage, Du Bois made Africa the centerpiece of his life and research. His writings are filled with African matters.

Consider the following hymn to Africa, from a piece called,

A DAY IN AFRICA

I rose to sense the incense of the hills
The royal sun sent crimsoned heralds to the dawn
She glowed beneath her bridal veil of mist-
I felt her heart swell while the King
Paused on the World's rough edge,
And thousand birds did pour their little hearts
To maddened melody.
I leapt and danced, and found
My breakfast poised aloft,
All served in living gold

You see Du Bois' Africa is hopeful, rich and splendid with history. Incense, Gold, Wisdom, Music, dance and birds environ it. It is a deproblematized Africa, a center of civilization, the first home of humankind. Du Bois takes pride in this black world; its rivers, lakes, minerals, purple flowered carpet, and soil flow from his pen as he writes about them. His Africa does not smell. The continent is wreathed in crimson, blue and green, as a stanza in *A Day In Africa* has it. For Du Bois, Africa is also sunshine, vegetation

“bursting life of leaf and limb” (The *W.E. B. Du Bois Reader*, p. 645).

Du Bois writes,

“The spell of Africa is upon me. The ancient witchery of her medicine is burning my drowsy, dreamy blood. This is not a country; it is a world - a universe of itself and for itself, a thing Different, Immense, Menacing, and Alluring. It is a great black bosom where the Spirit longs to die... Three things Africa has given the world, and they form the essence of African culture: Beginnings, the village unit, and art in sculpture and music” (Ibid, pp. 645-646).

Given this enormous respect for African matters, Du Bois could hardly be chided for thinking that blacks are backward and ignorant. How could that be, when passage after passage celebrates the achievements of blacks, our ancestors? In the pages of Du Bois narratives, Africans are presented as historically effective people. The producers of Axum and Lalibela in Ethio-

pia, the Pyramids of Egypt, not to forget the birthplace of Lucy, the miraculous, our oldest female ancestor.

For him, Africa is the homeland of humanity, and the proud place of the black race. As he put it,

“Wherever one sees the first faint steps of human culture, the first successful fight against wild beasts, the striving against weather and disease, there one sees black men” (Ibid, p. 647).

Again, the passages speak for themselves. His blackness is a source of pride, a fountain of his humanity, and Africa is an embodiment of his black body, his black being. Neither inferior nor superior, he defends it, as a foundation of his selfhood, a framework of a moral organization. The Pan-Africanism he so eloquently presented to the world is found on this moral/cultural framework. He knew the absurdity of the human condition deeply, but fought against it with a vision of a transformed humanity found on African possibilities of being; the contingent projects of compassion, care, and a moral framework. He was convinced that these contingent projects were destined to be black people’s contributions to the birth of new men and women that the world had not seen before.

Like Fanon after him, he too wanted to turn a new leaf, out of the incense of African hills, the royal African sun, the soft vegetation, the maddened melody and the purple flowered fields, the lush and the green. One of the duties of the Talented Tenth could easily be mending the broken black self by diffusing these flattering and empowering visions of blackness and Africity to diasporic blacks. They could do so first by familiarizing themselves with this rich history in Du Bois’ texts and rediscover their African roots. Once they do so, there is much there that could be passed on to their children, their relatives and their friends. Change begins with the self, and then it is shared with other selves. The rising African-American middle class needs to penetrate this history and heal itself. A historical people need historical foundations on which to build a history. That is what Du Bois advocated in his time. That is precisely what we need to awaken now. As educators, corporate heads, business people, preachers and parents, The Talented Tenth must make the exposure of African things a mission, a duty, a program and an effective strategy of change on the behalf of black people everywhere. It is out of this fabrics of existence, with Africa as the background and foreground, that Du Bois managed to create an original

ground and foreground, that Du Bois managed to create an original historical and existential philosophy of race.

Once this is put in place, it can work quiet handily with the revolutionary participatory track that West, the public intellectual of our time, so much desires. The public intellectual as a moral and cultural educator arrives on the scene, to preach to and educate the black masses. Whereas Du Bois's Talented Tenth would quietly impart esoteric and lyrical passages in the classroom and at corporate quarters, the gifted public intellectual could bring this knowledge and popularize it, hopefully, this will be done, and when it must, for little cost, so that those who need it most can be there to be enlightened, so as to act, to march, to fight for their rights.

RACE, RHETORIC AND A POSTMODERN WORLD

by Sanya Osha

ABSTRACT. The question of race continues to generate a lot of debate and interest. It also continues to provoke heated passions which sometimes lead to dangerous situations of conflict and even genocide as history has repeatedly demonstrated. Indeed, the connections between genocide and race are not only long standing, but are constitutive of the entire experience of modernity and even the condition to which we now refer as the 'postmodern' following Lyotard, the poststructuralist philosopher. In the same vein, the phenomenon of race continues to be very topical within the post-apartheid dispensation in South Africa. Consequently, academic studies of all kinds are still being published on the issue. Philippe-Joseph Salazar, a French philosopher based in South Africa tackles the matter of race in present-day South Africa from a rather interesting angle. He explores the phenomenon of race by employing an uncommon assemblage of discursive approaches that draw from rhetoric studies, Greek antiquity and postmodern forms of discourse, to explain how it intersects with post-apartheid constitutionality, public deliberation and space. In this way, Salazar suggests that the matter of race need not always be violent. Instead, the question of race can offer ways of exploring the multiple possibilities of postmodern democracy and cosmopolitan life. More specifically, this essay examines the different rhetorical constructions of race within the contemporary South African context and their implications for the establishment of a so-called 'rainbow nation'. Finally, it links the conceptual understandings of race in the present age of molecular biology with the possibilities for postmodern democracy or what the sociologist, Paul Gilroy has termed "cosmopolitan democracy."

KEY WORDS: de-apartheidization, rhetoric, race, cosmopolitan democracy

Recent literature on the conundrums of African development continue to demonstrate that the entire contours of argumentation are structured along a basically binary model in which either forms of Western progressivism dominate or discourses of indigenization hold sway. This model of discursive binarism extends to virtually all aspects of contemporary African intellectual production. Thus, it has been noted that

“the classical debate in African philosophy between ‘academic’ or ‘modern’ philosophy and ‘ethnophilosophy’ is not so much about whether African philosophy should

have roots in Africa; both sides agree on this. The contested question is whether the roots of African philosophy should consist of a direct cultural continuation of indigenous African traditions or consist of critical work concerned with African issues and practiced by Africans.”¹

However, it is not just the field of African philosophical discourse do we observe this deeply structured and structuring discursive dichotomy. Achille Mbembe notes also that two tendencies have shaped the trajectories of contemporary African academic discourse and are more or less ensconced within the “framework of developmentalism” or what he terms “disciplines of nativism.”² Of course two of the most sophisticated critiques of the discourse of nativism remain Paulin Hountondji’s *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983) and Anthony Kwame Appiah’s *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1992).

Indeed it is always inspiring to encounter debates, discourses and texts that disrupt the long established hegemonies of this discursive binarism in African intellectual production. Philippe-Joseph Salazar’s *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in Africa* (2002) has many fine attributes. First, it adopts the Barthesian (Salazar was a student of Roland Barthes) mode of French theorizing in reflecting on the question of South African subjectivities within the context of a constantly transfiguring postmodern public realm. Second, it is a sustained critique of the rhetorics of democratization and the problematics of deapartheidisation. Third, Salazar advances an articulation of non-racialism which many debates of multiculturalism especially in the US have much to gain. In other words, he develops a poetics of non-racialism in a world experiencing in varying degrees the entrenchment of various forms of ethnicity, ultranationalism, fascism and fundamentalism. Finally, it reconfigures the numerous insights of classical Greek thought along with several interesting postcolonial African political discourses, scenarios and categories of thought. The results that emerge from this alchemy of discourses are truly inspiring.

Apartheid was an ideology of violence and repression *par excellence* yet

¹ Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Introduction, in: Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, ed., *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, special issue, *Quest: An International Journal of African Philosophy*, Vol. XV No. 1-2, 2001, p. 6.

² Achille Mbembe, ‘Introduction’, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 2001 p. 3.

“the apartheid restriction the public space led ironically to the concentration of dissident oratory in highly charged sites, whereby speeches acquired in a more far-reaching potency.”³

Salazar consistently makes the question of rhetoric and its impact in the making of the new South African nation his primary concern.

The ghastliness of apartheid did not reduce all levels of South African life to the state of barbarity. Instead, various rhetorical devices and discourses flourished to fabricate other treads of commonality and belonging. Public acts, figures and spaces were inflected by modes of counter-articulation that constantly subverted and bypassed the hegemony of the apartheid regime. Not surprisingly, these various modes and sites of counter-articulation covered a wide spectrum of spaces and figures. For instance, Desmond Tutu’s rhetorical stance in relation to apartheid was different in relation to Steve Biko’s or Chris Hani’s. Also, Nelson Mandela’s rhetorical status as a legendary and actual anti-apartheid figure, as to be expected, is somewhat different from Tutu’s. This has a lot to do with attributes of charisma, personal histories and the instrumentalisation of public space and social memory.

Salazar contextualizes Desmond Tutu’s place in the making of the post-apartheid nation as one marked by considerable religiosity for what is post-Enlightenment temporal frame. These words can be regarded as the signature of Tutu’s rhetorical value;

“Friends, like you I abhor violence. I condemn the violence of an unjust system such as apartheid and that of those who want to overthrow it. In the beginning God... in the end, God.”⁴

Tutu was after all a man of God whose wish was to see a ‘rainbow nation’ of God established on South African soil. Salazar points out⁵ that

“rarely indeed in modern history has the emergence of a democratic nation been guided by such strict religious oratory.”

³ Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in Africa*, New Jersey and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002, p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 16.

Whereas,

“in traditional European democracies, rooted in 18th century free-thinking, the exercise of the public mind and the achievement of reasonable participation in the exercise of power are carefully separated from religion; religion is often perceived as the fossilized remnant of a predemocratic system of deliberation.”⁶

On the other hand, Nelson Mandela’s rhetorical gifts and strategies are markedly different. For one, he is a politician and this particular vocation exhibits a tension between *homonioia and homologia*:

“in other words, the tension between the “concord of minds,” which is respectful of plurality and difference, and the concord of words.... That is, the showcase of political verbiage in which politicians use words to achieve a semblance of agreement, or, even, an appearance of disagreement.”⁷

In this particular mode of public deliberation, Mandela

“eulogizes the powers of his own *phone*, of his own voice, as any good Sophist would.”⁸

In the post-apartheid context of a new South Africa, new rhetorical orientations evolved that certainly have similarities with other more established democratic traditions in contemporary times and also in antiquity. As such, we are to note that:

“nineteenth-century democratic deliberation deliberately placed a “mute” command on the voice of the President, with its potential for garnering power; the President’s was after all the only unmistakably solo voice speaking from the seat of executive power – while the two correlated powers, the legislative and the judicial, were multi-personed, dislocated, dissonant, even cacophonous.”⁹

These cacophonous seats of political deliberation and power are deemed to be more representative of the spirit of democracy. However, they are significant moments in political history and the history of democracy in particular

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. p. 21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. p. 32.

when what Salazar terms “rhetorical caesarism” flourished.¹⁰ And important political figures who demonstrated instances of rhetorical caesarism include Abraham Lincoln, F. D. Roosevelt, Churchill, Kennedy and de Gaulle. In spite of the rather overbearing rhetorical postures of these important figures of modern democracy, generally,

“in theory, presidential rhetoric is dangerous to deliberation and dangerous to democracy.”¹¹

The relationship between deliberation and political power is quite central for the study of rhetoric. Indeed,

“deliberation in a nondemocratic public sphere tends to mold itself (as rhetorical studies on imperial Rome and early modern Europe have shown) into a concerted praise of the Prince.”¹²

Thus, there is an often problematic conjecture between political power, praise and what Salazar defines in this context, as prudence. In addition, it is interesting to note that

“the most comprehensive system for the political ecology of praise was developed in *ancient regime* France.”¹³

Praise in modern and postmodern political deliberation creates several contextual problems. The Machiavellian prince attracted and courted praise. He had a whole court of praise-singers. But as we have noted, this sort of political figure belonged to another time and another ethos of political activity. His immediately noticeable autocratic leanings and attributes would seem unbearably offensive to the postmodern democratic palette.

Salazar discusses the numerous contradictory peculiarities of history and context that informed Mandela’s presidency. First, there are tensions between rhetorical caesarism and postmodern democracy, between the secular and the sacred, the private and the public, between tradition and postmoder-

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 33.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

nity and the different and competing ideologies of raciology. In a passage, Salazar captures this multiplicity of contextual tensions:

“...the celebrations accompanying Mandela’s 80th birthday (usually only monarchies or autocracies celebrate their leaders’ birthdays as national events) assumed the dimension of public festivity on July 18, 1998, spawning numerous public involvements. Massive media interest was brought to bear on Mandela’s marriage to the widow of Mozambique’s president Samora Machel. (Like national birthday celebrations, such marriages are the stuff of monarchies, particularly if one considers the hint that this was really a republican version of a royal morganatic union....”¹⁴

Such insights give deeper theoretical dimensions to South Africa’s ongoing democratic experiment and the various tensions between premodern and post-apartheid forms of political deliberation. But Mandela’s presidency had other telling implications. His widely celebrated birthday event, his version of a royal morganatic union as it has been described, and his various glamorous public appearances are

“elevated to the rank of public deeds in order to affirm the “integrity” of the President: his integral ethos, his *arête*.”¹⁵

This rhetorical and public positionality leads to a situation whereby

“private ethos and public ethos can become confused.”¹⁶

Moreover,

“by one of those bittersweet ironies of dialectics, this renders his successors’ rhetorical treatment of private and public virtues even more problematic.”¹⁷

The precise situation of the presidential successor (in this case, Thabo Mbeki) can be conceived in these terms;

“removed from the praise-laden function of the founder of the nation, yet in contact with the praise manipulation of the virtuous acts that ensued, how can a presidential

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 40.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 39.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 40.

successor's rhetorical intervention escape authoritarianism or timidity?"¹⁸

Here, we have two distinct rhetorics of presidency within the new South African nation, the first, exemplified Mandela in which political power, praise and prudence are held together in precarious balance and the second, typified his successor who in the aftermath of the euphoria of political liberation has to contend with the strictures of a presidency that must actively seek to distinguish between the public and the private, the secular and the sacred, the premodern and the postmodern etc. In this way, these various contextual typologies exemplify rather more frequently the condition of the postcolonial instead of the postmodern. Of course this observation is not appropriate for all the existing scenarios in South Africa.

The rhetoric of political power is followed by the rhetoric of collective empowerment in the economic domain. After the attainment of de-apartheidisation, which is primarily the signature of political liberation, the discourse of empowerment is compelled to assume more concrete forms, forms which relate not only to the structures and practices of everyday life but also seek to transform them. Thus political liberation has more far-reaching implications when it confronts the irresistible dynamics of the purely economic realm. Within this unavoidable configuration, the persistent trope of race is reinserted and reappropriated by the social body. Also, consumer culture becomes a marker of race,

“black consumers buy more, faster and better quality than their white counterparts”¹⁹

as a newspaper reporter enthusiastically recounts. Within the context of racialised discourses of consumer culture, South Africa's much-touted multi-colorism becomes problematic as it recedes in the face of a banal and clichéd raciology. It is instructive to note here that

“empowerment is the public sphere derivative of what has been called an “African Renaissance.”²⁰

The rhetoric of an African Renaissance has become more persistent and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 43.

²⁰ Ibid.

consequently has received considerable media attention. In addition, it has also received a sizeable amount of academic scrutiny.²¹ From some of the academic discussions available, the concept of an African Renaissance or Ubuntu philosophy is really nothing new.²² It is largely derivative of discourses of nativism we mentioned earlier at the beginning. It is this persistent strain of nativism that cultural and political ideologies in Africa must strive to overcome. Indeed,

“in the European renaissance period the ambition of culture-makers was not to simply reinstate classical values, classical themes and classical ideals, but to surpass them. The promise of an African Renaissance may lie not in a fixation on African heritages as such, but in the ambition to re-appropriate them critically and creatively and so surpass them.”²³

Indeed, commentators have not failed to notice in terms of discursive orientation, the current notion of an African Renaissance is not very different from other earlier raciologically based concepts relating to the black subject such as Senghor’s Negritude.²⁴ Also, there are a few theoretically sophisticated raciologically derived concepts of blackness available that surpass the general horizons offered by the current articulation of African Renaissance. For instance, Senghor’s concept of Negritude is far more sophisticated than many of his contemporaries assumed. By contrast, Wole Soyinka’s famous

²¹ See for instance, *QUEST: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XV, No. 1-2, 2001 which is a special issue on “African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy.” This special edition has contributions by figures such as Thabo Mbeki, Dirk J. Louw, Priscillia Jana and a few other prominent names.

²² Indeed a political ideology such as Julius Nyerere’s Ujamaa is motivated by similar preoccupations. See his publications particularly; *Freedom and Unity / Uhuru na Umoja*; a selection from writings and speeches 1952- 1965, Oxford University Press, 1966 and *Freedom and Development / Uhuru na Maendeleo*; a selection from writings and speeches, 1965- 1967 Oxford University Press, 1968.

²³ Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Introduction, *Quest: An International Journal of African Philosophy*, Vol. XV No. 1-2, 2001, p. 7.

²⁴ See Janheinz Jahn, *History of Neo-African Literature*, London: Faber & Faber, 1968; Sylvia Washington Ba, *The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973; and Irving Leonard Markovitz, *Leopold Sedar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude*, New York: Atheneum Press, 1969.

taunt that “a tiger needs not proclaim his tigritude” in relation the Senghorian aesthetics of blackness now seems to be ill-conceived.

Senghor was reacting to an incapacitating political ecology of racism which shook his faith in Enlightenment modernity and its claims to universal humanism. And rather than succumb to nihilistic despair he fashioned instead an ideology of humanism that tried to grapple with the particular and universal in human experience. During the Second World War, Senghor had been incarcerated for a couple of years at German prison camps near Poitiers. Within the deathscape administered by the political technology of the time, he still managed to compose poetry, read Goethe and Western philosophy. He also reconnected with fellow Africans who shared songs and tales from their homelands thereby fostering an alternative understanding of humanism and sociality.

It is very attractive to suggest that Senghor’s prison experiences, his deep knowledge of Western intellectual traditions and his love and respect for African values, traditions and cultures combined to produce a subjectivity that was transcultural and transnational in its sympathies, accomplishments and aspirations. Arguably, Senghor has laid down the bases for a post-anthropological humanism, one that truly points to the possibilities for a democratic cosmopolitan world. This is the kind of world that Anthony Appiah has been agitating for since the publication of important book, *In My Father’s House*. It is not enough to promote an ideology of blackness in direct response to a raciological universe and without also preferring an ideal of wider solidarity as a counter-measure as the concepts of African Renaissance and Ubuntu philosophy might end up doing if any form of complacency is allowed.

Salazar does not suggest this possibility in a disconcerting way. Instead, he analyses the scenarios that might encourage true postmodern democracy using as usual Athenian conceptual parallels. Accordingly, he avers, “the “rainbow nation, “ the “constitution” of the nation, and the very means to communicate these notions inscribe²⁵ in the ethos of the President the

“friendship that binds citizens – the *politike philia* – of Aristotelian democracy.”

²⁵ Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in Africa*, p. 70.

However, Aristotelian democracy alone cannot rebuild the new South African nation. New forms of solidarity, forgiveness and constitutionality are required. Indeed,

“the splintered identity of the South African nation under apartheid had to reconstruct itself, not merely through universal suffrage or via the iconic charisma of Nelson Mandela, but through a storytelling process, the narrative of peace.”²⁶

The South African Truth and Reconciliation was an outcome of this process. The *Report* of the Desmond Tutu led TRC sought to proclaim the truth about the evil of apartheid and also to promote reconciliation. Finally, “the *Report* is both an exposure and a weighing of South African diversity, dissent and specific vices that make up the nation.”²⁷ As Salazar correctly affirms,

“the TRC also created a new vocabulary, one that is now pervasive in the political lexicon, both in South Africa and in other fractured democracies.”²⁸

Nigeria, Rwanda and Bosnia are nations that have followed the South African example with varying degrees of success.

However, for South Africa, the rhetoric of peace and multiracial democracy had to work. After all,

“apartheid was the ultimate transgression against “democracy” (the common standard); it excluded Blacks from the social compact and perverted, for the Whites, the social link.”²⁹

A credible rhetoric of peace was required to erect a “New South Africa,” a rainbowism that announced in undeniable terms, a racial diversity as well a demographic egalitarianism. Needless to add, this is easier said than done.

An appropriate rhetoric that set loose the discourse of ethnic diversity and multiracialism was unleashed:

“Many rights, one constitution”; “Many voices, one parliament”; “Many parties, one

²⁶ Ibid. p. 75.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 81.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 83.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 87.

democracy”; “Many paths, one direction”; “Many ideals, one freedom.”³⁰

How was all this to be accomplished given the horrendous history of apartheid that had scarred the South African nation? Salazar argues that the South African rhetoric of peace is what we must investigate to better understand its courageous attempts at multicolorism. Here, he undertakes a very interesting theoretical manoeuvre that is genuinely Barthesian in both intent and effect.

Salazar reconfigures Roland Barthes’ semiotics of fashion and glamour within the South African context in order to theorise and traverse a complex ecology of identity and race. It is this configuration of fashion and glamour that grants the new South Africa its distinctive postmodern complexion. *Elle*, *Marie-Claire*, *Gentlemen’s Quarterly*, *FHM*, *Men’s Health*, *Conde Nast Garden and Home* have all taken root in South Africa. As Salazar informs us,

“glamour magazines are...powerful agents in the public sphere.”³¹

He demonstrates how these magazines employing the power of glamour and the seductiveness of wealth are actively articulating a new politics of identity, belonging and racial diversity within the geo-body of South Africa. Salazar makes an important contribution in not only identifying glamour magazines as a fertile resource for reading the new semiotics of the body and race but also in actually theorising them according to their various cultural potentials.

But this reconfiguration of the rhetorics of peace, glamour and beauty can only acquire its most complete meaning when situated in its proper historical context. Since medieval times, it has become established to civilize competition either in the realm of beauty or battle.³² Salazar reminds us that tournaments or tourneys were developed in medieval times

“as a means to redirect chivalry’s demand for military action in principalities where

³⁰ Ibid. p. 101.

³¹ Ibid. p. 109.

³² Ibid. p. 123.

political structures were adopting a more modern and peaceful shape.”³³

As such, there is a historical and structural relationship between glamour, war and sport. Salazar, in two graphic instances recounts this structural relationship in the new South African nation. The first instance:

“In South Africa people deliberately and enthusiastically marked the end of a warring culture by adopting new symbols of public glamour, peaceful competition and “derealized” competition...”³⁴

The second instance;

“Signs of apartheid have been converted into cosmeticized rhetorical markers of diversity.”³⁵

Next, Salazar turns to the reality of space and its various possibilities for public deliberation. Unquestionably,

“social space is entertaining. Social space is conducive to self-celebration. Social space is an occasion for social conversation.”³⁶

And accordingly, golf courses in the new South Africa have become

“powerful loci for an unfolding public deliberation on safety, gentility, affordable luxury, and, by capitalization of symbols, cross-racial integration.”³⁷

As South Africa struggles to construct its own Acropolis, a number of issues come to mind; the prospects of establishing a universe of genuinely transcultural, transracial and democratic values. The possibility for birthing a mode of post-anthropological cosmopolitan democracy has become³⁸ a seri-

³³ Ibid. p. 125.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 126.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 127.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 153.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 150.

³⁸ For instance, Paul Gilroy makes a very bold attempt to grapple with the issue in his book, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

ous matter in contemporary times. Salazar's treatment of the possibilities for the establishment of a postmodern democracy within the racially problematic South African context is admirable in many ways. First, he deparicularises the South African present with his numerous skillful allusions to Greek antiquity. Second, he advances a discourse on democracy that is both novel and refreshing. Third, his Barthesian reconfiguration of glamour, beauty and sport commends itself not just as an exquisite piece of culture critique but also in the manner it broadens the scope for understanding a new semiotics of the body in Africa. Finally, he points the way for popularizing a racialogical discourse that promises many connections between democracy and cosmopolitanism.

RE-ENCOUNTERING AFRICAN CULTURE

In living Christianity in my father's home

by Alozie Oliver Onwubiko

ABSTRACT. This essay is an exploration into the possibility of going beyond the usual juxtaposition between African traditional culture, and cultural imports from Europe in the colonial context and after. A pivotal place in the argument is occupied by Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and, like in that book, the emblematic situation in the argument is that of the Nigerian Igbo, 19th-20th century CE. While admitting the hegemonic racism inherent in colonial cultural imperialism, to respond, on the African side, with an equally race-based anti-colonial counter-culture is no solution. Instead, we should be proceeding from cultural monologue to dialogue. The author argues that African Christianity, even though initially burdened with hegemonic Eurocentrism and racism, may develop into such a dialogical situation. This requires both mental decolonisation and a reassessment of African traditional religion, and in fact implies a form of biculturalism, leading on to transculturalism. In the dialogical strategies advocated, the author identifies, as a hurdle, the paradigmatic Igbo stance of the *dimaragana*, whom built-in inhibitions prevent from doing what he knows to be the right thing. The author extends this emblem to universalist critics of African identity positions including ethnicity, such as Howe and Appiah, but nevertheless finds considerable truth in the latter's work.

KEY WORDS: Achebe, Africa, Appiah, biculturalism, Christianity, colonialism, counter-culture, cultural imperialism, dialogue, *dimaragana*, ethnicity, Europe, Howe, identity, Igbo, racism, *Things Fall Apart*, traditional religion, transculturalism, universalism

'Africa does occupy a unique place in global cultural history.' – Wim van Binsbergen¹

Introduction

Defining *culture* today is just as problematic as it is *political*. Not even the

¹ Wim van Binsbergen, 2004, 'Challenges for the sociology of religion in the African context: Prospects for the next fifty years', *Social Compass: International Review of Sociology of Religion*, 51, 1 (2004, March): 85-98.

simple definition – ‘a people’s “way of life”, often influenced by their religion’ – is accepted today. More problematic is identifying the relationship between *culture* and *civilization* vis-à-vis religion. Not long ago civilization was understood *against* culture. And to be *civilized*,² implied to be “acculturated.” A working concept for this article connects culture and civilization as *related* and understands acculturation in human intercultural interaction as and an experience that always works both ways (so that when A and B, while each identifying with different cultures, are interacting, A and B are always, up to a certain degree, acculturating to each other, while it is never the case that, e.g., A is acculturated to B whilst B not to A). This working concept sees civilization *as* culture *at the export level*. With this, it is driven home that intercultural, crosscultural, bicultural and transcultural studies are aspects of the type of multicultural education that is so very much stressed today. Multiculturalism defends “religio-cultural pluralism” as facts of the world today. Its aim is to help people – especially young people – to operate well in two or more different cultures. It is committed to bridging the gap between the “home culture” and the “school culture” – the native and the foreign. It believes that cultural differences ought no longer be permanent factors of tension between peoples; and that cultural similarities, just like cultural differences, should be constructively and effectively exploited, not denied.

European colonialism, especially from the 19th century CE onwards, justified itself on the *civilizational import*³ of its own ‘civilization (deemed to be superior) to native peoples and cultures. “Civilization” became anti-culture to justify the racism inherent in *La mission civilisatrice*.⁴ And⁵

“Racism is what it always was; an opinion that recognizes real civilizational differences and attributes them to biology.”

² Matthew Arnold in the 19th century used the term “culture” in contrast with “civilization.” But he advocated a kind of education that focused on the development of universal standards of reason to identify “the best which has been thought and said in the world”.

³ D’Souza, D.; *The End of Racism*, New York: The Free Press, 1995, p. 146 – 147.

⁴ Ibid. p. 533; Ahmad, E.; *Culture of Imperialism*.

⁵ Ibid. p. 537.

By the end of the 19th century, Rudyard Kipling, the British imperial poet captured this well as the “White Man’s Burden” in the Americas. Its other version – *La mission civilisatrice* developed from the European experience in Africa. Both made Christianity a European religion whose colonial vehicle of expression became European civilization. Thus justifying the relationship between colonialism, Christianity and civilisation developed into the politics still best described as the “White man’s burden”/ *mission civilisatrice*!

European colonialism, Melville Herskovits observed, in the bid to achieve political control, imposed the insidious and demoralizing assumption of cultural superiority in the name of civilization. In 1958, He lamented that it was difficult for Euro-Americans *not* to do what he termed “thinking colonially”, by applying to peoples of other cultures words like “primitive,” “savage” or any of “the rest of the dreary vocabulary of inferiority” that they had developed.⁶ This was to justify their directed culture change through the specific educational programmes that they claimed, directed people to “higher cultures.” The “White Man’s Burden” accepted the Indian as “Noble Savage.”⁷ “*La Mission Civilisatrice*” saw the African as “beastly savage.”⁸ Savagery was a common denominator and it this instituted opposition known as counter-culture.

I must admit that colonialism has been a feature of human experience not peculiar to Africa. And it may be an illusion, for instance, to think that the British Empire has come to an end – people are still being bestowed with Order of the British Empire, Commander of the British Empire, etc. The African elite must realize that other colonized peoples have been able to outgrow the negative effects of colonialism; made constructive use of them and integrated its positive contribution to their human development.⁹ But it

⁶ Onwubiko, Alozie, *African thought Religion and culture*, Enugu Nigernia: Snaap Press, 1991.

⁷ D’Souza D.; *The End of Racism*, p. 58.

⁸ Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa*, p. 20.

⁹ According to the Bible, Moses was born at the time when a most dangerous edict was made against the Jews; as a result he was educated under the very roof that seemed most inimical to the Jewish people. Liberation Theology’s appeal to this fact made considerable expression as illustration of a more widespread ‘dialectics of liberation’.

undergoes *transformative localization*. Christopher Dawson (1959) said that what was then happening in Africa and Asia, was an indirect expansion of colonialism, through a type of reaction that did not directly derive from any African and Asian cultural genius in its own right, but from a counter-culture attitude, in which, in other words, the superiority of the colonizing culture was still implicitly recognised even if defied. Dawson recognized that resisting European “civilization,” by that fact, did not and could not promote African or Asian cultures. Racism in civilization provoked such reactions.

Beyond Racist Counter-Culture

Some Africans tried to halt European expansionism but did so in a way that could not help develop Africa. This introduced Euro-/ Afro-centricism. Racist counter-culture became a burden in a dual sense. The “White man’s” burden was to prove that the Indian was subhuman to impose his culture. He had some nobility to be realized through European civilization. “*La mission civilisatrice*” saw the African as non-human and as in need of being humanized.¹⁰ The African’s burden was to prove the inhumanity of the European and reject his culture. Euro-centricism as a racist concept induced Afro-centricism also as a racist concept born as a reaction against it. This has been described as anti-racist racism.¹¹ This phrase does not in itself condemn “racism.” It pushed the argument into the Euro-centric domain. I am aware that

“antiracist racism is a path to the ‘final unity... the abolition of differences of race’.”¹²

This “final unity” recognizes the unity of the human race.

Students of African Thought, Religion and Culture are aware of how Euro-centricism in its three forms: colonialism, civilization and Christianity,

¹⁰ Cf. *End of Racism*, p. 59.

¹¹ Achebe, C. *Hopes and Impediments*, 1990, NY: Anchor, p. 45.

¹² Appiah, K. *In My Father’s House*, fn.11, p. 195.

is affecting the notion of culture in general and African culture in particular. *Things Fall Apart* published in 1958 with the anti-racist racism counter-culture *spirit of the age* illustrates this. Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad's influence on Achebe provoked counteraction. Achebe says that he would have written about Igbo life and culture even if he had not read *Mister Johnson* or *The Heart of Darkness*.¹³ That is not the issue. The issue is whether he would have written the way he did without reading them? Certainly not! Unfortunately what we have in *Things Fall Apart* is a reaction against European intrusion into a culture. This approach – a form of racist counter culture – and its consequences made it difficult for Achebe to present, in that book, the real African cultural face to the world. Many of its readers get the impression Achebe got from reading *Mister Johnson*.

The Okonkwo style of reacting against forces of change in his community, in my opinion, is typically counter-cultural. The African resisted this and still resist this in the neo-colonial form. Conflicts, for example, have become their ideological path. Their characters present African Studies as “victimology”, giving the impression that African culture crisis is a natural given, inescapably. They recycle “victimhood.” There is the need to go beyond these. They psychologically impact negatively the present and future Africans and build in them the sense of cultural homelessness! Realized today is the need to “re-educate” the Igbo youth because of the anti-culture education the Igbo received.¹⁴ My teaching experience – teaching African Thought, Religion and Culture and Theology (1987-2000) –is that students get almost the same message from *Things Fall Apart* – desperation, antagonism against our past and against our ancestors, and the obnoxious complicity between Colonialism and Christianity.¹⁵ And this easily develops into intra-cultural manipulation to achieve specific aims that do not exclude self-destruction.

¹³ Achebe, C. *Home and Exile*, 2001.

¹⁴ The now famous *Ahiajoku* lectures had as its maiden title: *Ahamefula*, a matter of identity. We have come a long way from the anti-colonial projects based on *Ikemefuna*, to the constructive search for balanced education based on bi-cultural projects of *Ahamefula*. But to achieve this, the principle of *Olumefule* must integrate the practice of *Ucheakolam*.

¹⁵ Cf. Onwubiko, O.A., *African Thought Religion and Culture*, 1991.

We must go beyond that *counter* spirit and age. A way to do this is to re-present Igbo traditional religion and culture, through textual criticism and extra textual information, to the world. Many of Achebe's readers miss part of his message because they do not understand "the cosmological fear of anarchy that burden the characters" of his novels and so fail to see why Umuofia,¹⁶ the location where *Things Fall Apart* is situated, moved from *order* into *chaos*. To reverse this requires the will and orientation to move Igbo people from *chaos* back to *order*. This new orientation is imperative for African Studies and for re-reading the *African Writers Series*. It sees African Studies in this century beyond imposed concepts, images, and stereotypes and addresses issues beyond politico-historical clichés.

That, for example, the Igbo, among the Nigerian peoples, have changed most while changing least may be paradoxical. But if it is true, it is time to ask whether this change is real or artificial? If it is real what can we do to deepen and develop it; if it is artificial what can we do to make it real? This presupposes the re-examination of the relationship between Christianity and colonialism to see how, today, Christianity, "civilization" and colonialism can still claim a higher morality. It is understandable, for instance, that both the African and the European colluded in the infamous transatlantic slave trade. What was the Christian influence on the slave dealer who claimed a higher and revealed morality?¹⁷

Beyond Racism Of Civilization In Christianity

Interculturalism presupposes "cultural parity." This makes possible for "culture at the export level" recognize that vehicles of its exportation are elements of a culture, its products, and not the culture itself. This reduces the force of racism in culture-conquering *mission civilisatrice* and facilitates "dialogue as charity." Dialogue implies biculturality – interlocution. In this sense it implies inter- and intraculturality. And "dialogue as charity" presupposes that interlocutors can communicate *inter se*. But what we have today,

¹⁶ Referred to bush, backward, primitive, etc. Igbo people.

¹⁷ Achebe, *Morning Yet*, p. 119.

in the name of dialogue, is mediated “monologue” through simultaneous translations. And real communication is not happening. Dialogue, in Christian mission, is no longer be talking *to* but *with* people and their cultures. Racism of civilization is recent. Coming to light today is that “no concept truly equivalent to that of ‘race’ can be dictated in the thought of the Greeks, Romans and early Christians.”¹⁸

Inter-religious Dialogue and *Religious Freedom* accept “religious pluralism” as a fact of human experience. Christian Mission has been redirected from its previous “church-centeredness” to “Christ-centeredness”, that is, “God-centeredness.” Church-centeredness was responsible for the debate as whether Christian mission was “Church planting” – *plantatio ecclesiae* – the building of the Church in the European fashion with its structures in mission lands or the Preaching of the Gospel (*proclamatio evangelii*) through which the Church would come into being.¹⁹ The debate did not envisage religious freedom, which was to come with Vatican II.

Religious freedom, though, does not envisage a state where one is free from religion, nor does it envisage the forceful imposition of a religion. The mission of the church becomes *proposing*, and, not *imposing* concepts, beliefs, practice and cultures in the name of civilization. This presupposes that those involved in dialogue are aware of intracultural self-examination that makes interculturalism a feasible project, resulting eventually in freedom of the other to willing accept another religion.

“Understanding traditional religion”,

in Africa, writes Appiah,

“is so central to the conceptual issues that modernization raises that philosophical discussion of the status of traditional religion has been so central in recent African philosophy.”²⁰

And, I would add, theology.

¹⁸ Frederickson, G. M. *Racism*, NJ Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 53-54.

¹⁹ Onwubiko, O.A., *Theory and Practice of Inculturation*, 1992.

²⁰ Appiah, K., *op. cit.*

Cross-Culture Dialogue

The study of Igbo religion today demands critical examination and reflection on how its “contents and nature,” related to Igbo worldview, constitute important elements of an Igbo theodicy which are aspects of Igbo philosophy and theology. Scholars (some of them Igbo) have affirmed that Igboland belongs to the communities described as “sacred” which are resistant to change. Emmanuel Obiechina insisted that there was scope for change in traditional Igbo society and that

“it had to be in areas outside those made sacrosanct by the religious and ritual order.”²¹

Therefore he argues that changes could only be peripheral and would not touch the process of securing the core values of the Igbo culture. These are the values made

“sacrosanct by religious and ritual order.”

This is not very true. And with such a view one can hardly contribute meaningfully to dialogue as such in a cross-cultural sense. Obiechina’s affirmations bring me to the issue of *dimaragana* education. *Dimaragana* is a figure in Igbo language and culture. It refers to one who knows what to do, can do it, has the means to do it, but refuses to do it or chooses the wrong means because of self-imposed inhibitions.²² Some African elites have become *dimaragana*. They were there in the traditional Igbo society, just as they abound today. Most of them have not been equipped for cross-cultural dialogue.

Changes that, simultaneously, affect religion, culture and society are realized through a process of secularisation that, however, does not necessarily lead to secularism. The effect of secularisation of thought is gradual and often difficult. The demythologisation of religious concepts and beliefs in-

²¹ Obiechina, E.

²² Achebe introduced this figure in connection with internally induced culture change in *Things Fall Apart*.

volves the use of myth and counter-myth.²³ The “killing” of deities and the installation of new ones in their stead demonstrates the occurrence, in Igbo-land, of changes that involve an entire cult and belief system concerning a particular deity. People adopt new cultural meanings very slowly, because such changes eventually lead to change in the sacrosanct areas of religion.²⁴

For effective cross cultural dialogue the influence of European education on the *dimaragana* requires “de-colonization.” Most of those advocating this de-colonization are products of the system, and have found out that they are “encumbered with extensive western education.”²⁵ Others, in spite of themselves, are perpetuating that type of education. What, really, is more cumbersome for them is how to identify the effects of this education. And I ask: why was the de-colonization project in Africa not part of the original struggle for Independence? What values did those involved in that struggle acquire (or lose, as the case may be), that daily the question is posed: Why is it that today as yesterday?, – in other words, why is it through Africa's own children and leaders, statesmen, priests and prophets, etc. (the very people who most loudly professed to work for Africa's interests) that the continent's subjection occurs, and may continue to occur? And what precisely, in the context of the “decolonization” which they are demanding, is Western, Christian, European and American education? Does it mean any or all of these?

Biculturalism

Biculturalism results from meaningful participation in cross culture dialogue. And cross-cultural dialogue, not translated information, implies bilingualism in education as an instrument – *information/ inquiry, instruction/ correction* – for culture change. Biculturalism addresses the problem of

²³ A counter-myth corrects a previous myth and thus purifies religious beliefs and opinions.

²⁴ Igbo cosmological beliefs and religio-cultural practices, for instance, are central in Achebe's exploration of the theme of culture-contact and change in his writings.

²⁵ In the words of K. Appiah.

ethnophilosophy and ethnotheology raised in the African context. Biculturalism involves “acculturation” as a process in two directions. When not this two-directional nature is not sufficiently acknowledged, biculturalism produces typically complex changes because of the interplay of different cultural factors and especially the foreign personnel and other elements of culture exportation, did not want to acculturate.

British (or, by extension, Western) education was very well calculated to teach the new Africans that in order to rise on the ladder of the new culture and acquire the exalted status it promised, they must be alienated, ideologically and physically, from their roots – from their cultural past. Biculturality was not envisaged. Basden puts it forcefully when he writes:

“ancient native law and custom cannot exist side by side nor intermingle with the principles of the British Government.”²⁶

This was in 1937, eight years after Igbo women rose and challenged effectively the basis of British administration and its conceptions of Igbo people and culture. This event aroused curiosity and interest in previous colonial reports. It questioned their assertions of those who *knew their natives!* And “knowing their natives” in this sense meant they were in control of them.²⁷ The Igbo women disproved of this logic.

Basden, in self-defence, complained that

“what is not realized as it should be” [sc., by those sympathetic to Igbo culture] “is that Native Law and Custom received its death-blow when the British administration became operative in the Ibo Country.”²⁸

He advised:

“To contemplate conserving native law and custom is to concern ourselves very largely with a corpse. It will not respond as anticipated, because life has ceased to animate it. The deed is done and, unless Europeans abandon the country altogether, and so provide the opportunity for ancient law and custom to be resuscitated, it may

²⁶ Basden, G.T., *Niger Ibos*, pxii.

²⁷ *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, p. 6.

²⁸ P. xiii.

just as well be counted as dead, for it has no future under modern conditions.”²⁹

The importance of traditional religion and culture today disproves Basden. Those who embraced the European education under this policy were not equipped with the necessary information to enable them to engage in the constructive criticism of the African cultures vis-à-vis the acquisition of elements of the British cultural package (which in itself was in some respects internally divided so as to include English, Scottish, Irish etc. cultural orientations). They lacked the stability to evaluate constructively the bi-cultural validity of those acquired. This hampered their ability to see things beyond their professional formations as influenced by the historical circumstances of their age.

The advance of bi-culturalism is strengthening the intellectual stability of the “de-colonized” African. Cultural knowledge is interrelated – there is a link between literature and philosophy, theology etc. Reaction against colonialism, Christianity etc., was at the roots of many *African Writings*. Through them struggle was transposed into the individual. It became a struggle within and between the same person and his culture. Conflict continues to resurface on the individual’s psyche.³⁰ Igbo intellectuals are today looking at the cultural issues raised by the overall message of *Things Fall Apart*, and are asking: “how could someone like Okonkwo who began life from “nowhere” be a good defender of the culture in which everything was against him?” Was he not looking for a new beginning based on individualism – in other words, the real source of his conflict? What was the difference between he who committed suicide fighting a foreign culture, and a Christian convert in Umuofia who denounced his past as bad, and opted for a fresh new beginning from nowhere, in pursuit of becoming “a new creation”. The latter was meant to justify the acquisition of a foreign culture, as if the Christian meaning of becoming “a new creation” was indissolubly tied to a culture!

²⁹ P. xv.

³⁰ Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, was struggling first with himself and inheritance –his father and ancestors, chi, natural environment, society.

Transculturalism – An Answer!

European education produced more *dimaraganas* by diverting their attention from their real problems and away from their cultural homelands. This made it difficult for them to realize the authenticity of what makes things African to be genuinely human.³¹

“The cultural and intellectual achievements commonly claimed as exclusive to the European continent,”

some forget,

“are a concoction of transcultural intercontinental borrowings such as one may only expect in a small peninsula attached to the Asian land mass and due north of the African land mass, both continents several times the size of Europe. What makes things European to be European, and things African to be African, for that matter, is primarily the *transformative localisation* after diffusion.”

What is not realized as much as it should, is that this

“Transformative localisation gave rise to unmistakably, unique and genially Greek myths, philosophy, mathematics, politics, although virtually all the ingredients of these domains of Greek achievement had been borrowed from Phoenicia, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt (and so by implication from Africa), Thracia, and the Danube lands. And a similar argument could be made for many splendid kingdoms and cultures of post-Neolithic Africa.”³²

Those who talk of African cultural homelessness are ignorant of the above facts. This ignorance shows what is happening in some sectors of the academic and intellectual world concerning Africa. Can one talk of “Africans” without admitting the reality that is Africa?

“Whatever Africans share,” insists Appiah, “we do not have a common traditional culture, common language, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary.”

It seems Appiah does not see anything common to Africans that can be a basis of their solidarity. He believes:

³¹ Onwubiko, O. A.; *African Thought Religion and Culture*, 1991.

³² van Binsbergen, W, ‘African spirituality’, *Polylog: Forum for Intercultural Philosophy*, 4, 2004 (English and Spanish versions), at: <http://them.polylog.org/4/fbw-en.htm> .

“we do not even belong to a common race.”³³

This, of course, is true. But it depends on the meaning of “share”, “have” and “common” in this assertion; and also depending on whether we can really *have* what we *share* and *share* what we *have* as Africans. Let me mention that those who equate *race* with complexion quickly speak of the “Black race” and, in this sense, Africa unmistakably belongs to a common race. By belonging to Africa as a “common race” they imply that in being African, I must, for instance, cease to be Igbo and metamorphose into a Nigerian that must also disappear into their African construct! But what does Africa, for instance, mean for Appiah? We know – a home of problems!

“Africans”, he says, “share too many problems and projects to be distracted by a bogus basis for solidarity.”³⁴

This is a typical *dimaragana* opinion.

Stephen Howe attacked ethnophilosophy. He cites many “African philosophers themselves” who also attacked it.³⁵ Yes, many “African philosophers” – if they accept that designation of themselves – have criticised ethnophilosophy to deny African ethno spiritual, theological, philosophical make-up, without telling us of any philosophy that is *Ethno Neuter* in content, author, problem, method, audience, etc. Howe informs us:

“the most powerful attack on ethnophilosophy and associated assumptions has been made by the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah.”³⁶

One can understand the concerns of Appiah – ethnophilosophers never go beyond the descriptive stage of African traditional religious and cultural beliefs. I insist it is “a stage” and an important one for that matter. It should not become the final stage. It is *a*, not *the* foundation of African philosophy, based on African *ethnos*.³⁷ But what makes it difficult, if not impossible, for

³³ Appiah, K. p. 26.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 26.

³⁵ Howe, S. *Afrocentricism: Mythical Pasts And Imagined Homes*, p. 158.

³⁶ Appiah, K. op. cit. p. 160.

³⁷ *Ethnos* here means people/ nation/ race.

Appiah, and for those of his intellectual colony, not to build and improve on this stage is what baffles me. And I must remark that even Howe does not dismiss this stage. He accepts its validity as

“where serious thought must start.”³⁸

To ignore this starting point – the description, no matter how good or bad, true or false our traditional beliefs are – “where serious thought must start,” we must forever be confronted with the question: “where did you come from originally” in our philosophical thinking! Howe tells his readers:

“The critics of ethnophilosophy – Hountondji, Appiah, Wiredu, Towa, Masolo, and the rest – seem to me to adhere to generally higher standards of argument than their opponents. Their views are expressed in more lucid form (with partial exception of the Althusserian jargon disfiguring Hountondji’s early work!), they proceed more often by reasoned arguments as opposed to mere assertion or description, their work is more coherent. To some, no doubt, that view simply shows that I have an irredeemably eurocentric conception of coherence.”³⁹

The problem I see in their attacks is that in the attempt to “destroy” ethnocentrism in African Studies they enthrone Euro-American ethnocentrism. For Wiredu, the African philosopher has no choice but to be a loudspeaker of the Eurocentric philosophy.⁴⁰ His type of study cannot contribute to the healthy development of *African Philosophy*. And the inability to tell the world on whose “traditional beliefs” that Appiah and his types’ adherence “to generally higher standard of argument” depend is what makes Howe’s type of scholarship a consolidation of *racism* generating *antiracist racism*.

Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji, with reference to ethnophilosophy – and Anthony Appiah though criticising them – have carefully reformulated Eurocentricism and racism, up to the point of effectively disguising their own Ethnocentrism under these reformulations. Appiah accepts that:

“...every culture has had views about what it is to have something like a mind and of its relationship to the body; almost every culture has had a concept that plays some of the roles of concepts of divinity. And even if there were human cultures where noth-

³⁸ Howe, S. op. cit. p. 160.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 161.

⁴⁰ *End of Racism*, p. 368-369.

ing like any of these concepts was present, it is hard to make sense of the idea of a culture that did not have *any* crucial organizing concepts.”⁴¹

The connection Appiah makes between culture and its “crucial organizing concepts” is important. But more important is our obligation to find and defend these “crucial organizing concepts” in our culture. They preserve our core values. If we do this it would not be difficult to see the truth in Appiah’s affirmation.

“There is, then, in every culture a folk philosophy, and implicit in that folk philosophy are all (or many) of the concepts that academic philosophers have made central to their study in the West.”

By implication, therefore, in Igbo culture there are many of the concepts academic philosophers can make central to their study in the same way “folk philosophy” was the starting point of European thought. Appiah admits,

“Of course, there might not be in every society people who pursued a systematic critical conceptual inquiry, but at least in every culture there is work for a philosopher, should one come along, to do.”⁴²

Appiah deserves praise for this admission. But the question remains will this philosopher be made or born within or without the culture area and background? How, of what background and from where “should one come along?” Western philosophical Tradition, opines Appiah.

Appiah’s phrase, “should [a philosopher] come along”, shows the *di-maragana* thinking that the philosopher must come from outside. This type of thinking kept African philosophy and theology “en route” for long. The idea of “route” whether metaphorical or real has been facing the dilemma between its *a quo* and *ad quem*. Could this route continue into another as a connecting or an intersecting one? And whether those who travel along this “route” even believe that they have or can even arrive philosophically and theologically is yet to be proved! The problems of their people have become very inconceivable for them. So as if to be pointing at this route from some safe distance many authors are comfortable with writing: *Towards...*, or

⁴¹ Appiah, K. op. cit. p. 87.

⁴² *Loc. cit.*

Introduction to... African Theology, etc.

Conclusion

African scholars need to develop more intellectual intra-, inter-, bi-, cross- and trans-culturality for fruitful academic dialogue in the 21st century. By intellectual here, I mean the mental ability to undertake the scrutiny of other's and one's cultures. It is the ability to admit that a new missio-theological equation has evolved. It states: to evangelize Africa is to strengthen her. This began before the Second Vatican Council, but that Council promulgated it.⁴³ That equation was the guiding principle of the African Synod.⁴⁴ And strengthening Africa presupposes an end to colonialism in all its forms; as well as it presupposes that to colonize, to civilize and to evangelize are not interchangeable. Their interrelation even had dangerous consequences leading to the belief that the end of colonialism would lead to the end of Christianity in Africa.⁴⁵

The African Synod was a *Synod of Hope*; a hope that Africa will come to stand on her feet in the third millennium. As the Pope said in his opening address on the Synod,

“We would like this to be a thoroughly African synod that goes to the very roots of what makes the Church in Africa African and, at the same time, universal.”

If these “roots” include the very African human nature, religious and cultural values, etc then I think it should go to strengthen the roots of Afri-

⁴³ Church Teachings, from Leo XIII who inaugurated the 20th century to John Paul II who inaugurated the 21st have emphasized “unity of the human race.” Pius XII [1939 - 1958] insisted that “civilization” does not break this unity of the human race. He condemned polygenesis in 1950. John XXIII (1958–1963) made human and Christian unity central themes of his pontificate. They became core issues at Vatican II. Paul VI laid the foundation of “dialogue as charity” in religion, culture, politics, communication, [mass media], economics, technology, theology, philosophy, literature, etc. LG spoke of the unity of the human race.

⁴⁴ *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995.

⁴⁵ Achebe, M.Y. p. 118.

can culture in Christianity and the roots of Christianity in African Church. Elimination of the socio-psychological, religio-political etc impediments to this project was anticipated. *Memory and Purification and Faults of the Past* was an expression, whether understood as a realistic or symbolic of guilt, the truth remains the Church asked pardon for “past faults.”⁴⁶ One thing was established, the good will to promote “dialogue as charity.” The current dispute between the Vatican and Europe over the “Christian roots” of European culture demanding a distinction between “Christian roots” of European culture and the “European roots” of the Christian culture is instructive. It presents us with alternatives: can a culture sustain two or more religions and retain its unity in diversity? Yes! And can the same religion develop two or more cultures – in a diversified unity and retain its uniqueness as a religion? This is the heart of the present debate of the role of Christianity in the formation of a global culture –multiculturalism. And from here re-encountering culture becomes indispensable for living Christianity in my father's home beyond racism!

⁴⁶ What specifically these were, is not the focus of this article.

IDENTITY AS EVOLUTIVE

An intercultural approach based on an examination of Mudimbe, de Beauvoir, Taylor, and Mbembe

by Carolien Ceton¹

ABSTRACT: In this article, four different philosophers' views on identity are confronted using three different approaches: how identity is formed through recognition, how it legitimises power structures and how our corporeality influences identity-formation. Mbembe and Taylor both view identity as a valuable achievement to be preserved, whereas Taylor bases identity on cultural singularity, and Mbembe designates daily necessity as the basis of identity-formation. De Beauvoir and Mudimbe view identity as a pitfall we have to liberate ourselves from: the human being should conceive of oneself as a project. For de Beauvoir, identity can only unfold within physical, daily reality. The significance attached to daily life by both Mbembe and Beauvoir represents a fruitful point of departure. It creates space to (re)think identity in terms of an evolving or evolutive entity, something that develops in accordance with our daily practice, always elaborating upon what came before. This way, an identity can be divers and coherent at the same time.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural philosophy, African philosophy, feminist philosophy, identity, authenticity, existentialism

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Introduction

Mudimbe – philosopher, author, African, cosmopolitan² – does not believe in any kind of name-tagging. Identity does not exist, but is merely a way to restrict oneself to the fulfilment of just one particular role in life. Also, philosophy does not exist; it is a “perpetual recommencement”, says Mudimbe. But even for Mudimbe the lifelong duty to avoid pinning down oneself in any way and make the most of one’s freedom instead, sometimes seems too heavy a burden. To the above-mentioned statement, he immediately added:

“And I’m sick of it! It is a nightmare! You try it, for 20 years!”³

Identity is a socio-historical construction. A construction that is too frequently used to put people in their place, a place they never chose themselves. Identity is used to exert power over people, to discriminate against them, to deny them the freedom to live their lives as they wish. Plenty of reasons to think we would be better off without identity altogether. But damaging though it often is, can we do entirely without it? Or is there anything we should put in its place?

The post-modern answer is well-known: we should abandon the idea of a unified identity altogether because the human being is fundamentally fragmented. To me, this seems a rather awkward and unsatisfactory solution, leaving many concrete human experiences and questions incomprehensible. In this article, I would like to confront the views of four different philosophers on this question, hoping to discover a more fruitful way to think about identity. What exactly is identity, and how did it come about? Three lines of thought are discernible throughout the article: how identity is formed

² Van Binsbergen on Mudimbe:

“...what is clearly one of the great creative cosmopolitan minds ... of our times.”

in: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2005, ‘ “An incomprehensible miracle” – Central African clerical intellectualism versus African historic religion: A close reading of Valentin Mudimbe’s *Tales of Faith*’, in: Kai Kresse, ed., *Reading Mudimbe*, special issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17, 1, June 2005: 11-65; also at: http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/mudil0.htm .

³ Mudimbe during an interview, Durham, 8/ 3/ 2002.

through recognition, how it is utilised to legitimise certain power structures and how our corporeality influences identity-formation.

Of these different approaches, the first two represent mainstream views within political and philosophical theories. Obviously, one follows naturally from the other. If identity is a product of (the absence of) recognition by someone's social environment, the conditions for a power-relation with that environment are already given. In order to not get stuck in this somewhat – in my opinion – abstract reasoning, I want to add the third theme of corporeality as a source of identity. This line of approach has been explored, among others, by feminist philosophy. To me, it offers the possibility to connect to daily reality and continue the discussion on a more concrete and tangible level. In the end, I want to combine the thought that identity is created by people in response to their daily practice with the human longing for an (to a certain extent) integrated self-image.

The first of the four philosophers to put in an appearance is Taylor, who has contributed greatly to mainstream theories concerning recognition and the role it plays in identity-formation. Mudimbe and de Beauvoir both subscribe to this analyses: a subject is formed in a process of recognition or denial by the 'other.' Unfortunately, because the circumstances from which people operate are not equal, recognition and the ensuing subject-formation is not mutual. In Mudimbe's analyses the African identity – similar to the female identity in de Beauvoir's work – is constructed as the *absolute* other by a more powerful counterpart. Identity as it is should be done away with and human life should be viewed as a project, to be chosen and fulfilled on a personal basis. De Beauvoir's and Mudimbe's analyses depart where our bodily existence comes into view. For de Beauvoir, our corporeality is of great importance to our personal project. Her views on corporeality play a decisive part in my argument. Finally, I draw on the work of Mbembe, who focuses on African identity, not as it came about in the colonial era, but as it is developing at the present time.

The cultural component of identity

Hermeneutics is one of Taylor's greatest sources of inspiration. He adheres strongly to the idea that people are self-interpreting animals; the human

being as a self-developing and an expressive being, including related values of individuality, unicity and authenticity. The fact that people attach meaning to their own acts is characteristic of human kind. Values only possess meaning because we have attributed those meanings ourselves. Truly important values and norms are different in this way than arbitrary tastes. People use their desires as a standard to evaluate things by, but at the same time those desires themselves are being evaluated. This is the evaluation of so-called second-order preferences, or to use Taylor's expression: *strong* evaluation. A human being or 'self' is someone who can make such second-order choices. It is our second-order preferences that define our identity; should we change them, then we would be changing our very selves.⁴

Taylor passionately wants to discredit what he calls the theory of radical freedom of choice. Our choices are never free; they come about on the basis of our identity. Our identity, for its part, acquires meaning only within an existing society, language and culture. This fact in itself – even though Taylor acknowledges the possibility of criticising one's own culture – represents sufficient reason to declare the theory of radical freedom unacceptable. Taylor strongly emphasises the significance of our social environment. First of all, the human being is dialogical by nature, meaning that he can only develop and identify himself in dialogue with other people. Secondly, a shared *horizon of meaning* is a necessary condition for identity development. The ability to choose freely is not enough; some choices must be more valuable than others, otherwise the act of choosing becomes an empty gesture. It is precisely Taylor's horizon of meaning that makes some of our choices more valuable than others.

On the basis of the culture-bound nature of identity, Taylor also rejects the ideal of detachment. Unless one assumes a specific cultural position, to speak of moral ideals, identity or meaning is completely senseless. Freedom consists in the ability – starting from existing values – to criticise our culture bit by bit and thus improve our moral ideals.

According to Taylor, Western modern identity has gone off the rails. The modern self is a stripped version of individualism; the self has become sovereign whilst its social environment only serves as a stage for self-discovery. The autonomous, detached individual is a perversion of the otherwise posi-

⁴ Tjong Tjin Tai, 'Inleiding op Taylor', 1997, p. 2.

tively valued individuality that is so characteristic of western culture. We will not be doing ourselves a favour if we renounce, along with this perverted version, all forms of individualism. The right interpretation of values like individuality and authenticity presupposes a society that exerts a moral influence on the individual. Our social environment is not simply a working space but the breeding ground of our identity.⁵ The individual can only discover what is valuable on the basis of the values made available to him by society. Individuality is not a radical detachment from society but a personal assimilation of influences both from within and without.⁶ Thus, the individual must not cut himself off from the outside world, but should rather enter into dialogue with others.

Mudimbe: identity & freedom as arch-enemies

Mudimbe subscribes to Taylor's idea that recognition is of crucial importance to identity-formation, and that is precisely where the similarity between the two ends. Whereas Taylor sees identity as the development of authenticity against the background of a shared horizon of meaning, to Mudimbe identity is purely a construction. Obviously the same applies to the African identity, although this identity represents a special case. 'The' African identity has not just been constructed as the other, but as a collective and historical other. Mudimbe contends that Africa is an invention of the west. The west needed an antipole with which it could express its own identity as a rational subject. Thus the African became the reverse of the western self; not just the other representing all that the westerner was not, but the key to western identity itself.

The objectification of the African identity is the result of various western power structures. Obviously, the political domination of the colonial era exerted a major influence, but cognitive forms of power – anthropological studies, philosophical concepts – have made a contribution as well. With

⁵ Houtepen, in: *De Malaise van de Moderniteit*, 1991, p. 14.

⁶ Houtepen, in: *De Malaise van de Moderniteit*, 1991, p. 14.

Mudimbe, identity is a result of different power techniques. In his analyses, power and identity are very closely knit. Intellectual, economical and political power structures developed and consolidated themselves in mutual correlation. Western discourse on Africa and the African response it has provoked, amount to a struggle concerning the control over African identity. The answers that have been formulated in response have not been able to wrestle themselves from western rationality as it dominates the created images. Mudimbe has set himself the task of deconstructing these images along all possible lines of approach. The attempt to create a truthful identity in which the western images no longer resound is senseless. It is, to Mudimbe, fundamentally a losing battle: identity always represents a construction, a construction that is always restrictive for the people to which it applies.

It is remarkable that in Mudimbe's analyses pre-colonial history is entirely left aside, even though he thinks African heritage includes not just the colonial past but the pre-colonial experience as well. Mudimbe's only solution lies in a radical break with the notion of identity altogether. Just by speaking about an identity, it becomes fixed – a dilemma we cannot evade.

Taylor is one of the victims of this dilemma. With his pronounced ideal of authenticity, essentialist traits creep into his thinking. To Taylor, our cultural definition is not just a fact of life, but – by definition – a positive and unsuspected contribution to our personal existence. We must develop an authentic identity which is truly authentic when built from a shared background of meaning. Taylor unfortunately does not question or elaborate upon this so-called background. Our cultural background is, without hesitation, an inviolable source of the good, an unquestionable origin of our values.⁷ For Taylor culture is a homogenous and clearly definable entity. A cultural background never consists of different, sometimes conflicting, elements – contrary to what people have to deal with in real life. Every culture comprises several ways of life, languages, religions etc. Taylor's background boils down to a simplification of reality; unfortunately, there is no such thing as an unequivocal background from which identities can sprout. Human identity does not have its origins in an alleged homogenous culture,

⁷ Tjong Tjin Tai, 'Inleiding op Taylor', 1997, p. 4.

but is at the same time personal and collective.⁸ Furthermore, in Taylor's analyses of the human query for authenticity, he only pays attention to authenticity as a result of acknowledgement of our true selves. He does mention the oppositional aspects of authenticity – the reaction against our social environment – but does not elaborate upon them.

The human being as a project

“And I think that the most beautiful mystification, the most remarkable lie of our century – the last and the new – is the belief that the identity of women, the identity of Africans, the identity of Europeans can be limited to this or that element. And that's not true. Anything is possible.”

According to Mudimbe identity might exist in mathematics, but it surely does not in social sciences.⁹ In human life we should understand identity as a project.

“There is an identity, my identity, when I am dead”,

says Mudimbe.

“But before that I can chose, change my orientations. I am a project. We should understand our choices in terms of transforming our existences and making our lives a work of art. It is only when we are gone that we can be given an identity. And people know that by instinct when they speak of someone they have loved. Maybe their grandmother has gone, and people say she had a beautiful life, a wonderful life. At that moment we are giving someone an identity and considering the life of that person as a work of art.”¹⁰

⁸ Tjong Tjin Tai, ‘In Cultuur Gebracht’, in: *Van Agora tot Markt*, 1996, p. 239.

⁹ Mudimbe, *Parables and Fables*, 1991, p. xx.

¹⁰ Ceton, ‘Alles is Mogelijk’, in: *Filosofie Magazine*, September 2002, p. 38.

The big mistake people make, is when they assume a fixed identity during their life-time. Things that happen to them are subsequently accounted for on the basis of such an identity, which is – to Mudimbe – never justifiable. We should conceive of our human existence as a project: we are making ourselves what we have chosen to become. Whether our project will be successful depends upon the choices we make. These choices can always be renewed; every project can always be reshaped. Testifying to his existentialist persuasion, Mudimbe says:

“We can choose, always. To choose is difficult because we act generally in bad faith. And bad faith is not a lie, it is self-deception. We must understand our choices as part of the transformation of our existence, the recreation of our lives in a work of art.”

To prevent rigidity, Mudimbe seeks the solution in perpetual movement, thereby running the risk of making movement an aim in itself.

Mudimbe does not deny any influence from the outside world.

“We become what we are because of our culture. And here I do not resist to refer to Descartes who said that our predicament is that we have been children.”

But in the last resort, such an influence can never be the decisive factor.

“We are born, we have to work and we die. And that condition, the human condition, transcends all differences of sexes, races.”¹¹

Mudimbe condemns those who use – for example – racism or sexism as an explanation of their own personal failure.

“I did something wrong – oh, I did not make it because I’m African. I did something wrong – I did not make it but you know, it’s because of the existence of sexism in the society.”

All bad faith according to Mudimbe. Nonetheless, some of the characteristics people use to designate their identity are physically specified. In Mudimbe’s example – being African or female – it seems farfetched to deny that people view each-other as being exactly that: African or woman. Does

¹¹ Mudimbe during an interview, Duke University, Durham, 7/ 3/ 2002.

our bodily existence come into any of this? Mudimbe endorses the fact that others view us in terms of our bodily characteristics, but he immediately adds:

“Our body, just like this table here, is an in-itself, an être en-soi. *But I am more*; I am a conscious being, a for-itself or être pour-soi.”¹²

With this, Mudimbe’s theorising becomes seriously problematic. Our body may be a useful and practical instrument,¹³ but in the end it is insignificant as far as peoples’ life-shaping choices are concerned. At the same time, Mudimbe insists that we – our selves, our identity – are beings for others.

“Everything we do, even when we are alone, is like a response to external expectations. Expectations of others. We are fundamentally beings for others.”

The human being exists, but for others; and these others first of all perceive his body. How can Mudimbe expect this perception, based on our physical existence, to be of no consequence to the choices we make (later) in life? Mudimbe’s only way out is an escape to ever higher levels of abstraction. By making a quick switch-over to our consciousness, Mudimbe denies any true significance of our physical existence. In the end, our consciousness is the truly human form of existence; it exceeds all differences.

Mudimbe claims a human universality which comes across rather sympathetic from a emancipatorical point of view. We all share the same human existence, so why should we let ourselves be guided by our differences in this life? At the same time, his human universality represents an escape into abstraction. Since there is no place for our physical existence in his thinking, there is no other option left for him, but to seek the solution in a universal existence slowly dissolving into nothing.

¹² Mudimbe during an interview, Duke University, Durham, 7/ 3/ 2002. My italics.

¹³ Mudimbe during an interview, Duke University, Durham, 7/ 3/ 2002.

The body in focus

Like Mudimbe – with whom she shares several existentialist assumptions – de Beauvoir also maintains that we should conceive of our existence as a project. But as Mudimbe's body is rendered meaningless by his omnipotent consciousness, de Beauvoir tries to reconcile those two elements of human life. In her thinking, a major part is played by our physical existence. In this way, she creates ample space within her analyses for the many concrete experiences people have in daily life.

De Beauvoir wants to reconcile body and consciousness through the emotions. In an emotion our corporeality can *coincide* with our consciousness, because an emotion can serve so to speak as a short-cut to the consciousness. While (bodily) experiencing an emotional response, one no longer regards the other from without but is able to truly sympathise. This way, one is no longer an outsider but an integral part of the situation encountered by the other. Emotions presents us with an opportunity to become truly involved with another human being, thus preventing our consciousness of placing itself opposite the other as is inevitably the case in Sartrean existentialist thinking. The coincidence of body and consciousness renders contact established through emotion much more direct than a purely rational connection. To use de Beauvoir's words: an emotion can dissolve the immediate difference between self and other.

Involvement with the people around us is a fact of human existence to de Beauvoir. Our corporeality implies the concreteness of our being. People attach a certain meaning to their body, and these meanings depend on the situation they find themselves in. Obviously, this situation is constantly subject to all kinds of changes, and the meaning we attribute to our body changes along. In that sense, the human being is by nature a social being or – using de Beauvoir's words – the human being is *situated*.¹⁴ De Beauvoir believes people should not deny their situated nature, but should accept it. As long as we keep aloof from others we will remain indifferent, our lives will be empty and meaningless. Meaning is attached to our bodies, our actions and our selves only within the context of a social community; the meaning of our existence depends upon this community. For de Beauvoir,

¹⁴ Vintges, *Filosofie als Passie*, 1992, p. 79.

the emotions, our situatedness, the unity of body and consciousness, are all the same. It is our direct connection with the world, whereby solidarity becomes a possibility.

Solidarity, however, is merely one of many possible outcomes and certainly not something that automatically follows from our situated nature. The body – with every meaning we attach to it – can also be a place of oppression. The female body for example is, in de Beauvoir's mind, 'occupied' by patriarchal power. Our bodies are completely formed by our particular situation, our social environment and (if all is right) by ourselves. If others – through their position of power – are able to fully determine the meaning of our bodies, our bodies have become instruments of oppression.

The active willing of freedom

De Beauvoir thinks the physical dimension of human existence implies that the human being is always situated, i.e. socially determined. The overlap with Taylor's argument for a shared horizon of meaning seems obvious, but luckily de Beauvoir takes another step ahead. As an existentialist, de Beauvoir also believed in the personal assignment for every single human being to create her own life *and* carry the full responsibility for all the choices involved. De Beauvoir wanted to find a way to combine our socially determined nature with individual freedom of choice and thus arrive at a socially conscientious, responsible human being. As a result, she drew some definite lines within which the possibilities we have creating our personal life's project are confined. An active attitude regarding our own lives and our social environment is crucial to de Beauvoir's understanding of freedom. To a certain extent, people must be socially free before they can practice their ontological freedom. It is our own responsibility, however, to seize the opportunity whenever and where-ever we can. Freedom is often hampered, but people are seldom totally subjugated on all sides. We must use every bit of leeway available to us. We must *will* ourselves free,¹⁵ whereby our situation ceases to be something we must passively suffer.

¹⁵ De Beauvoir, *Een Moraal der Dubbelzinnigheid*, 1966, p. 15; Dutch translation of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*.

The willing of freedom is a twofold acceptance. On the one hand, one accepts one's freedom of choice; on the other hand, one accepts the fact that the available options are dependent on one's social environment. The human being is free in the choices he makes, but in actual practice those choices always assume the shape of a particular bond with the outside world. The making of a choice implies the existence of an actual project. This way, de Beauvoir merges our innate ontological freedom and our situated nature; our being bound by the world around us. We must use our freedom to choose our commitments ourselves. Freedom is ours only when we actively make it our own.

Our body determines our position in the world; it supplies us with the basis upon which we create our personal identity. Meanings attached to the body change with time, place and with the individual making her own choices. The body is particularly well suited to the expression of personal choices in favour of a certain identity. Circumcision, tattoos or a certain hair-style are all different ways to claim an identity and secure access to the relevant social grouping. Other identities are physically given – like sexual identity whereby the division between the female and male body is considered an absolute. It is those physically determined identities that can easily conceal a personal choice. Appealing to an inevitable, inherent identity can be a most efficient means to mobilise people for certain political purposes. An active choice, say, in favour of a caring – typically feminine – profession is thus represented as simply the passive belonging to a certain group (being in possession of a female body). This way, the fact that it is us who decide which meanings should be attached to the female body disappears from sight. Along with those meanings, we also choose the identities we attach to the body we were born with.

Identity as a product of daily life

De Beauvoir believes that human life is a tangible existence; our life is determined by its daily reality, not by abstract patterns of thought or theories. Throughout her work, she approaches her subject matters from the point of view of our lived reality. This method she shares with the philosopher

Achille Mbembe. What inspires people in their daily lives is the key to their understanding of social and historical developments.

Mbembe elaborately describes what common daily African lives look like and the way this leads to – according to him – a specifically African form of identity-building. His work presents us with a succession of various images: the omnipresence of the autocrat by way of portraits and images. Salaries that have not been paid in a long time while people spend their working hours trying to provide for themselves elsewhere. Street scenes determined by abandoned building excavations – remnants of prestigious building projects that have not seen any work done in years.¹⁶ Such a disintegrated reality, where things no longer seem to be what they are, leads people to split their identities. Identity is adjusted to the situations at hand, and because different situations in daily African life can confront people with such different demands, the various parts of an identity can be far apart.

De Beauvoir also emphasises the disintegration of life as people lead it. Daily life exists of an enormous amount of experiences without any structure of their own. Human existence is fragmented and the human being is an open-ended set of dissimilar elements. It is upon us to create a coherent image of ourselves out of this chaos of experiences and impressions. We must revise all different elements and recreate a coherent entity out of them. Such a ‘coherent entity’ is what de Beauvoir means by the phrase ‘a personal identity’.

African identities

For Mbembe, the human assignment to create one’s own life assumes a totally different form. He views the creation of an identity exclusively in terms of struggle, a struggle to survive. Mbembe does not – as does Mudimbe – reject the idea of identity in itself, but he strongly opposes the notion of one African identity.

“We have to start from the assumption that identity formation is always a historical process. Which means that identities are not formed out of a vacuum. The material

¹⁶ Mbembe and Roitman, ‘Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis’, *Public Culture*, 1995, p. 328.

conditions in which people live have a serious impact on the way they imagine themselves. For most people in Africa, those material conditions of daily life are such that they have to grab at every opportunity to try and make it from one day to the other. In such a situation, it is more rational not to have one single loyalty. It is more rational to make sure that things are never completely closed. Because a maximisation of possibilities stems from the fact that these can always be renegotiated. One has to invest in multiple social relations in order to be able to confront the different facets of everyday imperatives. That is simply a practice of everyday life.”¹⁷

People resort to what Mbembe calls ‘arranging’ to be able to subsist. Through such practices, a whole new parallel reality is created: fraudulent identity cards, fake police officers clad in the official uniform, a lively trade in forged school reports and medical certificates etc. Every law is swamped by an arsenal of techniques, meant to circumvent and envelop that very same law, to the point of neutralising the legislation itself. Things no longer exist without their parallel.

“There is hardly a reality here without its double”, says Mbembe.¹⁸

Because of this, it is imperative to possess the capacity of being simultaneously for and against, of operating within and from without the system at the same time. This way, chances to finally achieve one’s aim are maximised. Mbembe is not describing incidents or imperfections of the system; it has become a general way of life, the daily negotiations necessary to survive. ~~Being~~ ~~becoming~~ becoming a subject in Africa, says Mbembe, requires one to maintain several loyalties at once to be able to survive. It means the splitting of one’s identity, something which is in principle not specifically African. In other parts of the world, people do not possess a homogenous identity either. But in Africa’s case, the situation is extraordinary in that the pressure on people is much higher.

“The historical pressure is higher: the colonial period that left its imprints on what we could call the African psyche, the memories of the many centuries before colonisation and the postcolonial period. But also the pressure of the present socio-economical conditions. Identity in Africa is not simply split in the traditional western sense of the

¹⁷ Mbembe during an interview, Johannesburg, 22/ 6/ 2002.

¹⁸ Mbembe & Roitman, ‘Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis’, *Public Culture*, 1995: 340.

term, but the subject is somewhat pulled in various directions simultaneously.”¹⁹

Although de Beauvoir realises that the past or our circumstances may severely confine us, her conception of a self-created identity predominantly appears to be a positive assignment which is part and parcel of human existence. Every single human being should, as an individual, create something out of life. Mbembe’s identity is more of a pragmatic answer to (extreme) daily difficulties, a short-term solution in a crisis-situation. Mbembe is convinced that subjectivity is always split. This does not elicit any value-judgement for him, he simply takes it as fact.²⁰ The unitary subject does not exist – not in Africa and not in Europe. In Africa though, this split is more acute and even necessary, because without it, daily life becomes an impossibility. With this, Mbembe cautiously formulates what makes an identity specifically African. The African identity is a *splintered* identity, wrought under exceptionally strong socio-economic pressures.

Is Mbembe’s identity a pragmatic solution to outside pressure, or might it also represent something which is worth preserving regardless of the circumstances? To Mbembe, this is completely irrelevant. In future, as in the present, the majority of people will not be able to escape the dynamics of trying to survive one day at the time.

“I just do not see how that will be different in the near future. People will keep composing their identities very mindful of past heritages and the vagaries of their daily encounter with what comes from outside.”²¹

Mbembe’s splintered identity is an instrument born of necessity, needed to face up to the crisis.

Identity as evolutive

After the failure of Taylor’s culturally determined identity and Mudimbe’s project, the creation of an identity as an answer to the requirements of daily

¹⁹ Mbembe during an interview, Johannesburg, 22/ 6/ 2002.

²⁰ Mbembe during an interview, Johannesburg, 22/ 6/ 2002.

²¹ Mbembe during an interview, Johannesburg, 22/ 6/ 2002.

life appears to be the most feasible analyses. Mbembe's specific interpretation, however, is less convincing. It seems hard to imagine people who, being forced by circumstances to acquire many different identities, no longer have any personal preferences. Will they not, on the basis of personal taste and characteristics, more easily opt for some identities than for others? Is it unthinkable that certain identity 'splinters' might correspond to other parts fairly well, while others are more separate? Because Mbembe renders the assumption of a certain identity as a purely pragmatic choice, he precludes any influence exercised by personal preferences or characteristics. Moreover, the choosing of an identity exclusively in reaction to outside demands denies any influence the different identities might exert on each-other.

Considering Mbembe's representation, it seems that all different parts of an identity operate completely independently. It is somewhat confusing, therefore, that Mbembe continues to speak of a subject, whereas his non-integrated subject really is a fragmented post-modern non-subject. What remains is the question whether people can manage a disintegrated identity without (wanting to) obtain some kind of coherence between the different parts. Mbembe himself seems to think that this is not the case after all:

"Now, I understand very well that being pulled in many directions at the same time might end up helping to produce schizophrenic subjects. But we cannot forget that at the same time, human societies always manage to constantly invent mechanisms for producing their own stability. Including in the midst of the worst of the crisis. We see it happening for example with the importance of churches in most urban parts of the continent. Religious organisations and churches have become somewhat a place where a certain sense of *agreement* within the fragments of the subject is under way."²²

The usage of a term like 'agreement' implies that even Mbembe acknowledges that people do not simply accept a disintegrated identity, but will rather try to achieve a certain coherence within themselves. Apparently, people want to find a place where they can belong after all.

Generally speaking, the combination of a totally disintegrated human identity and a type of society that aspires to stability and coherence seems rather problematic. Society and identity-formation are strongly connected; a

²² Mbembe during an interview, Johannesburg, 22/ 6/ 2002. My italics.

social aspiration for coherence should therefore be expressed in the identity-concept itself. Such a concept should, along with the interpretation of identity as an answer to the demands posed by daily life, express the human longing for being – to use de Beauvoir’s phrase – a coherent entity as well. To be able to capture those two interpretations in one concept, I would like to suggest the use of the term *evolutive* identity. The term ‘evolutive’ refers to development, to a succession of events or living creatures. Every event (or living creature) originates from the one preceding it, but is at the same time subject to changes that transform it into a separate identity. It indicates growth and a capability to adjust. All these notions – development, growth, adjustment, change, life – touch upon a conception of identity that, in my opinion, does justice to people’s lived reality. The identity people are looking for, the place they can belong to, is never static or unequivocal. Our social environment constantly changes – often more quickly than we can grasp – while the human being itself is also far from stagnant. A human being passes through different phases in life, phases that all represent their own specific demands and needs. An identity, therefore, must adjust itself, must adapt to a changing situation, grow alongside a developing human being. In this way, identity should be viewed as a phenomenon whose characteristics are more like those of a life organism than those of dead matter. Our identity will come to a standstill only when we die.

An evolutive identity develops in accordance with our daily practice. Little by little, day by day, our identity changes – changes we are able to direct to a certain extent. The different phases each represent a separate identity, yet these identities are interconnected because they elaborate upon each other. This way an identity can be diverse *and* coherent at the same time.

Concluding remarks

When positioning the four authors’ opinions on identity in a nutshell – passing over the necessary differentiations for conveniences sake – they separate into two different pairs. The one pair, Mbembe and Taylor view identity as a valuable achievement to be preserved. Whereas Taylor bases identity on

cultural singularity, Mbembe designates physical, daily necessity as the basis of identity-formation. The second pair, de Beauvoir and Mudimbe view identity as a pitfall we have to liberate ourselves from. The human being should conceive of himself as a project; it is our assignment to create our lives as human beings and not lapse into bad faith and irresponsibility. Whereas this project takes on totalitarian forms with Mudimbe, with de Beauvoir it can only unfold within physical, daily reality. An important common ground is indicated with this by both Mbembe and de Beauvoir and the significance they attached to daily life.

This line of approach represents for me a fruitful point of departure. It creates space to (re)think identity in terms of an evolving entity that is not fit for preservation as it is; something which Taylor promotes for example in the case of French-speaking Quebec. The French language is part of the cultural heritage of (part of) the Quebec community, *therefore* we should ensure the continued existence of its identity as French-speaking. Even, says Taylor, if it means compelling people to send their children to French-speaking schools to safeguard the survival of the French-speaking community.²³ But identity is not some unchanging object we can project on future generations. Identity must no longer be interpreted as a internal, tradition-laden entity that ought to be protected from influences coming from outside. If identity can be thought of as not something we directly inherit from the world our grandmothers and grandfathers inhabited, but as something we forge in dialogue with those that surround us in the here and now, it might present us with an escape out of some of the difficulties posed by a world in which mobility and migration are increasingly determining factors. In this respect, I would like to point out one more similarity between Mbembe and de Beauvoir. They both make use of literary language more than strictly philosophical argument. De Beauvoir – in her novels – and Mbembe – in his essays – show us people struggling with everyday life in a most expressive manner that appeals to our understanding and imagination. The actual state of affairs is presented in such a way that their texts sometimes invite a strong sense of recognition or identification. On the other hand, they are also able to formulate highly unfamiliar conditions in a manner that renders the situation intelligible even to the outsider. This achieve-

²³ Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in: *Multiculturalism*, 1994, p. 53.

ment is partly due to their willingness to seek out the boundaries of the philosophical discipline. Through their literary approach, Mbembe and de Beauvoir induce a spark of understanding that can travel across borders – cultural or otherwise. With this, they both make a valuable contribution to the ideals of intercultural philosophy.

DERRIDA ON RELIGION:

Glimpses of interculturality

by Wim van Binsbergen

ABSTRACT. The author investigates Derrida's long essay 'Foi et savoir' (1996) in a bid to derive, from that study of religion, pointers towards a philosophy of interculturality. He identifies Derrida's strategies of investigation, and finds them to consist in: dialogue with the philosophical canon; with Derrida's own work; a further development of the latter's own idiosyncratic but effective vocabulary; reliance on Indo-European etymologies; on the juggling of place names charged with biblical and Ancient Greek significance; and finally a conversational discursive progress. The author then criticizes Derrida for Indo-European entrenchment and linguistic determinism. It is argued that Derrida's central thesis of the culturally specific nature of the concept of 'religion' (i.e. as an invention of the West, even specifically of Christianity) is not supported from an Arabic and Hebrew linguistic perspective, nor from a cross-cultural distribution analysis of the notion of tolerance, not by the historical common roots of Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Here, growth points for an approach to interculturality may be discerned, although outside of Derrida's argument. On the other hand, the bifocality Derrida attributes to religion is much applauded. Derrida's ambivalence in his approach to Judaism is highlighted (cf. Sartre and Levinas). What Derrida describes as religion, has – contrary to the concept of religion in the hands of anthropology or 'comparative religion' as fields of study – too limited a distribution through space and time, and in fact (with a display of ethnocentrism commonly encountered in Derrida's work) takes the North Atlantic tradition for granted. This becomes especially clear when – using a paired concept from cultural anthropology – the North Atlantic tradition of religion, as 'emic', is dissociated from an analytical, 'etic' concept of religion. The author concludes with a sympathetic reading of Derrida's khōra / 'space' concept as having real promise for thinking interculturality.

KEY WORDS: ambivalence, anthropology, Afro-Asiatic, Arabic, bifocality, Christianity, comparative religion', conversational discursive progress, Derrida, emic, ethnocentrism, etic, etymologies, Foi et savoir, Hebrew, Indo-European, interculturality, Islam, Judaism, khōra, linguistic determinism, Niger-Congo, North Atlantic tradition, Nostratic, philosophical canon, place names, religion, space, tolerance

Introduction

This essay does not aim at a comprehensive discussion of Derrida's writings on religion and related topics.¹ Rather, it is a reflection on only one of his pieces on religion, albeit perhaps the most central one: 'Foi et savoir: Les deux sources de la "religion" aux limites de la simple raison',² which was based on his contribution to the 1996 Capri (Italy) discussions on religion in which also Gadamer and Vattimo participated. Having in the past manifested myself as the worst possible reader and interpreter of Derrida,³ my present piece is not intended to atone for former sins – however much such a gesture would fit into the general thrust of Derrida's argument, in which sacrifice, wholeness and righteousness become increasingly central as one reads on. No doubt I will still make a fool of myself even with the present, sympathetic reading of Derrida. My intention is not so much to do justice to him or to myself, but to scan his text for *the articulation of philosophical problems of interculturality, and the suggestion of possible routes towards possible answers, specifically from the context of religion* (or, perhaps more generally, 'spirituality').

¹ An earlier version was presented at the meeting of the Research Group on Spirituality, Dutch/Flemish Association for Intercultural Philosophy, 28 April 2000, Erasmus University Rotterdam; I am indebted to the participants, especially Henk Oosterling, for their stimulating comments; and to Sanya Osha, for suggesting its publication here.

² Derrida, J., 1996, 'Foi et savoir: Les deux sources de la "religion" aux limites de la simple raison, in: Derrida, J., & Vattimo, G., eds., *La religion*, Paris/Rome: Seuil/Laterza, pp. 9-86; English translation *Religion*, Stanford University Press, 1998. Derrida's piece, under the title 'Faith and knowledge: The two sources of "Religion" at the limits of reason alone', was also included, as Derrida's opening chapter, in Gil Anidjar, ed., *Jacques Derrida: Acts of religion*, Routledge/ London, 2002, pp. 40-101.

³ van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1999, '*Culturen bestaan niet*': *Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden*, inaugural lecture, chair of intercultural philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam: Rotterdamse Filosofische Studies; revised English version: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1999 (actual date of publication 2002), 'Cultures do not exist': Exploding self-evidences in the investigation of interculturality', *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, special issue on language and culture, 13: 37-114; also as ch. 15 in: van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2003, *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological towards a philosophy of interculturality*, Berlin/ Muenster: LIT, pp. 459-522.

Strategies of investigation

Derrida's text makes exciting reading. It has without the slightest doubt the pulse beat of our time and age, mediates today's experience in the inimitable, slightly pedantic, yet devastatingly relevant way which marks the author as a great philosopher of our time. If interculturality is indeed one of the few great problems of our time, it cannot fail to seep through in this text – and it does to a very great extent, even if the term interculturality is not used even once.

Derrida proceeds more or less in the manner familiar from his numerous other writings, and from kindred authors both in France and abroad. Much emphasis is laid, initially, on the anecdotal details that define the situation from which he is speaking and writing – the very idea of universals has to be nipped in the bud. He has a great deal of very important things to say about the modern world, the structure of the experience it generates, and the reflection of this state of affairs in current religious ideas and practices. Without pretending to have at his disposal a privileged external position from which to look at the world and produce systematic, empirical statements about it by some explicit and systematic social-science methodology, his observations on the contemporary world and on other empirical matters are presented in an off-hand manner, as if they are not worth the trouble of trying to falsify them. This attitude, after initial bewilderment, grows upon the reader and is rather endearing; moreover, much of what he says is, at the descriptive level, admittedly too familiar to invite closer empirical scrutiny; *much*, but – as we shall see – not *all*. The real challenge of his argument is not the facts of the contemporary world, but how to think about the apparent resurgence of religion in this context. His method is not empirical research but a combination of time-honoured philosophical *topoi*:

- (1) the idiosyncratic but profound and revealing dialogue with very few yet highly relevant philosophical texts by his philosophical predecessors, – texts with which he clearly has struggled for decades and to which he is now returning with a new set of questions
- (2) brief reference to and excursions into his own work where some of the terrain covered in his present argument has been treated at greater

length

- (3) the gradual unfolding of a highly personal vocabulary which is not specifically geared to the philosophical study of religion but which, having increasingly proven effective to convey and to problematise crucial aspects of the contemporary experience, turns out to be extremely powerful to highlight the religious problematic
- (4) the reliance on etymologies of key words from the Indo-European vocabulary to denote aspects of religion
- (5) the reliance on key words and names which, although once part of a general North Atlantic intellectual education through school and church, can no longer be expected to ring an automatic bell with the contemporary reader – or do I underestimate the readership if I suppose that not everyone knows that *Moria* was, by tradition, the mountain on which Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son Isaac, as well as the mountain on which the first Israelite temple was erected; that *Patmos* was the island where the Christian writer John claims to have started his *Book of Revelations*; that *Delos*, as the reputed birth-place of Apollo, was the most sacred island of ancient Greece, having a specific relationship also with the divine beings Leto, Artemis, Dionysus, and Ariadne; or that the Greek (specifically Platonic) χώρα (*khōra*), ‘space, refuge’, contrasts with τόπος (*topos*) but has nothing to do with the more familiar and somewhat similar sounding χορός, (*choros*) ‘dance, chorus or choir’.

Any technique is as good as the person using it, and in Derrida’s capable hands this rather unpromising combination of strategies produces a brilliant argument.

The main philosophical props which Derrida sets up to deliver his argument are eminently familiar: Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*; Plato, *Timaeus*; Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*; Hegel, *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*; Heidegger, *Holzwege* (specifically ‘Der Spruch des Anaximander’), and *Sein und Zeit*; Levinas’s entire oeuvre; Nietzsche, *passim*; and more implicitly Guattari & Deleuze, Bataille, and Sartre.

In addition to his own repeated assertions in the field of classical Greek and Latin philology, the principal source for Derrida’s Indo-European ety-

mologies is: the authoritative (but somewhat dated) work of the distinguished linguist Benveniste – an author whom Derrida occasionally chides for his apodictic and positivist attitude to scholarly truth, but without setting up the proper discursive context in which the assertions, and shortcomings, of Benveniste can be properly assessed.⁴ One may well appreciate Gadamer's misgivings (as vented in another chapter in the same book *La Religion*) about Derrida's reliance on etymologies; I shall come back to this.

The format of Derrida's lengthy piece is almost that of the protocol of a conversation, later augmented (by more than 200%!) in a postscript which step by step reiterates the argument of the main piece (the first 30-odd pages), thus greatly adding to the accessibility and transparency of his train of thought. The conversational structure and tone introduce, in a most felicitous manner which I greatly applaud, an element of what I take to be genuine and somewhat embarrassed humility vis-à-vis the truly formidable topic which the writer has set himself. He admits that he is not sure where to begin, he starts in the middle and lets the argument gradually unfold itself, and at the end one realises one has witnessed one of today's greatest minds at work, at its best. Gradually the mist of post-structuralist phraseology is dispelled (of course, Derrida has, against the background of his massive oeuvre, the right not to pause too long on the familiar aspects of his past itinerary); with ever greater clarity we see materialise problems of life, thought, truth, righteousness, sacrifice, violence, in short today's experience as filtered through a history of two millennia of Christianity.⁵ It almost comes as an afterthought that the real challenge which inspired Derrida's piece, and the

⁴ Benveniste, E., 1975, *Le vocabulaire des institutions Indo-européennes*, i. *Economie, parenté, société*, ii. *Pouvoir, droit, religion*, Paris: Minuit. Remarkably, a struggling with the same etymologies occupies the opening pages of Mudimbe, V.Y., 1997, *Tales of faith: Religion as political performance in Central Africa: Jordan Lectures 1993*, London & Atlantic Highlands: Athlone Press. With his Louvain Ph.D. on the lexical and semantic ramifications of the word *air*, Mudimbe is a historical linguist and classicist in his own right; Cf. Mudimbe, V.Y., 1979, *Air: Etude sémantique*, Wien-Föhrenau: Institut für Völkerkunder der Universität Wien/E. Stiglmayr, Acta Ethnologica et Linguistica.

⁵ That Christianity seems to be taken for granted as Derrida's point of departure will soon become understandable from his particular reading of the history of ideas, specifically of the idea of 'religion', yet remains puzzling and disquieting, not least because of Derrida's own, Jewish background.

Capri conference, in the first place, was not any re-peopling of Christian churches or any occasional backsliding of North Atlantic philosophers and social scientists into a religious stance,⁶ but the resilience, militant and intolerant position-taking, and the northern penetration, of *Islam*. Derrida's piece is, among other things, under conditions of globalisation, a brief exploration of the context and structure of Islam in the modern world. It is particularly a statement on the nature of religion as seen against the background of two millennia of (post-) Graeco-Roman culture. It has fundamental things to say about the nature of today's globalisation process and the place of religion therein. And it attempts to explain, on this basis, why it should be today that we witness the resilience of religion – although not so much of Graeco-Roman-Christian religion, but of Islam.

I will not attempt to situate this piece against the background of Derrida's general oeuvre. Let me merely indicate a few aspects of this rich text which are somewhat in my field of competence: interculturality and the empirical study of religion.

Religion as a parochial category – lexical determinism

All these gems of erudition I indicated under (5) above are apparently intended to confirm a claim which, although plausible, constitutes one of the important questions of interculturality implicitly raised by Derrida: the idea that 'religion' is very far from a universal category but, as a concept, is exclusively tied to the Graeco-Roman-Christian intellectual and institutional tradition from Imperial Roman times onward; we can only think of it, or

⁶ A phenomenon of which I am guilty myself, among – I now begin to suspect, after reading *La religion* – quite a few others, including for instance Benetta Jules-Rosette (who during fieldwork in the Zambian capital on the Vapostori Christian churches became an active member), and Matthew Schoffeleers, who although a Roman Catholic priest was for many years the main force keeping alive the Mbona territorial cult in Southern Malawi. Cf. van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1991, 'Becoming a sangoma: Religious anthropological field-work in Francistown, Botswana', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 21, 4: 309-344; reprinted as chapter 5 of my *Intercultural encounters*, op. cit.; also available at: http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/become.htm .

Derrida could only think of it along with his fellow-philosophers in splendid seclusion on the isle of Capri, because after all there is the shared background of Christian culture – even for Derrida with his background in North African Jewry. Religion is declared not even to constitute a general Indo-European idea, for as Derrida is happy to point out on the basis of Benveniste (whom, however, Derrida chides with as much gusto when his etymologies do not suit him), the Indo-European languages did not originally have a common term to denote ‘religion’. Of course, one level of abstraction lower, they did have a common vocabulary to denote the various aspects of religion, such as ‘priesthood’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘auspices’, ‘deity’. Here and elsewhere Derrida⁷ comes dangerously close to the kind of linguistic determinism that has been associated, since the first third of the twentieth century, with the Whorf-Sapir thesis.

He is right (p. 11) to question Heidegger’s assumption of the prior understanding of the words we use in a philosophical argument, but such questioning should be recognised to apply to all language use:

- in individual introspection,
- in intersubjective communication between native speakers of the same language, and
- in intercultural translation and, in general, communication, between different languages.

A false impression of the transparency of personal introspection and of intracultural communication is given if intercultural situations are singled out as particularly problematic.

This is not to say that intercultural communication, in the field of religion or otherwise, is unproblematic; all I am saying is that it is about as prob-

⁷ Cf. Derrida:

‘La langue et la nation forment en ce temps le corps historique de toute passion religieuse.’ (p. 12).

Cf. Whorf, B. L., 1956, *Language, thought, and reality*, New York/ London: M.I.T. Press; Black, M., 1959, ‘Linguistic relativity: the views of Benjamin Lee Whorf’, *Philosophical Review*, LXVIII, pp. 228-38.

lematic as intra-language and intra-cultural communication. If intercultural translation would be proven to be inherently so defective as to be practically impossible, that would mean the end of intercultural communication, but not of intercultural philosophy: the very field within which such a depressing impossibility could be argued in the first place; so we can afford to be frank. The real point is that, both between native speakers of the same language and in intercultural situations, there can be no exclusively linguistic confirmation of the possibility or impossibility of communication, understanding and translation – indications to that effect (relative indications, and never absolute proofs) can only be derived from extra-linguistic social actions giving evidence of trust, rejection, exchange, violence, or other such demonstrable social interactions that follow as a result of language communication. And all evidence points to the social fact of impredictably, yet by and large moderately, effective intercultural communication – the boundaries between cultures and between languages are demonstrably porous. By implication, the term ‘religion’, while having a solid Latin and European ancestry (as Derrida insists), might yet contain possibilities of being generalised beyond the Indo-European language domain and beyond the European historical experience. From the perspective of interculturality this is a crucial point: for all statements on other cultures (including entire scientific disciplines such as anthropology, comparative religion, archaeology) would be revealed to be entirely spurious – which from a point of view of intercultural philosophy they might very well be – if the semantic applicability of words could be demonstrated to be limited to the one culture in which they originated, and if the boundedness of that one culture could be demonstrated to be absolute and non-porous.⁸ I shall return to this point below.

This does reveal the one-sidedness of Derrida’s approach, but does not render it inherently invalid. He rightly stresses the parochialism of the universalist claim of a particular type of spirituality as ‘religion’; particularly when this claim is broadcast by Christian missions and colonial states, and when it is reinforced, as Derrida very rightly points out, by the alliance between Christianity, capitalism, and the scientific-technological complex of today. His insight in the potentially deceptive nature of pacifist and ecumenical projects (p. 57) is profound. And yet he fails to convince. In an

⁸ It is the latter thesis I contest in my *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*

attempt to bring out the parochial, Christian historical indebtedness implied in our thinking about religion, with his enormous display of etymological claims (rival, including non-Indo-European etymologies could be adduced in at least some cases cited by Derrida and Benveniste), he begs the question as to the possibility of radical transcendence from cultural constraints in intercultural communication. Genealogies, etymologies, histories – the very constitutive elements of a religious continental tradition with which Derrida is familiar and which he stresses greatly can only bring out historical, unalterable generic relationships since that is the idiom in which they happen to be expressed; they cannot reveal formal, structural similarities which may have historical roots now lost to consciousness, let alone *Wahlverwandschaften* (Goethe: ‘kinship by deliberate choice’) between people initially pursuing historically totally unrelated cultures, religions and languages. Yet such *Wahlverwandschaften* are among the stuff that interculturality is made of. A tree-like divergence from a common source is all what these historical, etymological and genetic models can conjure up, not convergence, crossing-over, mutation, optionality, transformation – and the latter is very much the standard experience of the contemporary world. The proper approach is not in terms of either-or, but the admittance of the tension which exist between the parochial and the universalisable approach to concepts of religion, and I suspect that, before a different – less ‘Roman’, less ‘Catholic’, less ‘Mediterranean’ – audience, Derrida would have admitted as much.

Islam as religion

This is all the more important given Derrida’s own partially non-Indo-European background: born in 1930 from Jewish parents in a Arabic and Berber speaking Algeria colonised by the French. One would expect him to dwell, not only on the Indo-European language family to which French, Latin and his cherished Greek belong, but also to pay some attention to the Afro-Asiatic language family to which Hebrew, Arabic and Berber are reckoned to belong – along with many other languages of northern and eastern Africa and of West Asia; and one wonders what would be the implication, for his etymological musings, of current long-range approaches in linguis-

tics, in which Indo-European, Afro-Asiatic, and most other languages of central and northern Eurasia, are argued to belong to one linguistic superfamily, termed ‘Nostratic’ – allowing even for a super-Nostratic extension to which also the other language families of Africa are reckoned (i.e. Niger-Congo – including Bantu – and Nilo-Saharan) with the exception of Khoisan.⁹

But Derrida’s position is particularly remarkable given the central position Islam (even long before the terrorist attacks on the American eastern seaboard on “9/11” 2001) has occupied in the debate on multiculturalism in the contemporary North Atlantic, including in Derrida’s text. As the prominent Dutch social scientist Bram de Swaan has argued, the term ‘multicultural’ is increasingly employed as a euphemism for ‘Islamic’, not only in the Netherlands but throughout Western Europe, with its massive influx of Mediterranean immigrants in the course of the last few decades.¹⁰ In a brilliant conversational way, Islam gradually emerges from Derrida’s argument both as the ‘worst’ (violent, sexist, intolerant, anti-literary, anti-human rights) embodiment of the paradox of resilient religion after the death of God, and as an understandable case (Islam being seen as a deliberate contrast with an exploitative and humiliating Christianity; p. 60 n. 24) given the hegemonic North Atlantic subordination to which the Southern shore of the Mediterranean and other predominantly Islamic regions of Asia and Africa have been subjected since the 18th century CE. Derrida’s argument is far too subtle and too well-informed to fall victim to the common stereotypes re-

⁹ Cf. Bomhard, Allan R., 1984, *Toward Proto-Nostratic. A New Approach to the Comparison of Proto Indo-European and Proto-Afroasiatic*, Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series IV – Current Issues in Linguistic Theory 27, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia; Bomhard, A.R., & Kerns, J.C., 1994, *The Nostratic Macrofamily: A study in distant linguistic relationship*, Berlin / New York: Mouton de Gruyter; Dolgopolsky, A., 1998, *The Nostratic macrofamily and linguistic palaeontology*, Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research. However, in the Russian branch of Nostratic studies, the status of Afro-Asiatic as a branch of Nostratic is contested. The claim concerning the African languages is in: Kaiser, M. & Shevoroshkin, V., 1988, ‘Nostratic’, *Annual Review of Archaeology*, 17, 309-329. The isolation of Khoisan suggested in this nutshell treatment is only apparent but cannot be elaborated here.

¹⁰ Gerda Sengers, 2002, *Women and demons*, Leiden: Brill; originally Ph.D. thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2000.

garding fundamentalism, of equating – lock, stock and barrel – Islam with today’s Islamism.

But there is more. In the Semitic vocabulary of Islam, and in that of Judaism for that matter, Derrida could have found much of the material not only to illustrate his thesis as to the culturally parochial nature of the concept of religion, but also for the denial of that thesis. It is simply not true, as a statement in intellectual and social history, to affirm, with Derrida, that toleration is a predominantly or uniquely Christian concept. Jews, Parsis, Christians, even Irani and Iraqi worshipers of the peacock demon which happened to be associated with a sacred book, were (as compared to other non-Muslims) privileged in that they were accommodated as *dhimmi* under Islam, a status which however wrought with humiliating implications at least meant that they were recognised and tolerated to be different – at a time when, by way of comparison, Christian Western and Southern European planned and executed the crusades in order not to accommodate, but to exterminate Islam. Or a more recent and conclusive example: in the early twentieth century the enlightened Christian theologian Rev. Dr. Hastings compiled his massive and famous, 12-volume *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*,¹¹ to cover every aspect of mankind’s religion and philosophy as known to scholarship at the time. The article on toleration covers dozens of pages in volume XII, some devoted to Christianity, admittedly, but others to Buddhism (an older and more numerous expression than Christianity during by far the greater part of the last two and a half millennia – and incidentally one which had¹² a considerable influence on early Christianity), Islam, etc. This is one of the several places in Derrida’s argument where his well-taken point of the parochialism of the concept of religion misfires and produces notions which are undesirable and wrong from a viewpoint of intercultural-

¹¹ Hastings, J., 1908-1921, ed., *Encyclopaedia of religions and ethics*, xiii vols, Edinburgh/ New York: Clark/ Scribner.

¹² As is e.g. indicated by the close parallels between the Jâtaka accounts of the Buddha’s life, and the accounts of Jesus’ life in the New Testament and the apocryphal books. Cowell, E.B., ed., 1895, *The Jâtaka: Or stories of the Buddha’s former births: Translated from the Pali* by various hands, vol. 1 translated by R. Chalmers, Cambridge: University Press; Budge, E.A. Wallis, 1923, *Beralâm and Yêwâsêf: Being the Ethiopic version of a Christianized recension of the Buddhist legend of the Buddha and the Boddhisattva, the Ethiopic text edited for the first time with an English translation and introduction*, 2 vols.

ity.

By the same token, the concept of religion, however much tied to a particular Latin etymology (*religere?* or *religare?*) in the case of West Indo-European languages and North Atlantic intellectual history, has an almost perfect counterpart in the Arabic concept of الدين (*ad-dīn*, ‘religion’). No one would expect the semantic fields to coincide completely; but then again, the semantic fields of the term ‘religion’ as used in the various European languages where this term appears, or even by different native speakers of the same European language, also greatly differ and only partially overlap. It is largely the actual social situation of interaction which determines translatability and its demonstrability.

Towards a philosophical theory of religion

Admittedly, the central thesis of Derrida’s piece is not explicitly about interculturality but about the contradiction between what he – with layers of implied reference (cf. Bergson) – calls the ‘Two Sources’ of religion. Alternately, and fascinatingly, Derrida attaches different labels to these two sources: now it is

- (a) the contradiction between sacrificial destruction and the intact integrity, the wholeness or holiness, of the sacred; or
- (b) the contradiction between the constitutive, transparent force of rationality which informs science, technology, theology, on the one hand, and on the other the *belief* in the soundness and efficacy of such rationality, which cannot be based on rational grounds itself and therefore involves an act of irrationality, absurdity (St. Augustine) and hope formally equivalent to religious attitudes;¹³ or

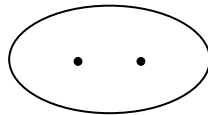
¹³ Cf. the following passage:

‘Religion et raison se développent ensemble, à partir de cette ressource commune: le gage testimonial de tout performatif, qui engage à répondre aussi bien devant l’autre que de la performativité performante de la technoscience. La même source unique se divise machinalement, automatiquement, et s’oppose réactive-

- (c) the contradiction between a morality which (contrary to the Hellenic moral ideal) may originally be based on Christian theology, but which (as Kant, God's principal through unintentional and privately even pious murderer, has argued) takes optimum realisation and effect once we are prepared to consider the possibility that God does not exist or is not interested in our existence; or even, towards the end of the argument,
- (d) the contradiction between the bloated erected penis (evoked with sufficient irony, I would think, to disculpate Derrida from the possible accusation of phallocracy) and the violated female body.

Ultimately, there is the suggestion that at the most formal level the constitutive element of religion is

- (e) that it is literally elliptic i.e. is a construct whose main feature is that it has not one but two foci:



According to Derrida's latter intuition thus the roots of religion are to be sought in a formal, early characteristic of human thought, in a twosome that is partially but incompletely dissociated, perhaps somewhere halfway between individual self-assertion along Cartesian lines (the twosome destroyed into object and subject) and the complete participatory merging that we tend to associate with pre-human levels of consciousness. I find this suggestion very inspiring.

But Derrida does not stop there, in the remotest human past – he also, and particularly, probes into the present-day conditions of religion. He is aware of how under postmodern conditions of globalisation and ICT, relig-

ment à elle-même: d'où les deux sources en une. Cette réactivité est un processus d'indemnisation sacrificielle, elle tente de restaurer l'indemne (heilig) qu'elle menace elle-même' (p. 41).

ion unavoidably presents itself as a panoptical ecstasy, with layers upon layers of transmission and performativity. These sections communicate a profound insight in religion as a phenomenon, and should be compulsory reading to any researcher in this field. In the light of these penetrating analyses, Derrida manages to interpret contemporary ‘fundamentalism’ as a particular, naive, attempted solution to the kind of contradictions outlined above. It is an illusory solution which could only be articulated under conditions of (post-) modernity. Here he does not necessarily mean fundamentalisms of the Islamic kind: there is also Christian Pentecostal or Evangelic fundamentalism, and – despite Derrida’s avowed sympathy for the following present-day manifestations – there are also ecological and dietary forms of fundamentalism to be identified in the contemporary North Atlantic. That the analysis may be extended to Islam, although this is way outside the Indo-European linguistic tradition, and largely (despite Aristotle’s influence on Islamic philosophy, which was subsequently sacrificed to theology) outside the Graeco-Roman-Christian intellectual history, demonstrates that in addition to the parochial nature of the concept of religion, also a more universal, transcultural or intercultural use for the concept, and domain of analysis and debate, may be rightfully claimed – and is in fact claimed, even by Derrida.

Judaism

Derrida realises that it is not only contemporary Islamism which challenges the anti-religious philosophical interpretation of god’s death in the North Atlantic, but also Judaism. He is strangely divided, sarcastic and tender at the same time, when it comes to juxtaposing his own thought on religion and modern times to that of Levinas. With Derrida’s insistence that Western philosophy as well as the concept of religion can really only be thought within a Christian context, this leaves Jews as the odd ones out (p. 20, citing Nietzsche). Thus we have the puzzling situation of three Abrahamic religions, explicitly paraded as such by Derrida, out of which one only, Christianity, by producing the term ‘religion’, historically defines the scene of religious enquiry and, via its collusion with capitalism and techno-science,

hegemonically forces the rest of the world into this conceptual mold;¹⁴ whereas the other two, Judaism and Islam, while sharing a common origin (not only because of pre-Islamic Arabian religion, but particularly, in addition to local Arabian religion, since Judaism and Christianity were the Prophet Muḥammad's main earthly sources of inspiration) are reduced to an ethnic, cultural and religious otherness which poses fundamental questions of interculturality.

'Le judaïsme et l'islam seraient peut-être alors les deux derniers monothéismes à s'insurger encore contre tout ce qui, dans la christianisation de notre monde, signifie la mort de Dieu, la mort en Dieu...' (p. 20f).

Not to say that they are the only two, since historically and comparatively monotheism is a rare exception, instead of a common phenomenon. Derrida, himself Jewish, thus gives a new meaning to 'the Jewish question' (Sartre).¹⁵ The phrase is problematic enough in itself; sixty years after Auschwitz, one does not want to be reminded of any such question, not as a Jew and not as a Gentile. But there is another aporia hidden underneath: how to negotiate a common origin in the past and a complementary fate in the contemporary world, if not by virtue of an encompassing concept (such as 'religion') which cannot be completely relegated to the history and nature of Christianity and its antecedents on the *northern* shores of the Mediterranean? The same kind of questions could be asked with regard to the status and translatability of non-Indo-European, non-Latin concepts, not only of the Arabic الدين (*ad-dīn*, 'religion') but also, as explicitly paraded by Derrida, of the Hebrew קדש (*qdš*, 'sacred').

¹⁴ For a brilliant recent study of all three in their historical interconnection, cf. Armstrong, K., 1995, *A history of God: From Abraham to the present, The 4000 year quest for God*, London: Heinemann, where she is particularly subtle in her discussion of Islam. In the study of Abrahamic religion, one of the most seminal texts has been: Robertson Smith, W., 1927, *Lectures on the religion of the Semites, I., The fundamental institutions*, 3rd ed. with additions by Cooke, London: Black; first published: Cambridge 1894 (no other volumes published); this implicitly also influenced Derrida in his emphasis on sacrifice, as a century ago it was a major inspiration for Durkheim.

¹⁵ Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1946, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, Paris: Gallimard.

Particularising emic 'Christianity', or generalising etic 'religion'

There is, still in the context of interculturality, an even more important point to be appreciated here. By insisting that religion has only been thought along Graeco-Roman-Christian lines and in the attending Indo-European language(s), Derrida suggests that there would not be religion outside that initial sphere, unless as a result of the hegemonic assault of the Christian/capitalist/ techno-scientific complex upon the rest of the world, in the context of globalisation and proto-globalisation during the last few centuries. That is to some extent an illuminating thought. Yet we have seen that there are reasons to allow for a less parochial and somewhat more generalisable notion of religion, which may be arrived at by extrapolation not just from the Christian point of departure, but also from, e.g., the Islamic one. Such an attempt to find a common denominator for religious phenomena beyond the boundaries of any one culture, is an exercise in interculturality. It would have to export the lexical element 'religion' beyond its original linguistic niche of Romance languages. Moreover, in Derrida's hands religion is not only considered from the point of view of lexical definition. As his argument proceeds, he brings out the main characteristics of religion in the Graeco-Roman-Christian historical tradition: the constitutive contradictions which he develops so insightfully and which I have very imperfectly rendered above as (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e), essentially serve to articulate the contents of religion in the North Atlantic tradition. It is thus a highly culture-specific complex of traits which he claims to be describing under the term 'religion', and not the *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Durkheim)¹⁶ as if these constituted a universally underlying model of all religion whenever and wherever – as was Durkheim's claim.

Because philosophers are rarely occupied with particularising historical or ethnographic description, the methodological implications of the problem at hand may somewhat elude them. But that problem is eminently familiar to historians and anthropologists,¹⁷ who are always torn between two formats

¹⁶ Durkheim, E., 1912, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

¹⁷ On this concept, cf. van Binsbergen, *Intercultural encounters, o.c.*; Headland, T.N., Pike, K.L., & Harris, M., 1990, eds., *Emics and etics: The insider/ outsider debate*, Fron-

of social description: an *emic* or an *etic* one. The *emic* format, explicitising the very concepts which the people described are themselves using (although yet rearranged and rephrased in an alien academic idiom – very few ethnographies are written in the language of the people they describe), remains as close as possible to these people's conscious structuring of their life worlds, but in principle defeats all possibility of generalisation. The *etic* format imposes alien, theoretically informed analytical categories upon the people's own structuring of their life worlds, thus renders the latter very imperfectly, but with the great advantage that via the analytical categories intercultural comparison becomes possible. Of course one can try to have one's cake and eat it, by taking an *emic*, parochial category like *mana* or *taboo* – words derived from specific Polynesian languages and life worlds – and re-coin them into analytical categories; this was the great but clearly deceptive innovation of religious anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century. Now Derrida's method essentially amounts to the same deceptive device. It invests a great deal in an *emic* description of Christianity which becomes increasingly rich in contents (bringing in sacrifice, Messianism, the concept of the holy as intact and vulnerable, as polluted and threatened particularly by rationality which yet is invoked to protect the holy against the very threat it itself represents, the violence which this generates, the way that violence finds a bodily, especially a sexual expression, etc.).

However, the argument does not remain limited to Christianity exclusively. It immediately extends to include Islam, and soon also Judaism; it might as well extend to modern African cults, to witchcraft eradication movements, and to Christian Pentecostalism which, next to Islam, is becoming Africa's dominant religious expression. Implicitly, the appeal of Derrida's argument derives from the suggestion that what he asserts to be the case for Christianity, in fact applies also and particularly to contemporary Islamism, and even to 'all' 'religion'. By sleight of hand, the *emic* perspective has become an *etic* one. But this step is fundamentally unacceptable, not only for reasons of methodological rigour, but particularly because the *emic* characteristics attributed to Christianity, demonstrably, by reference to in-

tiers of Anthropology no. 7, Newbury Park/ London/ New Delhi: Sage. In the latter book especially the contribution by Quine: Quine, W.V., 1990, 'The phoneme's long shadow', p. 164f.

disputable empirical data to be derived from anthropological ethnography and from comparative religious research, are not necessarily found elsewhere, in other... *religions*.

Clearly one major question (a question of interculturality) underlying Derrida's whole argument is whether it is possible to distinguish between

- the concept of religion (as an analytical category capable of generalisation over more than one culture, region, historical period),
- ~~and~~ specific contents, in the form of empirically demonstrable traits, of any one religion identified with the aid of that analytical concept.

It is the dissociation between the idea of sacrifice (redefined as bloodless) on the one hand, and the actual ritual killing of mammals and birds on the other (bloody sacrifice), which separates Christianity and Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, from earlier Semitic religion and from latter-day popular and even formal Islam. Derrida's intriguing scenario of religion, righteousness, the death of God, and globalisation, however appealing as an original perspective upon Christianity, therefore does not even apply to all three Abrahamic religions, let alone to all the thousands of 'religions'¹⁸ known from empirical research – sacrifice, righteousness, truth, are differently constructed in many of them, and in many others do not even constitute identifiable traits at the level of the consciousness of the people involved. In other words, Derrida's scenario cannot justifiably be invoked to explain Islam under globalisation, and such light as it appears to cast on that

¹⁸ I am fully aware of a huge underlying problem here and on other points in my argument where I speak of 'one religion' or of a plurality of 'religions'. What is the unit of analysis in the study of religious phenomena? If – as I claim elsewhere – cultures do not exist in the form in which they have been represented through much of the twentieth century: as bounded, distinct, integrated more or less natural units, then in all likelihood the same argument would apply to 'religions'. So much I am prepared to admit. However, my rejection of the particular definition of culture as indicated does not make me deny the existence of any cultural systemic specificity, – my point is that in no one such systemic specificity is it possible to live a complete life, one always needs several such specificities. Whatever the case, the problem of the unit of analysis in the study of religion is too important to be treated to any satisfaction here. I have to pretend naivety on this point, in order to be able to make, concerning Derrida's argument, the more pertinent points as contained in the present paper.

phenomenon is a false halo, a shimmering reflection originating from (what is, as seen from the southern, *African* shore) the opposite side of the Mediterranean, i.e. the northern shore.

Place

Moria, Delos, Patmos, Capri...

Derrida's argument is permeated with spatial metaphors. He emphasises from the beginning that it is impossible to philosophise without taking a definite spatial position, also in the literal geographical sense. He revives implicitly the Ancient Near Eastern fundamental religious notion of the sun-god from whom there is no hiding, whose light penetrates *everywhere* (thus exploding the concept of 'place') in order to bring illumination, especially in the sense of knowledge of good and evil, justice to be meted out to evil-doers, and righteousness.

His argument further focuses on three spatial evocations of the religious: the island, the Promised Land, and the desert – later even *the desert in the desert*. The latter (not ecologically but in terms of the abstraction and livelessness of thought) sets the scene for a discussion of Islam, which Derrida, with his North African background even though he disclaims all personal relationship with Islam, cannot fail to appreciate as desert-originated and desert-bound. He calls these places *aporetic*: they represent varieties of being caught and hemmed in, of incapability or unwillingness to access or to escape. This sets the tune for a particular mode of handling space which has considerable implications for the thinking of inter-culturality. The three aporetic places, however exemplary for varieties of religious positions, are all of them by implication dry, bounded, and secluded *par excellence*; the island and the desert are per definition the opposite of water, and the Promised Land, however much it may be accessed by crossing a small river (Derrida knows his Bible!), is ultimately, after that *fording*, just that: *Land*. In such solidity and dryness the flow of mediation, boundary

crossing, ‘inter’, stagnates, solidifies, dies.¹⁹ The active dynamics and ambiguity of the notion of *aporia* is therefore lost in these three images that dynamic ambiguity consists in: the temporary or eternal, accidental or inevitable, incapability (hence α -, a -) of fording (*πορειν*, *porein*), but necessarily: *in the face of a promise or suspicion of fordability*. The three religious positions are defined as if taken once for all, they deny movement, approach, interaction (‘fording’). They amount to evocations of non-communication, as if religion in the modern world is inescapably bounded and bounding, and has no potential whatsoever of crossing, relativising, or destroying boundaries; cf. once again:

‘In our time, language and nation form the historical body of any religious passion.’²⁰

Yet what is popularly called fundamentalism is not the only typical religious experience of our globalising age – it is accompanied, among other things, by a proliferation and spatial explosion, all across the globe, of low-threshold cults binding and uniting rather than separating people from greatly different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Religion not only sepa-

¹⁹ It is also as if the ‘ban’ (Hebr. *חרם* *khrm*), the relentless, allegedly divinely-sanctioned (and utterly anti-intercultural) drive at total exclusion and total extermination of the Canaanite population, which the author of the Book of Joshua attributed (albeit more than half a millennium *after* the postulated and probably largely illusory event) to Joshua after the crossing into Canaan, is already implied in the desert-like metaphors of the Exodus story. Meanwhile the reference to the same ban on the Early Iron Age stele of Mesa of Moab (line 11 and 17) demonstrates that here we have a genuine historic institution, whatever the historicity of its projection onto Joshua and the Exodus story; cf. Noort, Ed., 1998, *Das Buch Josua: Forschungsgeschichte und Problemfelder*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; Albright, W.F., 1969, ‘Palestinian Inscriptions’, in Pritchard, J.B., ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 320-322. We cannot overestimate the devastatingly tragic influence of these (originally poetic, nostalgic, and illusory) images of relentless exclusion, violence, legitimation and conquest in the Book of Joshua, not only on the modern state of Israel, but especially on two millennia of Christian and European expansion in the world.

²⁰ As in:

‘La langue et la nation forment en ce temps le corps historique de toute passion religieuse’ (p. 12).

rates, it also has a unique potential for unifying against all odds – as Durkheim was to stress in his main contribution to the social science of religion. Entrenchment behind a newly erected boundary is not the only face of fundamentalism. Look who are hiding behind that boundary: people whose religious self-organisation allows them to create, among themselves, a new social identity, a new *communitas*, which they would never have had without that religious expression; whilst creating a boundary between the chosen and the outside world, the diasporic religious situation seeks to efface boundaries among the chosen whatever their pre-existing differences in terms of class, gender, region, itinerary, age, etc.

Exploring spatial imagery, it is remarkable that Derrida did not dwell on the obvious spatial imagery involved in a concept so closely related to ‘religion’: the *cult*, which – for one who, like he himself, believes in the revelatory power of etymologies – has everything to do with the tilling, not of the desert, the island or even the Promised Land, but of the fertile home which is a good mixture of dryness and wetness, and where therefore fordability (in other words, sociability, in part constructed through religious activity and belief) is an implicit given. Needless to say that for me, fordability is synonymous to interculturality; and in my capacity of anthropologist of religion, conducting, over the years, participatory anthropological research in four different African settings, I have always experienced that fordability, building it into the heart of my approach to African religion and becoming an African believer in the process.²¹

For Derrida, two roads, or wells – the imagery becomes unacceptably muddled, but the one important thing implied is: liquidity, flow, movement and transition as the opposite of unfordability – appear as so many *fata morganas* in the ‘desert of deserts’ (a nice Semitic phraseology which Derrida might have employed for extra effect): Messianism (as the hope of a radical transformation of time, truth, and righteousness), and *χώρα* as privileged, and above all, as *shared*, space beyond boundedness.

‘Khôra, l’ « épreuve de khôra²² » serait, du moins selon l’interprétation que j’ai cru pouvoir en tenter, le nom de lieu, *un* nom de lieu, et fort singulier, pour *cet espace-*

²¹ Cf. my *Intercultural encounters*, o.c.

²² Original reference to Derrida, J., 1993, *Sauf le nom*, Paris: Galilée, p. 95; *non vidi*.

ment qui, ne se laissant dominer par aucune instance théologique, ontologique ou anthropologique, sans âge, sans histoire et plus « ancien » que toutes les oppositions (par exemple sensible/ intelligible), ne s'annonce pas comme « au-delà de l'être »,²³ selon une voie négative' (p. 31).

As intercultural philosophers, we are suddenly quite at home here. For this is 'the inter-' we were looking for. This is also the 'placeless everywhere', the 'ubiquitous utopian never-neverland', to which Mall in his authoritative exposition of intercultural philosophy²⁴ clings, not in the least as an arguable and plausible, identifiable factuality,²⁵ but as a last resort, lest we give up all hope of the possibility of intercultural communication, translation and understanding. The parallel is not accidental: Mall has read Derrida and expects from the latter's philosophy of difference a way out of the aporias of interculturality, even though finding such a solution is not explicitly part of Derrida's project. And given Derrida's insistence on North Atlantic parochialism as unavoidable, more than a Derridean inspiration alone is needed to arrive where we want to be as intercultural philosophers.

²³ Is this perhaps an oblique reference to: Levinas, E., 1981, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence. Le livre de poche edition*. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974; *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, tr. A. Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981?

²⁴ Mall, R.A., 1995, *Philosophie im Vergleich der Kulturen: Interkulturelle Philosophie, eine neue Orientierung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

²⁵ Cf. van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 1999, 'Enige filosofische aspecten van culturele globalisering: Met bijzondere verwijzing naar Malls interculturele hermeneutiek', in: Baars, J., & Starmans, E., eds, *Het eigene en het andere: Filosofie en globalisering: Acta van de 21 Nederlands-Vlaamse Filosofiedag*, Delft: Eburon, pp. 37-52. Here I demonstrate that Mall's insistence on the placeless everywhere as the focus of intercultural philosophy is deliberately utopian in the strict sense of wishful thinking. *But so, of course, is my own approach to African religion*. English version, 'Some philosophical aspects of cultural globalisation: With special reference to Mall's intercultural hermeneutics', included (ch. 12) in my *Intercultural Encounters*; also at: http://www.shikanda.net/general/gen3/index_page/cursus_1999-2000/mall_english.htm .

Conclusion

Later on Derrida's spatial argument turns out to lead to 'the' place, the place of truth (Golgotha? Patmos? Delos? Mecca? or simply Capri, after all?), monopoly of which is the main claim and counterclaim in the rise and fall of religion. It is tele-techno-science which dispossesses and delocalises, which takes away space and threatens space. Is religion the answer to this process? Could it be? Is that what Islamism mediates despite its repulsive trappings of fanaticism, infringement of human rights, sexism, violence, undeclared war, war under false yet quasi-democratically negotiated pretences, etc.? Is an answer possible regardless of our theory of interculturality, or is it only through a theory of interculturality that we may understand more about the contemporary resilience of religion?

Quest laboratory

ETUDE CRITIQUE DE L'OEUVRE DE FREDERIC-BIENVENU MABASI BAKANA

par Louis Mpala Mbabula

RESUME: Sans être ensorcellé par la théorie de “jeux de langage” de Wittgenstein II (dont l’auteur loue le courage et l’humilité philosophiques) et par la postmodernité (dont l’auteur ne partage pas certaines thèses), l’auteur remet en question le réductionnisme scientiste du livre de Mabasi, intitulé Science et philosophie en Afrique. Voilà pourquoi, comme “l’idiot du village” (cf. Canquihem) est au milieu du village où il attend une réponse à son “idiotie” qui fait échec à la science, l’auteur propose une pluralité philosophique (dont la philosophie des sciences n’est qu’un jeu de langage parmi tant d’autres) pour une Afrique plurielle. Il y va de la vitalité scientifique.

MOTS CLE: Afrique, jeu de langage, Mabasi, philosophie des sciences, pluralisme, réductionnisme, science et philosophie en Afrique, scientisme, vitalité scientifique, Wittgenstein

Avant-Propos

Il est des questions auxquelles tout étudiant (ancien ou nouveau) en philosophie aura à répondre toute sa vie durant. Cet écrit essaie de répondre à quelques unes d’entre elles. Ainsi mon écrit est un débat autour de certains thèmes philosophiques qui se formulent, interrogativement, comme suit:

- les classifications (et leurs critères) des courants en philosophie africaine sont-elles valables?
- N’oublent-elles pas certains philosophes exhumés par les travaux de C. Anta Diop, T. Obenga, Bilolo, C. Sumner...?
- Quelle est, à nos jours, la pertinence de la critique de la conception occidentale des Sciences et de la philosophie visant une interrogation épistémologique de l’ethnologie?
- Dans quel âge sommes-nous? Celui de la Science ou de l’homme tout court? En d’autres termes, notre lieu théorique et pratique des discours

- est-il uniquement scientifique ou globalement humain?
- Quel rapport existe-il entre la philosophie et l'idéologie?
 - Qu'en est-il de la philosophie face à la Science? Le travail philosophique est-il toujours dépendant de l'expérience scientifique ou de l'expérience humaine dans sa globalité?
 - Quel est l'objet de la philosophie? En a-t-elle un? Si oui, lequel? Et si non, pourquoi? La philosophie est-elle une connaissance ou énonce seulement des thèses aux enjeux?
 - Que dire de l'œuvre philosophique? Tue-t-elle la subjectivité de son auteur? Qui doit décider de la validité de la philosophie et quelles en sont les contraintes?
 - Entre nous, doit-on parler d'UNE philosophie Africaine ou DES philosophies africaines?
 - Quel est le rôle de la philosophie? Doit-elle produire des connaissances sans impact sur la vie du philosophe et sur le monde ambiant? Ne doit-elle pas transformer le monde en transformant le philosophe ou vice versa?
 - A-t-on droit de qualifier d'idéologie toute philosophie qui ne part pas de l'expérience scientifique? etc.

Toutes ces questions sont abordées dans cet écrit qui se veut une critique du livre de Mabasi. En parcourant cet écrit, le lecteur connaîtra notre prise de position philosophique.

Cet écrit interpelle les philosophes qui critiquent verbalement ceux qui écrivent. Tout écrit exige une critique écrite. C'est ainsi que l'on apprendra à faire avancer nos recherches philosophiques, et les futurs chercheurs poursuivront le débat philosophique commencé à un moment donné.

Si cet écrit pourra aider l'un ou l'autre à régler ses comptes avec ses maîtres ou ses cours, alors, il aura atteint son but.

Je considère cet écrit comme le prolongement de mon livre intitulé *Philosophie pour tous: Cours d'introduction à la philosophie*.

Introduction

La présente étude critique porte sur l'écrit de Frédéric-Bienvenu

MABASIBAKANA. Ce dernier a publié aux Editions Bruylant – Academia de Louvain-La-Neuve, en 2001, un ouvrage (de 84 pages) intitulé *Science et Philosophie en Afrique. Enjeux et repères d'une philosophie à l'âge de la science*. Le professeur kinyongo Jeki l'a préfacé et il n'a pas manqué d'en faire des éloges. C'est son droit, car chacun lit un ouvrage à partir d'un lieu théorique et pratique donné. Ceci vaut aussi pour moi.

Mabasi, à travers son livre, essaie de répondre à des questions qu'il s'est posées dans l'introduction:

“Quelles sont dès lors, les tâches d'une philosophie africaine qui voudrait pleinement être fille de son temps et assumer les exigences de cet âge de la science? Comment philosopher en Afrique au Seuil du 21^e siècle, dans un contexte général où la science est devenue l'axe central de la culture et contrôle désormais l'économie des pays dits développés; un contexte où la recherche scientifique est l'élément intégré du développement et du progrès?”¹

Je me demande si un philosophe des Grands Lacs, des territoires occupés de la République Démocratique du Congo, de Sierra Leone, de Libéria, de Somalie pourrait se retrouver dans ce questionnement. Comme on peut le deviner, Mabasi est provocateur, et il l'est effectivement. Ne dit-il pas que

“la seule prétention [de ses questions] est de soulever des interrogations sur ses prises de position qui pourraient paraître à certaines audacieuses [réductionnistes pour moi Mpala], briser cette espèce de paix incompatible [à ce propos il a raison] avec l'esprit de la philosophie et relancer un débat dont l'absence devient dangereuse pour la vitalité de la philosophie africaine.”²

Ma critique est un débat, quitte à savoir si elle sera pour la vitalité de la philosophie africaine. Au lecteur et à l'homme averti de le dire. Ma réaction prouve que Mabasi a atteint son but, et non le moindre, à savoir susciter le débat. Oui, la philosophie, à mon humble avis, ne se réduit pas à des discussions, mais elle s'en nourrit.

L'auteur a répondu à ses propres questions en quatre chapitres:

1. la philosophie africaine: un état des lieux,

¹ F.-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *Science et philosophie en Afrique...*, Louvain-La-Neuve, 2001, p. 8.

² Ibidem, p. 8.

2. l'âge de la science,
3. à partir d'un nouveau paradigme du travail philosophique,
4. enjeux et repères d'une philosophie africaine à l'âge de la raison.

Les chapitres suivront ceux de l'Auteur, car c'est au niveau de chacun d'eux que j'aurais à prendre position – et j'espère que mes positions seront raisonnées – face à ses prises de position “audacieuses” que je qualifie de réductionnistes et d'hors-jeu.

J'ai connu l'Auteur quand il était Assistant aux Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa. Etudiant, je reconnaissais son intelligence. Intelligent, il l'est. Toutefois, ses prises de position, selon moi, risquent de le transformer en un “dogmaticien philosophe”, en un “fondamentaliste” ou mieux en “homme d'un livre”, or la vie est pluridimensionnelle; en d'autres mots, la vie est comparable à une boule à plusieurs faces. Ceci vaut aussi pour la philosophie. Le défaut serait de croire et de faire croire aux autres que les quelques faces vues manifesteraient toute la boule de la philosophie. Voilà, en dernière analyse, le *punctum dolens* de la brochure de Mabasi. C'est mon point de vue.

Dans cet écrit, j'opte pour le *je*³ et non pour le *nous* pour la simple raison que j'aimerais endosser seul la responsabilité de mes affirmations.

Comme tout discours se tient à partir d'un lieu théorique et pratique donné – et il est donc limité – , j'accepte les critiques écrites et non verbales, car après Socrate, je dis:

“Je vais donc vous exposer ce que j'en pense, et, si quelqu'un de vous trouve que je me fais des concessions erronées, qu'il me reprenne et me réfute”⁴

par écrit, dois-je insister.

³ Je sais que pour Blaise Pascal

“*le moi est haïssable* (...). en un mot, le *moi* a deux qualités: il est injuste en soi, en ce qu'il se fait centre du tout; il est incommode aux autres, en ce qu'il les veut asservir: car chaque *moi* est l'ennemi et voudrait être le tyran de tous les autres” (B. Pascal, *Pensées*, n° 455, Paris, 1972).

⁴ Platon, *Gorgias*, 505d-506c.

A Propos de "la philosophie africaine: un état des lieux"

L'auteur donne les classifications proposées par A-J. Smet et Nkombe Oleko, Elungu Pene Elungu, Ngoma Binda et Dimandja Eluy'a Kondo⁵.

A-J. Smet – Nkombe Oleko subdivisent la philosophie africaine en quatre courants, à savoir le Courant idéologique, le courant de reconnaissance d'une philosophie africaine traditionnelle, le courant critique et le courant synthétique.

La classification de Elungu P.E. que l'Auteur qualifie de "classification raisonnée"⁶ comprend trois courants: le *courant des philosophes ethnologues* (ou ethnophilosophie), celui des *philosophes idéologues* et celui des *philosophes critiques*.

Ngoma-Binda a une classification tributaire de celle de Smet et Nkombe Oleka. Après quelques modifications apportées à la classification de ces deux derniers, Ngoma-Binda parlera de trois *axes* et non de quatre courants. Ainsi on aura l'axe *idéologico-politique*, l'axe *herméneutique* et l'axe *critico-prospectif*.

Quand bien même le philosophe Mabasi écrirait que la classification triaxiale de Ngoma-Binda a

“le double mérite d'être plus rigoureuse, dans la mesure où elle exploite les essais antérieurs, les éprouve et les dépasse, et de viser une présentation schématique de la majeure partie des oeuvres marquantes de la philosophie africaine contemporaine du moins celles de l'Afrique intertropicale (...)”⁷,

il reste vrai qu'il penche pour la classification de Dimandja.

Celui-ci propose des critères que doit remplir toute classification:

“La pertinence des opérations, la cohérence et la testabilité ou du moins l'acceptabilité de la théorie par ceux à qui elle est proposée.”⁸

Mabasi, à la suite de Dimandja (?), pense que “les classifications de la philo-

⁵ Cf. F.-B. Mabasi Bakabana, o.c., p. 11-16.

⁶ *Ib.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ib.*, p. 14.

⁸ Dimandja E.K., résumé par *Ib.*, p.15.

sophie africaine ne semblent pas se soumettre à ces exigences.”⁹

Ainsi l’on comprend pourquoi Dimandja, rapporte Mabasi, proposera une approche plus satisfaisante: *Approche par secteurs philosophiques et par régions*. Dimandja appelle secteur d’activités philosophiques” une série ou, mieux un groupe de recherches philosophiques qui, de façon organisée ou non, de manière délibérée ou non, porte un objet plus ou moins commun”¹⁰ et les régions sont “des espaces géographiques donnés sur lesquels vivent des formations sociales pouvant, par exemple, correspondre aux nationalités africaines officielles ou à l’un et l’autre des groupes ethniques ou multiethniques, fondés sur la langue commune ou sur d’autres faits de culture.”¹¹

De ces différentes classifications, j’ai mon point de vue. Il serait mieux de faire éclater le concept de “philosophie africaine”¹² afin que les philosophes africains que nous découvrons grâce aux travaux de C.A. Diop, T. Obenga, Bilolo Mubadinge, C. Summer, Mabika Nkata etc. puissent figurer dans des classifications, puisqu’on a la “manie” de classer. En outre, à mon humble avis, ces différentes classifications étant *faites à partir d’un lieu théorique et pratique donné d’où l’on parle*, me semblent partisans, pour ne pas dire arbitraires et subjectives. Je me demande si les philosophes classés dans tel ou tel courant ou axe pourrait s’y reconnaître totalement. N’y sont-ils pas enfermés ou emprisonnés? Et pourtant, puissé-je penser, c’est à chacun d’eux de se classer et chacun peut appartenir à plusieurs courants s’il veut se limiter en se classant. Même l’approche par secteur d’activités philosophiques et par régions, pour plus séduisante qu’elle paraît, n’est pas innocente surtout que le philosophe Dimandja – que j’admire pourtant – , parle à partir d’un lieu théorique selon lequel

⁹ F-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Dimandja E.K, cité par *Ib.*, p. 15-16.

¹¹ *Ib.*, p. 16.

¹² Mabasi comme Jean M. Van Parys semblent désigner par la “philosophie africaine” la seule philosophie négro-africaine. Et pourtant le programme d’histoire de la philosophie africaine proposé par P. Hountondji est d’un grand intérêt. Il ferait justice aux travaux de nos grands chercheurs pré-cités. On peut lire P. Hountondji, *Remarques sur la philosophie africaine contemporaine*, dans *Diogène 71* (1970) et J.-M. Van Parys, *Une approche simple de la philosophie africaine*, Kimwenza, 1993, p. 70-71.

“toute vision et division du travail philosophique est une théorie.”¹³

D’où les critères donnés propres à une “théorie.”¹⁴ Si l’on devrait suivre rigoureusement ces critères, je me demande dans quel courant serait mis par exemple le premier philosophe grec Thalès de Milet. Et Pythagore? Je sais qu’il n’est pas facile de réfuter Dimandja dans une étude critique comme celle-ci. Il faut pour cela un autre écrit. Qu’on sache au moins que je qualifie ses critères d’élitistes. Au nom de quoi tout le monde doit-il se plier à ses critères pour une meilleure classification? Ne doit-on pas laisser les gens philosopher, même si ça serait “autrement”¹⁵, en dehors de ces critères et classifications?

Le discours sur les classifications en philosophie africaine étant fait, le philosophe Mabasi a passé en revue quelques réflexions philosophiques sur la techno-science. *Il* reprend les six grandes orientations de l’ouvrage de Ntambwe Tshimbulu, à savoir

“l’anthropologie africaine des sciences, la reconnaissance des fondements sociaux et historiques des sciences; la critique des pratiques scientifiques des chercheurs africains; la réflexion sur les fondements universels des sciences et l’aménagement de la mentalité scientifique africaine et de l’ethno-science.”¹⁶

Bukasa, Mudimbe, Kamwiziku etc représentent le courant de l’anthropologie africaine des sciences qui

“est essentiellement axé sur une théorie sociale des sciences enrôlées dans la classification des fonctions jouées et à remplir par la techno-science en Afrique”¹⁷.

Ce courant critique les sciences telles qu’elles sont pratiquées en Afrique où

¹³ Dimandja E.K., résumé par F-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Dimandja fut mon professeur de philosophie des sciences et par deux fois, j’ai assisté à ses séminaires d’épistémologie (Thèmes: *Théorie de modèle* (1997–1998), *Analogie et ses usages en science* (1998 –1999). Il est pertinent, profond et créateur.

¹⁵ Cet “autrement” nous vient de Tshamalenga Ntumba et de Ngoma-Binda. Nous en parlerons au temps opportun.

¹⁶ Ntambwe Tshimbulu, cité par F.B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 16-17. *C’est souligner par Mabasi.*

¹⁷ *Ib.*, p. 17.

elles fonctionnent par, avec et pour l'occident. D'où, en dernière instance, l'enseignement des sciences n'arrive pas à les "inculturer" en Afrique. Pourquoi ne pas produire sa propre science? La science, à mon humble avis, naît suite à certains besoins à satisfaire. Par ailleurs, elle est une "propriété privée." D'où il sera difficile – et non impossible – de l'inculturer sans tenir compte de certains préalables comme la spécialité et la possession des instruments. Si l'on ne veut pas que les sciences qui nous viennent d'ailleurs ne fonctionnent pas par, avec et pour l'occident, que l'on crée les conditions de possibilité d'une science "émancipée." Le temps est révolu où l'on doit se contenter de constater, et de pleurnicher. Il faut passer à l'action. Donnez des moyens à nos spécialistes et nous verrons en quoi ils sont spécialistes.

Le courant de la reconnaissance des fondements sociaux et historiques des sciences (Tshbangu wa Mulumba, Tshibangu Tshishiku, Botolo, Makamu, Sow et Manzombi) finit par dire que la science occidentale serait portée par une culture des intérêts propres et des idéologies propres à l'occident, étrangers à l'Afrique. Si ce n'était pas ainsi, ça serait étonnant car la science a les empreintes du milieu, de la culture d'où elle provient. C'est un produit social et un moyen de pouvoir aussi. Il ne suffit pas d'en "exorciser" ses "enveloppes" (cultures, intérêt et idéologies propres à l'occident) pour arriver à l'émergence d'une "science authentiquement africaine", il faut, j'ose croire, donner les moyens aux savants africains et ne pas les combattre. Souvent l'on fait la chasse aux meilleurs. C'est une mentalité à changer. Il est, par ailleurs, facile de parler, de l'extérieur, des sciences comme le fustige Louis Althusser. Commencez par entendre ce que disent les scientifiques de l'intérieur et nous serons moins moralisateurs et fournisseurs des titres de droit aux sciences. Evitons l'*idéologie juridique*, nous conseille Louis Althusser. Le paraphrasant, je dirais: "Evitons l'*idéologie moraliste*."

La critique de la conception occidentale des sciences et de la philosophie visant une interrogation épistémologique de l'ethnologie et considérant l'ethnologie comme "science coloniale", n'est qu'une interprétation de la pratique coloniale, alors que l'occident nous a transformés-jusqu'à un certain niveau – avec cet instrument appelé Ethnologie. Paraphrasant la *11^e Thèse* de Marx sur Feuerbach, je m'en vais dire qu'il ne suffit plus d'interpréter cette "science coloniale", mais qu'il faut la transformer en créant une autre science. Donnez des moyens aux chercheurs et motivez-les, et ils seront capables de beaucoup de choses. Encore une fois, dépassons le discours

plaintif, critique et prenons l'habit de l'amour" panafricain" pour lancer et financer les recherches. A quoi servent toutes ces fondations qui poussent comme des champignons un peu partout en Afrique? L'élaboration des politiques scientifiques, la politique et la gestion de la technologie ont déjà été échafaudées. L'on a déjà suggéré à travers différents séminaires scientifiques, colloques et congrès, la politique scientifique pour les sociétés africaines en voie de développement. Le malheur est que chacun tourne le regard vers l'Etat et non vers sa poche. L'Etat a ses priorités de survie. Ne pas le reconnaître serait se mettre à appeler un sourd qui vous tourne le dos. Sous d'autres cieux, certains privés sont à la source de certaines recherches et découvertes. Que les Mudimbe, les Laléyé, etc. se trouvant dans ce courant financent les recherches. Je sais que l'on finance les leurs. Où est Mudimbe, pourquoi et jusqu'à quand?

Le courant de la critique des pratiques africaines scientifiques des chercheurs africains s'attaquent à ces derniers qui "pensent par procuration" ou qui raisonnent, au dire de Buakasa, "par lui, avec lui et en lui" (entendez par, avec et en l'occident). Cette critique ne sait pas que le philosophe marxiste Italien Antonio Gramsci a déjà parlé des *Intellectuels organiques*¹⁸. Il n'y a pas d'intellectuels neutres. Chacun, y compris moi-même, se situe et est situé. Le chercheur africain ne peut être, en dernière instance, qu'un intellectuel de celui qui finance ses travaux et il suivra son idéologie. Au lieu de s'en plaindre, il faut avoir la stratégie de "créer" ses propres intellectuels.

¹⁸ Sur la notion des *Intellectuels organiques et traditionnels*, on peut lire A. Gramsci, *Elementi di politica*, Roma, 1964, pp. 118 et Id., *Gli intellettuali e l'organizzazione della cultura*, Torino, 1978, pp.3-4.

"Par rapport à une classe progressiste l'intellectuel est dit traditionnel, non seulement parce qu'il est lié à un mode de production antérieur, mais encore dans une mesure où il a été "intellectuel organique" d'une classe disparue, où il ne s'est pas organiquement lié à la classe actuellement montante..."

dit Maria Antoinetta Macciochi, *pour Gramsci*, Paris, 1974, p. 214. Comme on le voit, l'intellectuel organique d'aujourd'hui peut être l'intellectuel traditionnel de demain. Mais Gramsci propose de l'assimiler et de le récupérer idéologiquement. Souvenons-nous toujours, à la suite d'Antonio Gramsci, que tout intellectuel est "le représentant de l'hégémonie", "le fonctionnaire de la superstructure", "le commis du groupe dominant" ou du groupe dominé, dois-je ajouter.

Mudimbe qui fait aussi partie de ce courant n'est-il pas un intellectuel organique de la classe ou de l'Etat qui l'emploie et qui finance ses recherches et écrits? Que dire du professeur Nguey des Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa? Il est aussi situé et il sait bien qu'il est au service d'une institution. Voyez-vous, l'on ne peut combattre une pratique scientifique que par une autre. La "*Lumpen intelligentsia*", "une classe dangereuse" selon Roy¹⁹ et, intellectuels organiques dans le cas présent, ne peut être combattue que par une autre race d'intelligentsia. Les travaux de Cheikh Anta Diop, de Théophile Obenga et de Bilolo sont à encourager et à imiter dans le domaine scientifique. Ces chercheurs forment une classe d'intellectuels dont on a besoin.

Sachez toutefois que Mabasi discute la classification de Ntambwe Tshimbulu et opte, encore une fois, pour une *approche sous-sectorielle et régionale*. L'auteur est plus descriptif que créatif ou "actif." Pouvait-il en être autrement?

L'Auteur, à la fin de son chapitre, constate avec amertume

"que philosophes et scientifiques ont évolué en vase-clos, éludant des noces qui auraient pu s'avérer très fructueuses dans le contexte actuel de l'Afrique (...)." ²⁰

Je regrette, au contraire, de ne pas voir le philosophe Mabasi se spécialiser dans un domaine scientifique en dehors de la philosophie. Qu'il se souvienne de la remarque pertinente de Louis Althusser selon laquelle tout discours philosophique sur la science reste toujours philosophique et non scientifique. Proposez, M. Mabasi – puisque les philosophes sont forts en propositions –, que le philosophe ait un autre diplôme dans un domaine scientifique donnée. Soyez conséquent. Mettez la main à la pâte. C'est mon point de vue. Nous, nous continuons à philosopher autrement, pour ne pas dire comme ceux-là que nous prenons pour modèles. *Mabasi n'est-il pas "hors jeu"?*

Suivons encore l'argumentation de Mabasi qui veut instaurer une pensée assumant les exigences inhérentes à l'âge de la science.

¹⁹ G. Labica et G. Bensussan (dir), *Dictionnaire critique du Marxisme*, Paris, 1982, p. 672.

²⁰ F-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 22.

A propos de "l'âge de la Science"

A la suite de Gilles-Gaston Granger et Jule Vuillemin, Mabasi pense que, depuis le début de l'après-seconde guerre mondiale, nous sommes entrés dans l'ère qui se définit en termes d'"âge de la science." Que cette dernière soit, selon eux, l'axe principal de la culture, je pense avec Canguilhem que "l'idiote du village"²¹ est toujours au milieu du village où il scandalise, où il tient en échec les sciences et où il rend indispensable les philosophies. A dire vrai, l'anomalie symbolisée par "l'idiote du village" rompt l'image harmonieuse que les sciences nous donnent de leur monde, le reconnaît Gaboriau²². Ainsi, au lieu de parler de "l'âge de la science" que l'on soit humble pour parler tout simplement de "l'âge de l'homme." En toute époque, ce dernier est à la fois théologien, métaphysicien et positiviste²³. Même en Europe, certains se réveillent au son de l'Horoscope ou vont au travail après avoir lu la rubrique Horoscope des journaux. Il suffit de suivre certaines télévisions pour se rendre compte combien la publicité des mages, médiums et devins est bien suivie. Il y a même des journaux spécialisés. La pédophilie est devenue, sans exagérer, un fléau. Alors, dans quel *age* sommes-nous? Dans celui de l'homme tout court.

L'exaltation de "l'âge de la science" n'a qu'un but: faire l'apologie de la philosophie des sciences et dénigrer les autres formes de philosophie. N'est-ce pas là un *impérialisme injustifiable* qui voudrait imposer à tous une pensée unique à sens unique? Et que faire de "l'idiote du village", de la souffrance, de la mort, du bonheur, de l'amour, du masque, etc.? Malgré les bienfaits de la science, l'homme reste toujours à sa soif. Il attend d'autres sons de cloche. Il ne veut pas être réduit à un homme unidimensionnel. N'est-il pas, en dernière analyse, un mystère?

Dire que toute réflexion philosophique doit intégrer, d'une part, un état suffisamment actuel de la science et *renoncer* d'autre part,²⁴ au vieux mythe d'une *philosophia perennis* (et intégrer la marque essentielle de la moderni-

²¹ Canguilhem, cité dans F. Gaboriau, *Philosophie issue des sciences*, Paris, 1986, p. 55.

²² Cf. F. Gaboriau, *o.c.* p. 55.

²³ Ici, je pense aux trois états d'Auguste Comte.

²⁴ Cf. F.-B Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.* p. 26.

té), est une preuve d'une vision réductionniste et sur la philosophie et sur l'homme et sur le vécu humain. Encore une fois, je déclare un "*hors-jeu*" pour le philosophe Mabasi. Intégrer un état suffisamment actuel de la science n'est pas mauvais. Ne faire que cela est une erreur, et c'est être hors-jeu du vécu humain, vécu multiforme.

Mabasi cherchera à convaincre son lecteur avec le chapitre de *A partir d'un nouveau paradigme du travail philosophique*. Dira-t-il du nouveau ou répétera-t-il ce que nous avons déjà entendu chez d'autres philosophes?

A propos de son "A partir d'un nouveau paradigme du travail philosophique"

Honnête, Mabasi reconnaît que ce qu'il soutiendra est loin d'être nouveau, "car la conception trouve une première élaboration chez les "grands Viennois des années 30", mais elle revêt une figure plus nette chez les Granger, F. Gonseth et, dans une certaine mesure, chez J. Vuillemin."²⁵ C'est son point de vue. Tenez! Pour Mabasi, c'est "dans les écrits d'un Granger [qu'il apparaît nettement] que la philosophie est bien une connaissance"²⁶; en d'autres mots, avant Granger, cela n'apparaissait pas clairement chez d'autres auteurs. Que dire de Aristote pour qui tout homme a naturellement la passion de savoir? Il suffit de s'intéresser à l'Histoire de la philosophie et de ses thèmes pour se rendre compte que le dire de Mabasi est "*hors-jeu*."

Nous le verrons tout à l'heure.

Le premier point de son chapitre *A partir...* commence par établir le rapport de la philosophie aux autres formes de savoir, à savoir la *science* et *l'idéologie*. Et pourtant il aurait pu y ajouter la religion et le mythe. Je le comprends: il doit exposer son maître à penser, Granger.

Tout étudiant en philosophie sait que plusieurs livres d'introduction à la philosophie ont le chapitre du rapport de la philosophie aux autres formes de savoir. Ainsi, je ne trouve pas opportun-est-ce fondé? – de le résumer sur ce

²⁵ Ib., p. 27.

²⁶ Ib., p. 27.

point, mais en attendant que l'on sache, à la suite de Louis Althusser dont je partage l'avis, que *tout homme est animal idéologique*. Vous voyez ce que cela implique: l'homme de science comme le philosophe sont des idéologues à des degrés différents.

Toutefois, j'aimerais discuter avec Mabasi sur certaines affirmations se trouvant dans le premier point (rapport de la philosophie aux autres formes de savoir) et dans le second point (le concept philosophique: concept sans objet)

A la suite de Granger – et sans avoir défini le concept science –, le philosophe Mabasi qualifie *la philosophie de connaissance sans objet*.²⁷ Je sais que, nous enseignants de philosophie, nous ne manquons pas de dire aux étudiants de la première philosophie que la philosophie est problématique du point de vue origine, définition et objet. Toutefois, à la fin, nous sommes conviés à prendre position sur plusieurs positions. Ainsi Mabasi suit Granger pour qui la philosophie est une connaissance sans objet. C'est son droit. Le nôtre est de voir si celle position est raisonnée, si elle ne se contredit pas en dernière instance.

Voici son argumentation: les sciences ont pour visée la construction des modèles abstraits des phénomènes.

“Or, la philosophie, dit-il, n'a jamais réussi à construire de véritables modèles des phénomènes. Le travail philosophique ne vise pas l'explication des faits.”²⁸

Tout étudiant en philosophie le sait.

“La connaissance philosophique, poursuit-il, est une connaissance sans objet, puisqu'elle vise la mise en perspective, l'organisation des significations du vécu dans sa totalité.”²⁹

N'est-ce pas là donner déjà à la philosophie un objet? Ici *le vécu dans sa totalité*. Je crois que Granger ne dit pas le contraire quand il écrit qu'à la philosophie revient de droit

“une réflexion interprétative et valorisante du vécu, par opposition à la construction

²⁷ Cf. Ib., p. 28, 31; 32, 33...

²⁸ Ib., p. 28.

²⁹ Ib., p. 28.

des modèles structuraux qui, en science, objectivement expérience.”³⁰

Le vécu humain à interpréter et à valoriser n'est pas un objet? Je sais que c'est l'expression “dans sa totalité” qui dérange, car pour Mabasi et ses maîtres,

“l'objet est lié à l'idée d'une fragmentation du réel.”³¹

J'y reviendrai quand je parlerai de l'objet matériel et formel.

Ngoma-Binda, tout en trouvant terriblement “fallacieux” (c'est son épithète) le slogan de “totalité du réel” (comme objet de la philosophie), ne manque pas cependant de dire que

“la philosophie a ses objets privilégiés, peut-être pas plus d'une douzaine, sur lesquels elle s'articule habituellement.”³²

Je ne marche pas avec lui quand il affirme avec fracas que l'arbre, la pierre et la sauterelle, etc. sont indignes d'attention philosophique³³. Il oublie que tous les objets donnent à penser, si pas pour lui du moins pour moi³⁴. Ainsi nous nous inscrivons en faux contre sa théorie inflexionnelle qui “pense que toute chose n'est pas digne de philosophie, et que la “totalité du réel” donnée

³⁰ G.-G. Granger, *Essai d'une philosophie du style*, cité par J.D. Robert, ‘La philosophie du style’, dans *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 70 (quatrième série n° 6/ Mai 1972), p. 284.

³¹ Ngomba-Binda, P., *Philosophie et pouvoir politique. Essai de théorie inflexionnelle*, dans *La Responsabilité politique du philosophe africain*. Acte du Séminaire scientifique de Philosophie. Kinshasa, du 20 au 23 Juin 1993, Kinshasa, 1996, p. 171.

³² *Ib.*, p. 171.

³³ Cf. *Ib.*, p.

³⁴ Cf. L. Mpala Mbabula, *L'arbre dans l'éducation ancestrale*, Kinshasa, 1998, inédit. Il s'agit d'une conférence tenue aux Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa le 5/ 12/ 1998 lors de la Journée mondiale de l'arbre. J'ai essayé de faire voir comment l'arbre, analogiquement, donne à penser et a été, pour nos ancêtres, un instrument didactique pour l'éducation des jeunes, des gouvernants et de tout homme. Ex: *L'arbre en fleurs reçoit la visite des insectes* est un proverbe provenant d'une observation, et cela peut être appliqué à la vie d'une adolescente. Voyez-vous, l'arbre n'est pas indigne d'attention philosophique. Il suffit de s'intéresser à la paramiologie pour se rendre compte du fait que *tout ce qui est* donne à penser et n'est pas indigne de toute attention philosophique.

comme objet de la philosophie par nos manuels constitue une fiction non opératoire.³⁵ Je crois qu'il est bon de revenir à la notion d'*objet matériel et formel*, sans cela, on s'en prendra à "la totalité du réel" sans raison valable. Je reste convaincu – et cela jusqu'à preuve du contraire – que

"l'*objet matériel* de la philosophie est tout ce qui est, visible et invisible. Voilà pourquoi nous disons que son *objet matériel est la totalité du réel*, et chaque philosophe ne philosophera que sur la partie de cette totalité du réel."³⁶

Ainsi, le philosophe ne parlera pas du "tout" et de "tout" au même moment. Il y a toujours un choix opéré d'entre les multiples faces de son objet qu'est la totalité du réel. Et à ce propos, je suis d'accord avec Ngoma-Binda quand il écrit qu'

"il va de soi qu'il y a toujours déjà un choix initial qui est opéré par le penseur. Mais la question fondamentale qui est posée c'est celle de la justesse [ici j'entends la voix de Louis Althusser] et de la pertinence du choix."³⁷

Ainsi, *le vécu humain* dont parlent Granger et son disciple Mabasi peut être un *objet matériel* et pour la philosophie et pour la science. C'est l'aspect ou l'angle sous lequel il sera abordé par chacune d'elles qui fera leur différence. C'est cela *l'objet formel*. Le philosophe approchera, par exemple, le *vécu humain* en faisant sur lui une réflexion interprétative et valorisante (comme le dit Granger lui-même) ou mieux en organisant ses significations (comme l'explique le disciple Mabasi). Et la sociologie (j'espère qu'elle est une des sciences de l'homme auxquelles s'intéresse Granger) aura sa façon d'aborder le vécu humain.

Parmi les philosophes qui nient à la philosophie un objet, j'aimerais citer Louis Althusser dont le propos ne prête pas totalement à la confusion. Sans toutefois être d'accord avec lui quand il dit³⁸ qu'en dehors du rapport de la

³⁵ Ngoma-Binda, a.c., p. 170.

³⁶ L. Mpala Mbabula, *Philosophie pour tous. Cours d'introduction à la philosophie*, Lubumbashi, 2000, p. 15.

³⁷ Ngoma-Binda, a.c., p. 171.

³⁸ Et F. Gaboriau ne dit pas le contraire quand il affirme que la philosophie est issue des sciences. Cfr Gaboriau, *o.c.*, p. 16. Née des sciences, la philosophie "doit reconnaître sa filiation" (*Ib.*, p. 44). Pierre Somville, dans son *Parménide d'Elée. Son temps et le nôtre*,

philosophie aux sciences, la philosophie n'existerait pas – , le discours de Louis Althusser dit que la *philosophie n'a pas d'objet comme une science a un objet*, mais *elle a un enjeu*. De ce fait, la philosophie ne produit pas de connaissances mais elle énonce des *Thèses*. Ces dernières ouvrent la voie à la position *juste* des problèmes de la pratique scientifique et de la pratique politique.³⁹ En outre, pour Louis Althusser, les *Thèses*. – propositions philosophiques – sont *dogmatiques* dans la mesure où toute thèse n'est pas susceptible de *démonstration* au sens *strictement* scientifique (au sens où l'on parle de la démonstration en mathématique et en logique) ni de la *preuve* au sens strictement scientifique (au sens où l'on parle de la preuve dans les sciences expérimentales).⁴⁰ Alors on comprendra que le rapport d'une *thèse* a son *enjeux* ne soit pas celui de simple “*vérité*” (= rapport entre connaissance et son objet) mais un rapport *pratique* et un rapport pratique *d'ajustement*. *Rapport pratique* signifie que ce rapport provoque *des effets pratiques* et ce rapport pratique signifie aussi *rapport de force* à l'intérieur d'un champs donné par des contradictions et des conflits. Ainsi, le procès d'ajustement est celui d'un *ajustement dans la lutte*, dans la lutte entre les idées existantes, les unes dominations, les autres dominées. Après cet *ajustement* interviennent les *résultats pratiques*. La nouvelle position arrêtée et fixée par la *thèse* (= position) modifie les autres positions et affecte les réalités qui sont *l'enjeu* de tout ce procès d'ajustement dans la lutte, et qui aboutit à la fixation des thèses “justes” (ou non)⁴¹. Comme on peut le deviner, le discours de Louis Althusser repose sur une certaine conception de la philosophie qui veut que celle-ci soit un *Kampfplatz*, un champs de bataille où il faut prendre position. Kant en est l'inspirateur. Cependant, cette position de Louis Althusser est plus séduisante que celle de Mabasi (et de son maître) qui croit que

“le travail philosophique ne vise pas la création de tels objets (concrets, inducteur

Paris, 1976, p. 26, affirme que la philosophie “naît toujours d'une théologie.” Disons tout simplement que la philosophie est née de l'*étonnement*, comme la science aussi *en dernière analyse*, est née de l'*étonnement*. C'est mon point de vue.

³⁹ Cf. L. Althusser, *o.c.*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 13-14.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 59.

d'expériences), mais plutôt l'utilisateur du langage pour la production *directe* de concepts."⁴²

Cette conception de la philosophie productive des concepts n'est pas différente de celle de Deleuze et de Guattari.⁴³

Malgré la séduction qu'a la conception philosophique althusserienne sur moi, je persiste et je signe que la philosophie a un objet matériel et un objet formel, et que les enjeux y sont, car je reste convaincu que *la philosophie est liée à la vie comme les lèvres aux dents*⁴⁴. Et ceux qui disent que l'objet par excellence de la philosophie est l'homme n'ont pas tout à fait tort car,

“en dernière analyse, tout tourne autour de l'homme face à soi-même, à son semblable, face au monde invisible qui touche sa vie. L'homme reste au centre car si la question ne vient pas de lui, la réponse ne peut pas ne pas venir de lui.”⁴⁵

Ne puis-je pas me permettre de dire que sur ce point Mabasi est “*hors-jeu*”?

Par ailleurs, il y a une affirmation herméneutique que j'aimerais remettre en question. Mabasi dit que

“... la philosophie se rapproche de la science, car pour toutes les deux, la personne de l'auteur est en principe absente de l'œuvre. L'œuvre tue la subjectivité de son auteur.”⁴⁶

Platon, dans le *Phèdre*, n'estime pas comme certains le pensent que le texte est en quelque sorte orphelin, car il perd son père et affronte seul l'aventure de la réception et de la lecture.⁴⁷ Si réellement il en était ainsi, le philosophe

⁴² F.-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 30.

⁴³ Cf. Deleuze, G. Et Guattari, F., *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (critique). Paris, Minuit, 1991.

⁴⁴ Avec cette expression, nous paraphrasons le premier Althusser qui affirmait que la philosophie était liée à la politique comme les lèvres aux dents.

⁴⁵ L. Mpala Mbabula, *philosophie pour tous...*p. 61.

⁴⁶ F.-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Voici les passages où Platon parle de la responsabilité de l'auteur face à son écrit:

“c'est que l'écriture, Phèdre, a un grave inconvénient tout comme la peinture. Les produits de la peinture sont comme s'ils étaient vivants; mais pose-leur une question, ils gardent gravement le silence. Il en est de même des discours écrits.

Mabasi n'écrit pas son nom sur la couverture de sa brochure. Aussi longtemps que son écrit a le nom de son auteur, il n'est pas orphelin, car partout où il sera, il aura son père, son défenseur. Sans cela, il n'y aurait jamais eu de 2^e, 3^e, ... édition revue et corrigée, revue et augmentée ou entièrement revue. Si je fais cette étude critique, c'est parce que Mabasi veut provoquer un débat et je m'adresse à Mabasi et non à sa maison d'édition (qui serait la mère de l'écrit si l'auteur était anonyme). A ce propos l'on n'a qu'à suivre le débat de Hirsch avec ses adversaire si l'on doit tenir compte de l'intention de l'auteur quand on interprète un texte. Au "sophisme intentionnel" de Wimsatt, Hirsch opposera le "préjugé de l'autonomie"⁴⁸. Seul Schleiermacher me semble réaliste et pratique quand il nous invite à tenir compte du psychologique (l'individu) et du grammatical (l'universel) quand nous devons interpréter un texte.

A ce propos, j'ai l'impression que Mabasi est victime de la mode herméneutique selon laquelle l'auteur est en principe absent de l'œuvre. Que dire du *style*? Celui-ci n'est-il pas la *signature* même de l'auteur? Je ne sais pas si Granger dans son *Essai d'une philosophie du style* dit le contraire. Je ne l'ai pas encore lu. S'il dit le contraire, je ne serais pas d'accord avec lui.

On pourrait croire qu'ils parlent en personnes intelligentes, mais demande-leur de t'expliquer ce qu'ils disent, ils ne répondront qu'une chose et toujours la même. Une fois écrit, le discours roule partout et passe indifféremment dans les mains des connaisseurs et dans celles des profanes, et il ne sait distinguer à qui il faut parler. *S'il se voit méprisé ou injurié injustement, il a toujours besoin du secours de son père; car il n'est pas capable de repousser une attaque et de se défendre lui-même*" (Platon, *Phèdre* 275 d-e; je souligne).

"Nous voulions examiner si Lysis méritait des reproches pour avoir écrit des discours" (*Ib.*, 277)

"S'il [Lysiais ou tout] pense y avoir mis une grande solidité et une grande clarté, ses écrits ne rapporteront à leur auteur que de la honte qu'on en convienne ou non..." (*Ib.*, 277d)

"Et toi, va retrouver [dire à] à Homère... et enfin à Solon et à tous les orateurs politiques qui, sous le nom de lois, ont rédigé des écrits, que si, en composant ces oeuvres, ils ont connu la vérité, *s'ils peuvent en venir à la discussion et défendre ce qu'ils ont écrit...*" (*Ib.*, 278b-c – je souligne)

⁴⁸ Pour ce débat, cfr P. Ricoeur, *Herméneutique*, Louvain-La-Neuve, 1971-1972, p. 4548.

C'est mon point de vue et ce point de vue n'est pas orphelin. S'il y aura une critique, c'est à l'auteur Mpala qu'elle sera adressée.

Sur ce point, j'ose croire que Mabasi est "*Hors-jeu*."

Une autre affirmation de Mabasi, à la suite de Granger, fais réfléchir. D'accord avec eux qu'un fait scientifique peut être *un* de départ de l'activité philosophique⁴⁹, je reste cependant réticent quand Mabasi avance une thèse selon laquelle

"la validité en philosophie est tout de même soumise à deux contraintes: la cohérence et la richesse. Un système philosophique doit être cohérent, en son propre sens, et riche, tant il doit interpréter une expérience humaine [n'est-ce pas là un objet?] au cours de l'histoire."⁵⁰

Doucement! Un mensonge peut être cohérent aussi long temps qu'il ne renferme pas des contradictions dans sa formulation ou argumentation et il peut être aussi riche pour son auteur. Que dire du *Sophisme*, cousin de la *Philosophie* ou l'autre face de la philosophie? En outre, on doit éviter de croire et de faire croire que toute philosophie doit être un système. "En dehors des "systèmes philosophiques", il y a la philosophie-activité, la philosophie-attitude critique, qui renonce à élaborer une doctrine ou un système. Cette philosophie-activité correspond en gros à ce que Dilthey appelle "idéalisme de la liberté." Cette philosophie considère souvent avec mépris les "systèmes" philosophiques"⁵¹ et sans être "hors-jeu", je peux citer Nietzsche comme étant, parmi tant d'autres, un philosophe sans système. *A supposer* que toute la philosophie soit un système, ces deux critères suffisent-ils à rendre tout le système philosophique valide? Ces critères ne sont-ils pas unilatéraux surtout quand Mabasi proclame, tout haut après Granger, que conformément au second critère,

"une philosophie qui n'intègre pas ou intègre mal, dans son système de significations, un état suffisamment contemporain de la science, ne pourra nous satisfaire totalement. Et s'il se trouve que sa nature soit telle qu'elle se révèle comme tout à fait étrangère à une interprétation de cet aspect de l'expérience, nous serons à juste titre enclins à la

⁴⁹ cf. *Ib.*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ *Ib.*, p. 39.

⁵¹ R. Ruyer, La science et la philosophie considérées comme des traductions, dans Les Etudes philosophiques1 (Janvier-Mars 1963), p. 20.

rejeter comme inadéquate et invalide”⁵².

N’est-ce pas là une *Intolérance* et un *Fanatisme scientifique*, ennemis de la philosophie? L’on a l’impression – et je pense que c’est cela – que la science est la mesure de la validité philosophique. Cette position n’est pas loin de celle de Louis Althusser quand ce dernier parle du rapport *Spécifique* qu’a la philosophie face aux sciences. Convaincu qu’il n’y a pas de philosophie qui ne parle pas des sciences ou de la science, Althusser traite la philosophie de Kierkegaard, de Sartre, des *Philosophies “réactives”* en tant qu’elles parlent des sciences muettes. Elles répondent, selon lui, directement à des philosophies parlant des sciences. Elles sont hantées par les sciences.⁵³ C’est son point de vue, mais il reste à savoir si Kierkegaard et Sartre seraient de son avis.

Mabasi n’y va pas par quatre chemins.

“Pour Granger [dont il partage les idées], le travail philosophique est donc dépendant de l’expérience scientifique. [Et Mabasi conclut que] c’est dans la mesure où l’œuvre de Granger souligne à l’instar d’autres œuvres, comme une conséquence d’un âge de la science, le lien entre le travail philosophique à promouvoir en Afrique, au seuil du 21^e siècle, afin que la philosophie africaine prenne la mesure des exigences d’un âge de la science.”⁵⁴

J’ose croire que sur ce sujet Mabasi est “*hors-jeu*”, y compris Althusser et Granger. Le travail philosophique n’est pas *seulement* dépendant de l’expérience scientifique. Pensons à “l’idiot du village” et ce symbole est à prendre au sérieux pour éviter le “*dogmatisme scientifique*” et philosophique.

Il y a encore un autre point sur lequel j’aimerais discuter avec Mabasi avant de passer à son quatrième et dernier chapitre. Pour lui, l’œuvre de Granger, en soulignant le lien entre le travail scientifique et le devenir des sciences, peut inspirer le paradigme du travail philosophique à promouvoir en Afrique. Je voudrai attirer son attention sur

⁵² G-G -Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophie*, cité par F.-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.* p. 40.

⁵³ Cf. L. Althusser, *Cinquième Cours*, dans *Ecrits philosophiques et politiques*. Tome II, Paris, 1995.

⁵⁴ F.-B. Mabasi Bakabana, *o. c.* p. 40.

“le paradigme du travail philosophique à promouvoir en Afrique.”⁵⁵

Je crois qu'il est bon de savoir d'où l'on parle même si le livre – son livre sans doute – sera édité sous d'autres cieux (en Europe) avec des fonds dont il ignore, peut-être, les origines. Ne pas avoir son propre argent pour publier un livre est déjà en lui-même un problème qui donne à penser sur les conditions de possibilité de la sortie de ce marasme économique et de la paupérisation entretenue dans un pays déclaré riche et vivant” actuellement” dans la pauvreté. Je m'explique. Il n'y a pas, à mon humble avis, *le paradigme du travail philosophique à promouvoir en Afrique* pour la simple raison que si l'Afrique est *Une* comme continent, elle est *plurielle*⁵⁶ comme réalité existentielle du point de vue culturel, politique, économique, social, religieux... Ainsi, tenant compte de “l'idiote du village”, il serait bon de parler *des* paradigmes du travail philosophique. La République Démocratique du Congo avec sa guerre d'occupation et la misère qu'elle engendre, a un philosophe approprié-je sais qu'il n'est pas l'unique – qui rassemble ses philosophes à Kinshasa ou ailleurs et ces derniers parlent de la guerre, de la paix, de la faim, du dialogue intercongolais, etc. C'est toute une philosophie politique et sociale, à nouveaux frais, qui surgit. Même la philosophie de la misère avec ses conséquences politiques et anthropologiques est entrain de naître. Conjoncture oblige! l'Afrique du Sud, avec son Apartheid qui s'est métamorphosé après l'avènement de l'ANC au pouvoir, a aussi son philosophe tenant compte de son *Sitz im Leben*. La criminalité, le chômage, etc., tout cela donne au philosophe un style propre à un milieu donné. Que dire de la Libye de Kadhafi avec sa théorie des Etats-Unis d'Afrique au même moment où la Xénophobie règne dans son pays? N'oubliez pas, par ailleurs, que nos C.P.P. viennent de se recycler chez lui. C'est toute une mouvance de la philosophie politique qui s'y exerce. Sierra Leone est à l'heure d'un philosophe sans précédent: quel est le sens d'être d'un tribunal International chez eux pour juger les crimes contre l'humanité et les crimes de guerre? C'est tout un débat sur qui doit être jugé et quel est, en dernière analyse, le but

⁵⁵ *Ib.*, p. 40.

⁵⁶ *TV5 Afrique* n'a pas tort d'avoir une rubrique” *Afrique Plurielle*. IL suffit de la suivre pour voir les multiples faces de l'Afrique même si cela est vu, souvent, par un regard occidental qui finance la rubrique ou l'Emission.

escompté? Le Rwanda vient de changer son hymne national, son drapeau, etc. C'est un élan philosophico – idéologique qui impose un regard sur le génocide, la cohabitation et la guerre hégémonique. Depuis le sombre 11 septembre 2001, le Soudan et la Somalie sont dans des tourmentes, car le gendarme du monde qui décide quand il veut et comme il veut, peut les frapper et personne ne bronchera. Là aussi, il y a un philosophe cherchant les conditions de convaincre de son innocence, de sa conversion, de sa bonne foi, de sa coopération. En un mot, il s'agit d'un philosophe de peur et de survie. Le Sida touche différemment les pays africains. Chacun en a sa conception. D'où, à chaque pays une éthique appropriée même si dans l'ensemble tous voudraient voir en finir une fois pour toutes. Mais n'ayant pas les moyens, l'on tend les mains aux pays qui ont des médicaments et qui font une sourde oreille, car l'on en a besoin pour faire pression sur l'un ou l'autre pays africain. L'Algérie avec son F.I.S qui fait le mauvais et le beau temps, a un philosophe de la sécurité et qui cherche un *modus vivendi*. Ce ne sont pas des exemples qui manquent. Que dire du Burundi, de l'Angola, de l'Égypte, de la Côte d'Ivoire? Voyez-vous, devant une Afrique plurielle, il faut plusieurs paradigmes du travail philosophique.⁵⁷

Vouloir proposer *Le* [quantificateur universel] paradigme du travail philosophique à promouvoir en Afrique est un réductionnisme, une cécité scientifique. Et dans le prochain chapitre, je ferai voir comment Mabasi se moque d'autres modes de philosopher "autrement" qu'il qualifie "d'embrigadement" ou d' "idéologie."⁵⁸ Là, encore une fois, Mabasi sombre dans l'intolérance et il mérite un sifflet d'"hors-jeu."

Puisque Mabasi tient à ses positions audacieuses – pour ne pas dire celles d'"hors – jeu", quelle philosophie propose-t-il clairement (j'en ai déjà fait allusion) pour l'âge de la science et quelles tâches, *ipso facto*, assigne-t-il à une[réductionniste] philosophie africaine à l'âge de la science?

La réponse à ces questions se trouve explicitement dans son dernier chapitre (le plus long, car il a 34 pages. Le troisième en a 14, le deuxième 4

⁵⁷ Sur ce sujet l'on peut lire avec intérêts ma critique adressée au philosophe Irung Tshitambal qui proposait *La Démocratie consociative* à l'Afrique, Mpala Mbabula, L. *Attention à la démocratie consociative du philosophe Irung Tshitambal!* Lubumbashi, Ed. Mpala, 1994.

⁵⁸ Cf. F. Mabasi Bakabana, *o.c.*, p. 43.

et le premier 12 – quelle disproportion!) intitulé *Enjeux et repères d'une philosophie africaine à l'âge de la science*.

A propos des "Enjeux et repères d'une philosophie africaine à l'âge de la science"

Mabasi, dans ce chapitre, commence par donner les exigences auxquelles devrait se plier *un philosophe pour l'âge de la science*. Il en donne deux: 1 – sa démarcation d'avec l'idéologie et le bon sens. 2 – dialogue permanent avec les sciences et les techniques.

Je sais que depuis l'Antiquité grecque, le philosophe a toujours voulu se démarquer de l'idéologue connu sous le nom de Sophiste. Aristote, comme le rappelle Mabasi, disait que la sophistique tentait souvent de revêtir le manteau de la philosophie et Platon, de son côté, faisait remarquer que sophiste et philosophe se ressemblent comme Chien et Loup. La question est celle de savoir si Platon et Aristote n'ont eu, un jour dans leur vie, le malheur d'être appelés sophistes.⁵⁹ Effectivement Platon fut appelé sophiste par ses ennemis Isocrate et Lisia, de même Aristote le fut par l'historien Timeo. Pour Socrate, il n'y a pas de doute. Lui qui combattait acharnement les sophistes fut aussi qualifié de sophiste. C'est un grand débat, et à mon avis, Louis Althusser me semble plus réaliste et pratique quand il affirme que tout homme est un animal idéologique. Ce sont les "doses" d'idéologie qui diffèrent de l'un et de l'autre. De ce fait, même le philosophe pour l'âge de la science étant un philosophe à partir d'un lieu théorique et pratique donné se réclamant de l'âge de la science – âge remis en question par "l'idiote du village" – reste teinté d'une certaine idéologie, celle de l'âge de la science sans doute. Et ici, idéologie pourrait même être comprise comme une certaine vision du monde (et de la science) qui exclut les autres modes de philosopher qui ne partent pas de ses présupposés indémontrables. Or c'est cela que l'on voit chez Mabasi comme on l'aura à le démontrer tout à l'heure. Et le pire de ce comportement est d'appeler idéologie tout philosophe qui

⁵⁹ D. Composta *Storia della filosofia antica*, Roma, P.U.U, 1985, p. 125 nous apprend que Platon et Aristote n'ont pas échappés au surnom de sophiste.

s'écarter ou s'écarterait du sien.

De tout ce qui précède, l'on comprendra pourquoi Mabasi écrit en ces termes:

“Devons-nous, en effet, rappeler que la philosophie a avant tout une visée de connaissance, et qu'elle ne peut et ne doit vouloir directement transformer le monde, sauf si elle s'adultère en idéologie, renonce donc à cette visée cognitive, se considère comme arrivée et cède à la sclérose? (sic) une philosophie ne peut transformer directement le monde qu'au prix de sa mort comme philosophie”⁶⁰

Jugez!

Si la philosophie a “avant tout une visée de connaissance”, à quoi sert cette connaissance? A quelque chose sans doute. Et il est bon que Mabasi nous dise l'acception qu'il accorde au verbe “transformer.” Est-ce qu'il accorde à ce verbe un sens chimique, industriel, etc.? Même son adverbe “directement” exige une explication. A ma connaissance la connaissance philosophique qu'acquiert le philosophe le transforme directement, car il ne sera plus ce qu'il fut avant cette connaissance. Voilà ce que j'entends par le verbe “transformer.” Et à ce propos, Platon et Karl Jaspers n'ont pas tort de dire que la philosophie nous apprend à bien vivre et à bien mourir. Et une fois que la connaissance philosophique a transformé le philosophe, ce dernier aura une attitude face à soi-même, à autrui, au monde visible et invisible et face à la pratique politique sociale, économique, culturelle et scientifique. et c'est la décision personnelle ou son option fondamentale qui fera qu'il s'engage dans la transformation de son monde. Et c'est ici que retentit la fameuse 11^e Thèse de Marx sur Feuerbach, à savoir

les philosophes n'ont fait qu'interpréter le monde, à présent il faut le transformer.

L'interprétation relève de la théorie et la transformation relève de la pratique, de l'engagement. En un mot, Marx invite le philosophe à lier la théorie à la pratique. Voilà l'esprit de cette thèse. Ainsi on comprendra pourquoi Marx a travaillé à la production des théories pour éclairer les actions politiques, sociales et économiques.

Ne veut vouloir transformer le monde, .i.e. lui changer la face suite à une pratique révolutionnaire politique par exemple, que celui se sent avant tout

⁶⁰ *Ib.*, p. 43.

transformé. Et dire qu'une philosophie qui projette la transformation du monde "s'adultère en idéologie", dépasse mon entendement. La philosophie devra être le prolongement de nos bras dans tous les domaines possibles. N'est-elle pas liée à la vie comme les lèvres aux dents?

La conception philosophique de Mabasi accuse les philosophes africains du courant dit "des idéologies politiques africaines" (et tous ceux qui parlent de la philosophie fonctionnelle – ici je pense au philosophe Irung) d'avoir assigné

"délibérément à la philosophie une visée qui lui est étrangère"⁶¹,

seul Mabasi connaît la vraie visée de la philosophie: les Socrates, les Hobbes, les Kinyongo, les Mudiji, les Ndumba, les Nketo, les Elungu P.E., les Mujynya, les Mayele, les Mpala etc. ne sont pas de philosophes mais des idéologues. Surtout que ceux d'entre eux n'étaient pas entrés dans l'âge de la raison. Tshimalenga Ntumba et Ngoma-Binda, avec leur article de 'Philosophons autrement! propositions pour une nouvelle race des philosophes en Afrique', contribuent, selon Mabasi, à adultérer le projet philosophique et sa valeur sociale. Et pourtant le souci de Tshamalenga Ntumba et de Ngoma Binda n'est pas à traiter d'"embrigadement." Après avoir donné à la philosophie le rôle de comprendre, de transformer et d'humaniser la société, tout ceci en vue d'apporter la joie d'exister aux Africains en⁶²

"contribuant à la santé intégrale et à la réhabilitation économique, politique et sociale de l'Afrique",

nos deux talentueux philosophes – que cela n'en déplaise à Mabasi – ont remis en question l'enseignement de la philosophie tel qu'il se fait au Congo et en Afrique [sans avoir été partout en Afrique] et ont proposé la création d'un Institut de philosophie pratique (I.P.P), des cabinets philosophiques (C.P) et un ordre des philosophes conseillers du Congo (O.P.C.C). Nos deux philosophes n'ont pas tort de qualifier de "jacassière" et de "dépendance" la philosophie qu'ils enseignent. Leur autocritique vaut un pesant d'or. Vouloir

⁶¹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 43.

⁶² Tshimalenga Ntumba et Ngoma-Binda, 'Philosophons autrement! Propositions pour une nouvelle race de philosophes en Afrique', dans *Revue philosophique de Kinshasa*, 6 (Juillet-décembre 1990), p. 78.

proposer un philosophe autre que celui qu'ils pratiquent n'est pas mauvais. Le débat que l'on doit engager avec eux sera à situer, à mon humble avis, sur les conditions de la réalisation de leurs propositions pour une nouvelle race de philosophes en Afrique. Le cadre n'est pas approprié pour ressusciter le débat que j'ai mené avec eux en 1997⁶³. Sachant que notre société connaît des classes sociales, et étant convaincu que chaque classe a ses intellectuels, j'ai qualifié les philosophes de cabinets philosophiques de *Lumpen intelligentsia*, comprenez-moi. J'ai compris que Tshiamalenga et Ngoma-Binda courtoisaient le pouvoir à qui il devraient se mettre au service. C'est leur droit. Et je leur ai proposé une analyse sociale haussant le débat jusqu'à la philosophie idéologique pour une praxis sociale réalisable à partir d'une "guerre de position." Ici je suis avec Antonio Gramsci. Sans vouloir faire de l'analyse marxiste une panacée, j'ai posé autrement le problème pour un vrai "philosophons autrement." J'ai fini par une autocritique selon laquelle il est facile de donner des conseils à autrui. Je répète, nous devons reconnaître les efforts et le souci de Tshiamalenga Ntumba et de Ngoma-Binda. Leur "embrigadement" (qui n'en est pas un) ne peut contribuer à adultérer le projet philosophique et sa valeur sociale. C'est au contraire le discours de Mabasi qui risque d'adultérer le projet philosophique et sa valeur sociale.

Faire du symbolisme scientifique (et technique) ce qui "devrait constituer un point de départ privilégié du travail philosophique, particulièrement [= adverbe idéologique, selon moi] durant notre [= son] que nous avons [= il a] considéré comme un "âge de la science" "est dangereux pour le projet philosophique en général. Il y a plusieurs points de départ privilégiés selon ses propres préoccupations et croire que les sciences sont les fondamentales serait un signe d'intolérance. A la fin, il y a le risque de trouver comme "insensées" les propositions philosophiques des autres. Je crois que Wittgenstein II avec sa théorie de "jeux de langage" reste pour nous un signal d'alarme. La philosophie des sciences n'est pas l'unique "jeu de langage philosophique" dans le continent "philosophie." Sinon il y a de quoi tomber

⁶³ Dans le cadre de *Séminaire de philosophie africaine* animé par le professeur Okolo Okonda, j'ai présenté un travail pratique intitulé ' "Cabinet philosophique" ou "Lumpen intelligentsia" : Critique promarxiste du " philosophons autrement! propositions pour une nouvelle race de philosophes en Afrique" de Tshiamalenga Ntumba et Ngomba Binda', Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa, inédit.

dans un “puits et “l’idiot du village” risque de rire sous cape. Nous ne sommes pas dans la philosophie de l’âge post-métaphysique comme le prétend Mabasi à la suite de ses maîtres. Nous sommes dans l’âge humain avec ses progrès, ses “hommeries” et “mystères.”

De tout ce qui précède, on conviendra avec moi que les tâches des philosophies africaines sont multiples selon la réalité existentielle de la portion africaine. Car l’Afrique est plurielle, dois-je encore une fois le répéter pour la bonne compréhension. Ainsi s’interroger sur la configuration de la raison d’aujourd’hui, éclairer sur les problèmes que pose la techno-science en Afrique, etc. sont des tâches philosophiques parmi tant d’autres.

Quelle conclusion puis-je faire pour cette étude critique?

Conclusion

Mon débat s’arrête par ici et il a été ma prise de position sur plusieurs thèmes philosophiques. Considérant les différentes classifications (et leurs critères) des courants en philosophie africaine comme un emprisonnement de la pensée, j’ai plaidé pour un philosophe libre se libérant de la “manie de classification.” Le temps de jérémiades et de chasse à l’ethnologie me semble révolu. Il faut passer à la philosophie – activité.

Je reste convaincu que nous sommes à l’âge humain dont “l’âge de la science” fait partie. “L’idiot du village” nous interpelle et nous convie à ne pas sombrer dans un fanatisme engendrant le dogmatisme. Comme “l’idiot du village” est au milieu du village où il attend une réponse à son “idiotie” qui fait échec à la science, il nous faut une pluralité philosophique pour une Afrique plurielle. Ainsi l’énigme du monde et de la vie⁶⁴ reste encore une partie de l’objet de la philosophie. Et vouloir qualifier d’idéologie toute philosophie qui ne part pas de l’expérience scientifique est une attitude idéologique dévoilant la cécité scientiste, le fanatisme, le fondamentalisme intellectuel et l’intolérance philosophique. Tout ceci est ennemi de toute pratique qui se veut philosophique. En outre, l’on doit savoir que tout discours philo-

⁶⁴ Cf. W. Dilthey, ‘L’essence de la philosophie’, dans *Le monde de l’esprit*. T.I., Paris, 1947, p. 348.

sophique fait sur la science reste toujours philosophique. Il n'est jamais scientifique. Que chacun fasse son travail et les vaches seront bien gardées. Seule l'attitude reconnaissant une pluralité dans le travail philosophique transformera notre mental pour bien transformer notre monde. C'est à ce prix, puissé-je penser, que le philosophe Mabasi peut reprendre son jeu sans avoir peur d'entendre un coup de sifflet signalant son "hors-jeu."

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Reviews Section

IS VIOLENCE INEVITABLE IN AFRICA? THEORIES OF CONFLICT AND APPROACHES TO CONFLICT PREVENTION, BY CHABAL, PATRICK, ENGEL, ULF, & GENTILI, ANNA-MARIA,

Leiden: Brill, 2005, ISBN 9004144501, Series and Series Number AGIS001,
EUR 50.- / US\$ 70.-

A Review by Tatashikanda Kahare

Largely due to Achille Mbembe's incisive writings, it has become customary – especially outside Africa – to refer to a conspicuous and widely shared set of African experiences today under the heading of 'the postcolony'. The expression has come to suggest an aggregate convergence of ills, from state decay to uncontrolled violence and civil war; and from intercontinental subservience and exploitation, to extreme poverty. This is the common image of Africa in the North Atlantic, in other continents, increasingly even in Africa. As a self-fulfilling prophecy this image's negative effects on the future of Africans and of Africa cannot be overestimated. The flight into universalism among some of Africa's most brilliant philosophers, and alternatively – including others equally brilliant – the insistence on the liberating force of a less-than-universal *African* philosophy, can only be understood against the background of the challenges that Afropessimism poses.

But is this negative image reliable? Is the condescending fatalism that the media and decision makers in the North Atlantic often base on it, indicated by the facts? Taking out of the aggregate package of Afropessimism one salient topic, the book under review addresses the incidence of violent conflict in Africa, and scans both the Africanist descriptive literature, the contributors' own rich African data, and the fast growing theoretical and comparative literature on conflict and violence, so as to give a provisional answer to the question posed in the book's title: *Is violence inevitable in Africa?* According to the editors' own excellent summary

“This volume is an attempt to analyse the causes of conflict in Africa, to review the various approaches to conflict prevention or conflict resolution and to discuss some of the practical difficulties in ending violence. It brings together a wide range of scholars and practitioners, with specialist knowledge of a large number of African countries. (...)

The Intention here is to provide, within a single volume, a survey of the various approaches to conflict in Africa, a systematic discussion of some of the root causes of violence, as well as case studies on the consequences of violence and the effects of conflict resolution. The book is in four parts. The Introduction develops a political analysis of violence in Africa. Part I discusses a variety of theories of conflict and outlines the main approaches to conflict resolution. Part II presents case studies of conflict management and resolution. The Conclusion reviews the literature and offers an original way forward.”

This book successfully reflects the sustained efforts, on the part of Brill publishers, Leiden, the Netherlands, to become a major name in African Studies publishing, and thus to complement their excellent reputation built up over the centuries (!) in the fields of Asian studies, linguistics, religious studies specifically of Islam and Judaism, and the Ancient Near East in general. The cast of editors and contributors is intercontinental, featuring senior researchers from Europe along with the veteran North American Africanist political science Donald Rothchild, and from the Muslim world Shamil Idriss, an intercontinental peace negotiator so globalised that not even a specific location can be tagged to him in the list of contributors (p. 238); meanwhile, he excelled as a post-conflict negotiator in Burundi.

Dedicated to a question so absolutely vital to Africans today; to a question moreover that addresses African self-esteem and identity so directly (for instance, in Anna-Maria Gentili’s balanced and comprehensive chapter on ethnicity and citizenship); and produced at a moment in history when there is no longer a lack of Africans who in terms of publication record and international reputation can compete with North Atlantic Africanists, one would have preferred to see far more African contributors in this book. Yet the background and the academic stature of the first editor, Patrick Chabal, for one, guarantees that the book is largely free from the estranging and condescending othering vis-à-vis Africa, still so often found in this genre of writings. Chabal’s emphasis on dominant strands of rationality and modernity in African situations today (pp. 10f) is certainly well-taken.

However, this does not prevent that the *politics of North-South knowl-*

edge production receive little explicit attention in this volume. If the range of possible sources of inspiration for the book's arguments is somewhat wider than usual, it is because of the repeated reference made to 'consultants' reports' (to be sure, to complement, not to replace, more fundamental and professional academic research) – rather than because of any extensive epistemological and, in general, philosophical reflection on such points as:

- the nature of society and of conflict,
- the nexus (far from self-evident) between conflict and violence,
- the place of violence not just in 'the' African 'postcolony' but in *any* state regardless of space and time.
- what rights and what duties do (the representatives of) other states, even from other continents, have to intervene in African conflicts, and on what systematic and fundamental grounds
- how does such intervention (with its potentially liberating, but also potentially hegemonic implications) relate to the epistemological assumption, underlying the present book, that North Atlantic knowledge production on Africans and Africa is largely unproblematic and self-evident – in other words, how can we prevent that scholarly knowledge production naïvely paves the way for military control (like in the old anthropological debate on counter-insurgency research),¹ – and how can our research, on the contrary, help to differentiate between North Atlantic expansionism and genuine (and justified) humanitarian intervention.

The reader will look in vain for a fundamentally theoretical, philosophical underpinning of the kind of political and social theories underlying the specific social and political science arguments in this book. Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Marx, Weber, Derrida, Bataille, Arendt, Sartre, Girard, Levinas and

¹ Cf. Buytenhuys, R., 1972, 'Defeating Mau Mau: Some observations on "Counter Insurgency Research" in Kenya during the Emergency', *Sociologische Gids*, xix, no. v/vi (1972), pp. 329-339. For a general introduction to the work of this lamented pioneer student of violence in Africa, see: Konings, P., van Binsbergen, W., & Hesselings, G., eds., 2000, *Trajectoires de libération en Afrique noire* (Festschrift Buytenhuys), Paris: Karthala. I derive the 1972 reference from that book's bibliography.

Habermas, and most of their heirs in political philosophy today, both inside and outside Africa, are almost entirely absent (although one welcomes a reference to Wamba-dia-Wamba on p. 44, to Giddens on p. 228 – not deemed worthy of inclusion in the book’s Index – and especially to Foucault as the *deus ex machina* leading on to an alternative research agenda, pp. 226f).

The book’s arguments (plural) suggest a sympathetic and somewhat hopeful ‘*not really, not under all circumstances*’ as the answer to the book’s central question (*Is violence inevitable in Africa?*). However, the book’s empirical orientation (with excellent case studies of Angola by Christopher Cramer, of Congo by Theodore Trefon, and of Mali by Gerti Hesselting and Han van Dijk) has at least one weakness. It takes rather for granted current social science (including political science) discourse, without indicating the epistemological boundary conditions of the implied claim of validity of such discourse. From the perspective of *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, this means that the impressive array of data and theories, brought together in this book (so as to offer a justified and timely critique of a central tenet of Afropessimism; and so as to guide intercontinental peace interventions as well as the latter’s counter-hegemonic critics), will have to be further developed in a philosophical direction, in a discussion process especially involving many more senior African participants, before the book’s conclusions can be given the full weight they yet deserve. In a way, of course, the book’s suggesting a Foucaultian alternative research agenda implies, self-reflexively, the existence and the acknowledgment of such boundary conditions, but if the book had been truly coherent to the extent claimed by the editors in their Preface (p. vii), such an afterthought had been allowed to inform the actual contributions in this book much more centrally.

The ideal book of this nature would perhaps also have managed to avoid certain other blind spots. One would have liked to see much more central attention for such social technologies of conflict management and conflict resolution as are so highly developed and – at the grassroots level – so conspicuous in African societies; in particular, we need to understand why, time and time again, it has proven to be impossible for these mechanisms to be taken from the local and regional level, and to be implemented at the national and international level, without totally losing their earlier effective-

ness.² Of course, a book of this nature is bound to touch on South Africa and its relatively recent transition towards majority rule, which especially features in Donald Rothchild's piece on power-sharing and democratization as crucial elements in a two-phase peace implementation process, in the time-honoured American tradition of political science (pp. 147-170). *Quest* readers have had the privilege of familiarising themselves (see *Quest* volumes XV and XVI) with some of the cultural embedding, in Southern African societies, of non-violence through a normative and cosmological system recently reformulated under the heading of *ubuntu* ('being human') philosophy; and have also grown familiar with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as one of the more successful strategies to usher one particular African post-colonial state through an episode of heightened violence risk. But not all readers of this book can be expected to be similarly privileged, and a more extensive treatment of the South African case would certainly have enhanced this book's width and depth.

Meanwhile, let us not pretend that philosophers exercise the monopoly over some magic stone that brings them substantially closer to truth and relevance than members of other academic disciplines. Philosophers, particularly, have not always been Africa's most perceptive and most self-critical observers, either; and since Plato, and despite the latter's own views, we have known that, in general, it is a disaster to have philosophers leading the state. It is only fair to say that African Studies, also when pursued by scholars in the North Atlantic, constitutes an established and honourable discipline in its own right, which may well claim the room needed to operate its own concepts and theories, without constantly having to feel the hot breath of more fundamental theory in its neck – however wholesome such a breath is occasionally.

As a sample of ongoing research, especially in Europe, on African violent conflict, this book is a considerable achievement. The synthetic and comparative chapters by Klaas van Walraven on African conflict resolution

² Cf. the work of my adoptive kinsman, van Binsbergen, W.M.J., 2003, 'Reconciliation: Ideas and procedures constituting the African social technology of shared and recognised humanity', in his *Intercultural encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality*, Berlin/Muenster, LIT, pp. 349-374, also at http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/reconcil.htm.

(albeit only *above* the grassroots level), and of Andreas Mehler on area studies, conflict analysis and preventive practice, are highly useful in their comprehensiveness and subtlety. Also Ulf Engel's concluding chapter is a commendable piece of work, both in its review of the literature and in its attempt to formulate an alternative research agenda.

Although the book does not appear to be an initiative of the Leiden African Studies Centre, the sheer prominence of that one institute's members among the contributors (Mirjam de Bruijn, Han van Dijk, Klaas van Walraven, Gerti Hesseling), and the weight of their pieces in the book as a whole, suggest the prominent place of that institution in North Atlantic African studies today – especially in the sense of addressing, in its research programmes, topical issues that are of considerable relevance for the lives of Africans today, concentrating on major structural themes in action, and doing so in a comprehensive research effort that reaches from the grassroots level (the 'perspective from below' offered in de Bruijn and van Dijk's paper on 'Natural resources, scarcity and conflict') to the intercontinental level of northern interventions in violent conflicts on African soil. Considering the extensive institutional and personal link which that institution entertains with African researchers and organisations (e.g. CODESRIA), one would have wished for an even greater impact of the Leiden crowd on the present book.

If theoretically-orientated research of this quality could join hands with philosophers (especially African philosophers) working on violence, conflict and the state in Africa, from their respective disciplinary and identitary positions, we could make a major step out of the Afropessimist nightmare.

IN THE NAME OF OIL

Oil, Politics, Poverty & The Planet, Toby Shelly, London: Zed Books, 2005,
pp. 220, ISBN 1842775219

A Review by Sanya Osha

The exploration, exploitation and consumption of the world's petroleum resources have long ceased to be matters that are decided by single nation-states. Indeed, they have become truly global issues through which a part of the dynamics- in their positive and negative effects- of globalisation can be understood. Toby Shelley's *Oil: Politics, Poverty & the Planet* offers a largely factual reportage of the various developments that have made the politics of oil an issue mere nation-states are not in a position to deliberate upon, decide or act alone. A point he continually stresses is that:

At the global level, oil and natural gas are inseparable from geostrategy. The quest of the powerful consumer nations for access to energy on their own terms runs parallel to the clashes over agricultural subsidies (...). In the energy sector, the natives of producer countries are good natives as long as they guarantee supply of oil and natural gas at prices that are low enough to be acceptable to companies and governments in the rich consumer countries and high enough to keep the nodding-donkey producers of Pennsylvania and the shareholders of the oil majors happy (Shelly, 2005:196).

So the politics of oil exploitation and consumption is central to how global dynamics are configured and shaped and are in turn influenced by a variety of local and global factors. Since global politics is generally dominated by the most powerful nations of the world, it isn't surprising that

“controlling access to hydrocarbon reserves has been an abiding feature of foreign policy since the First World War” (Ibid. p. 2)

The struggle to control this vital resource has also been the cause of many major conflicts. For instance, it led to the overthrow of Mussadeq in Iran, the Suez Crisis in the 1950s, the price increases in 1973 and also the Arab embargo in the same year. In addition the conflicts that erupted as a result of

interrupted supply of oil include the 1979 Iranian revolution, the tanker wars of the 1980s and of course the Gulf crises of 1990 and 2003. As long as oil remains crucial to the engine of the world economy, it will always be a source of conflict. Ron Paul, a US congressman links the access to, and supply of oil with the question of the US national interests and by extension, national security. With this kind of perception, it is easy to understand why the politics and fate of oil have moved beyond the countries who own or produce them. According US congressman Raul;

In dealing with foreign policy, because we mess up our energy policy, we have this so-called great need to defend our oil, and it drives our foreign policy. Whether it is in Colombia to protect a pipeline, whether it is in Venezuela to have our CIA involved, whether it is in the persistent occupation of the Persian Gulf (which does not serve our interests), whether it is in our control of where and how the oil comes of the Caspian Sea, and possibly our presence in Afghanistan, may all possibly be related to energy (Raul cited by Shelly, *ibid.* p. 82).

By virtue of the views expressed above, the global dimensions of the control of, and access to, oil resources become clearer. Through them, it demonstrates the extent to which the United States is willing to go in pursuing what it sees to be in its interests. Of course, other nations are bound to have important interests tied to the politics of oil which Shelly does not disclose. Neither does he explore the consequences of some countries being ready to go to any extent to secure their interests pertaining to oil.

What he does instead is to present precise estimates of oil reserves in various parts of the world. In this connection, we are informed that

“in the last ten years 1993-2002, proven oil reserves of the Middle East rose over 45 per cent to 699 billion barrels, those of Africa rose over 45 per cent to some 94 billion, and those of the former Soviet Union increased over 35 per cent to some 78 billion” (*Ibid.* p. 13)

Shelley also explores what is known as the “Dutch curse”. This simply means that nations that have an abundance of petroleum or other natural resources would not necessarily become rich. The origin of the phrase the Dutch curse

“refers to the mutation of the Dutch economy during the tulip boom of the sixteenth century; the other is that it derives from the impact of natural gas development and

export in the 1960s. The theory states that large windfalls in one sector tend to drive up the exchange rate, making exports of other sectors more expensive and imports cheaper" (Ibid. p. 35).

Accordingly, countries such as Algeria, Ecuador, Indonesia, Nigeria, Trinidad and Tobago as well as Venezuela received a windfall of \$22.5 billion in 1974 but only Indonesia was able to accomplish a significant diversification of its economy away from oil dependency. In this sense,

"Indonesia bucked the trend in managing oil windfall revenues, and its agricultural and manufacturing bases achieved strong growth through a combination of 'good luck and an abundant supply of labour relative to oil income' and government policies that accepted the need for a flexible exchange rate and emphasised programmes to raise rural incomes thus avoiding the Dutch disease" (Ibid. p. 37).

Nigeria had used the monetary resources derived from oil windfalls for capital projects in the petrochemical and metal sectors but these sectors were severely affected by the slump in the global petroleum markets. Consequently, Nigeria has become a country that suffers from a chronic case of the Dutch disease.

In addition, a connection can be made between oil exporting countries and the peculiar institutional formation known as the 'petro-state' which in essence is a predatory autocracy. Shelley suggests that the petro-state is especially vulnerable to corruption. Citing Terry Lynn Karl, we are informed:

"Petro-states are not like other states. While they share many of the development patterns of other developing countries, especially mineral exporters, the economies and politics of countries dependent on oil are rapidly and relentlessly shaped by the influx of petrodollars in a manner that sets them apart from other states. Oil wealth moulds the institutions more dramatically than developments specialists ever imagined or even seem to understand. This is especially true if petroleum exploitation coincides with modern state building, as has so often been the case. Where this historical coincidence occurs, petro-states become marked by especially skewed institutional capacities" (Ibid. pp. 43-44).

Countries such as Russia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia all manifest different features of the petro-economy or in this case, the petro-state. For instance, in Russia,

"the transition from Soviet rule to capitalism was marked by the transformation of

powerful civil service barons into the oligarchs whose manoeuvrings dominate political and economic life in the country” (Ibid. p. 45).

As such,

“complex political stratagems, reminiscent of medieval court intrigues” (Ibid.)

dominate the petroleum sector and other vital areas of contemporary Russian life. In relation to Saudi Arabia, we are informed that

“oil rents have long been skimmed by the ruling family and its dependent caste” (Ibid. p. 47).

In general terms, oil-producing countries tend to be unaccountable and so misappropriation, corruption and plunder are common.

In the legal sphere, the effects of petro-state are quite evident since it usually means a formal, abstract conception of law and justice is difficult to enforce and so the question of corruption gets doubly complicated because it is not always underpinned by categorical imperatives. Shelley employs several useful examples from various petro-states to support this view.

Indeed, there are many negative developments attributable to petroleum and its exploitation. For instance, the population of oil-producing countries in the Middle East and North Africa increased by 2.5 per cent in the 1970s and 1980s but we also have to take into account that oil and natural gas are finite resources. The most obvious consequences of population growth with decreasing revenue from oil are economic decline with the attendant problems of low mortality rates, poor literacy levels, high incidence of child malnutrition and the widespread emasculation of social services.

The parable of the Dutch curse in this context makes penetrating sense. Oil wealth does not necessarily equate with national development. Thus,

“there is an argument that oil wealth can increase the proportion of the population living in poverty, overpowering the beneficial effects of a statistical rise in per capita income” (Ibid. p. 40).

It is possible to explore and exploit oil thousands of feet below sea level and Nigeria and Angola in Africa have been identified as important sources of off-shore petroleum in the foreseeable future. But this as we know is hardly pleasing news as it is not likely to translate to wealth for the collective good

of Nigerians or Angolans. Perhaps it is now more urgent to explore in more concrete terms the relationship between petroleum exploitation and the destruction of biodiversity and indeed the earth.

However, the overriding point Shelley makes is that the politics of oil exploitation is now fully global. He concedes that this global drive has serious implications for the environment. Indeed

“the social impact of climate change is global. The low-lying Netherlands’ exposure to coastal flooding and storm damage and its dependence on coastal defences is epitomised in the folkloric tale of a boy who blocked a hole in a dyke with his finger” (Ibid. p. 158).

Graphic as this metaphor is, it does not do enough to project the various dangers to the world’s ecology. A few other instances in Shelley’s book indicate these very real threats. In some of the oil-producing communities in Nigeria,

“flaring near settlements has meant that some communities have not had a dark night for years. The rain is acidic and crops and animal life are destroyed” (Ibid. p. 155).

Also, the pursuit of oil can lead to all out war involving several countries;

“In the South China Sea, the 500-mile chain of rocks known as the Spratly Islands is subject to territorial claims by no fewer than six countries interested in the unproven natural-gas and oil deposits lying beneath and around them. China, Vietnam and Taiwan claim sovereignty over all of the chain, while the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei claim a part” (Ibid. p. 78).

Surely, this kind of recipe can result in the outbreak of violent hostilities. In Africa, Nigeria and Cameroon have had their relations strained for years over the Bakassi Peninsula which is also oil rich.

Being a journalist, Shelley is adept at marshalling his facts. The United States consumed 19.9 million barrels of oil a day in 2001. It would need 31.8 million barrels a day in 2025. In 2003, China consumed 5.59 million barrels of oil a day. In 2030, it would require 162 billion cubic metres of natural gas a year. In 2002, India consumed 2.1 million barrels of oil most of which was imported. In 2030, it is projected that it would need 5.6 million barrels. Shelley frequently highlights that fact that China and India have become important nations on the global scale of petroleum consumption. He also mentions

that no alternatives to oil are expected in the immediate future. However, what we need to know is just how much of humanity and of the globe itself are at risk in 2025 or 2030? Would the world's ecology be able to support this drive of consumption? Again, Shelley does not pose these questions in ways that resonate throughout his book. Instead what he does is to state statistics relating to oil consumption and finds. We also need to know some of the more specific impacts of oil exploitation or at least identify a way of situating their deeper significance in relation to the future of the earth. For policy makers who need facts to make projections for the machinery of bureaucracy a lot in Shelley's book should be quite useful. And for those who are concerned with the future of the earth, there is some material to build a broader (than the book incorporates) conceptual vision for a world that is becoming increasingly interlinked.

Shelley makes a number of revelations one already suspects to be true. One of them is that petro-states are generally prone to corruption and institutional dysfunction. Another is that oil wealth does not necessarily lead to broad national wealth. Also, he points out that the inexorable pursuit of oil for purposes of exploitation can easily lead to war among several nations. Given these unpalatable truths about the politics of exploitation and consumption, we are left to ponder the possibilities of these negative attributes of oil leading to global chaos. Indeed the pursuit of oil can and does lead to chaos and there are many studies of specific cases. Shelley's books of facts forces us to pose this question – can oil lead to global chaos? – which he does not attempt to answer.

THE MAKING OF A MODERN POSTCOLONIAL CULTURE

The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities by Charles Francis Hutchison, Michel R. Doortmont, ed., Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005, pp. 497, ISBN 90-04-14097-2

A Review by Sanya Osha

It is always pleasing to come across snapshots of Victorian culture playing themselves out in peculiar ways in West African history and lives. Charles Francis Hutchison's book, *The Pen-Pictures of Modern Africans and African Celebrities* which was first published around 1930 boldly tackles various experiences of unfolding modernity within a dominant ambience of colonialism. The predominant dialectic is familiar enough: colonizer/ colonised and tradition/ modernity. But within the context of the dominant binary logic, the surprises of existence are what one finds truly arresting, that is, the ways in which colonised/ 'native' subjects navigate the strange byways of euro-modernity and in the process, re-make themselves, their life-worlds, their cultures and other subjects around them. In essence, not only are they re-invented as subjects but also, the entire fabrics of their societies are reconstructed.

Charles Francis Hutchison was successful Gold Coast businessman who was born in Cape Coast in 1879. He trained as a surveyor in England in the 1890s and then returned to the Gold Coast where he became the pre-eminent land surveyor. He had also been sired by

“one of the most prominent Euro-African families of the nineteenth-century Gold Coast, namely the Hutchison-Bartels clan of Cape Coast and Elmina” (p. 16).

In addition, his great-grandfather was William Hutchison, a Scot who had served the colonial administration in the Gold Coast. Indeed, within the Gold Coast of that era, it was not surprising to find families with European ancestry or members. Some Europeans – Dutch, Danish or British – married local women and raised families thereby creating what in various ways might be

termed ‘subjectivities of whiteness’ within the populace.

The political context in which Hutchison’s book was conceived and written is equally interesting. Great social and political changes were occurring. An African elite had emerged in the sphere of international trade and commerce. The Atlantic slave trade had more or less provided the grounds for the creation of the local elite. And then as the slave trade ended to make way for legitimate trade in agricultural produce and minerals, new processes of social stratification and re-alignment re-configured the social scene. In other words, fortunes were made and lost. The agglomeration of interests that emerged from this socio-economic flux was indeed crucial to the making of modern Ghana. As processes of social stratification set in, so did the nature and configurations of political power change. At a time, the local elite were fairly cordial partners with the agents of empire. In other words, they aided the machinery of the colonial administration either as minor bureaucrats or as trading partners. Afterwards, the colonial machine preferred to deal with traditional chieftains thereby incurring the displeasure of the local trading, educated elite. It was the displeasure of the elite that eventually provided the fuel for the sentiments that congealed to make modern Ghanaian nationalism leading to the moment of political liberation. Obviously, this change in the general political climate also led to a transformation of the perception and subjectivity of whiteness. The book captures the crucial moments of incipient anti-colonialism that emerged in the 1890s.

So Hutchison’s book incorporates a number of registers; it is first and foremost, a celebration of the lives of prominent Gold Coast indigenes, it is also a portrait of subtle and overt colonial social relations, a commentary on the various subjectivities of whiteness, in addition, a somewhat understated translocal engagement with the dialectics of freedom as espoused anti-slavery movement of the United States and finally, a depiction of the multiple social tensions involved in the making of a modern postcolonial culture. These are the broad discursive registers that inform the book.

However, we must bear in mind that the book in fact comprises biographical sketches in blank verse and prose. Part of its strength lies in being able to reveal a great deal of historical truths within those sketches of biography. In all, there are sketches of 162 individuals from fairly diverse professional backgrounds- mercantile/business, civil service, law, traditional rulership, the clergy, medicine and engineering.

Michel Doortmont who has done an impressive job of preparing a new edition of Hutchison's book mentions some of its values; it is an important source book on vital segments of Ghanaian history, as a text filled with photographs, it is both a piece of cultural commentary as well a significant product of art, it is, in the same vein, a work of West African literary art as well as historiography and finally, it is an important launch pad for other historical and theoretical projects.

In Doortmont's words,

"Hutchison often provides numerous snippets of information that are the product of intimate personal knowledge of the individuals described, and give the reader a detailed and very private insight into the life and times of the Gold Coast educated elite of Hutchison's generation, and that of his father, making the book both a historical biographical dictionary and an intimate sketch of upper class Gold Coast society in the twentieth century" (p. 1).

Doortmont introduction to the new edition of Hutchison's book puts it in its proper perspective. In addition, he has added new biographical information and footnotes to amplify the significance of Hutchison's historic text. Indeed Doortmont undertakes a major role not only in restoring the cultural significance of Hutchison's text but also in amplifying it through further research and elaboration. This process took years of research into Gold Coast family history by various methods of archival study (libraries and newspapers) and oral interviews. In this sense, Doortmont accomplishes two objectives. First, through academic research, he brings to the fore an important cultural text and second, he evaluates the achievements of its author by putting them in their proper perspective. Accordingly, we discover that Hutchison wrote other works- *A Eulogy of White Celebrities of British West Africa*, *African Cameos: A book of entertaining stories*, *Shades of Africa: Reflects Life, Scenery and Psychology*. Other titles by Hutchison include, *Man of Genius: A book on the miracles of the subconscious mind* and *The Problem of Progressive Africa: Corrective monologues of African psychology*. Those were indeed culturally rich times for an inspiring mind.

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