

Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies

Introduction

by Wim van Binsbergen

Abstract: Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies: Introduction. The present special issue on ‘Lines and rhizomes – Transcontinental encounters in African philosophies’ brings together a number of studies united by what seems to be a common – though in some cases implicit – orientation: the recognition that philosophy, whilst localised and home-bound in the philosopher’s body, a language, a writing system, a community of scholars, a journal, a regional and continental history etc., is at the same time unbounded in the sense that without worldwide inspiration, exploration and finally expertise in modes and systems of thought (both formal and informal) away from home, the universalising component of all conceptualisation and all verbal articulation risks to be unable to unfold its powers of imagination by which it creates and recreates the world; unable, also, to renew itself and to address the kind of novel problematics that the history of the last two centuries – and especially of the last two decades – has strewn so generously over our heads. What we see here is an assembly of authors who in many ways qualify as a collective of African philosophers, most of them hailing from Africa, all of them living with and writing on Africa, yet in a transcontinental orientation that reminds us how long ago it is that the debate on the possibility and the existence of an African philosophy has subsided. If Africa is anything, it is part of the world of humankind as a whole. If African thought is anything, it is both a resource for, and a celebration of, the thought of humankind as a whole. Therefore, the boundaries of historic identity and localising organisational structure that were once necessary so as to allow us to think African difference, may now increasingly become interfaces of exchange, geared to the pursuit of distant promises in space and time, and to the recognition of a common ground in what was once construed to be mutually exotic.

Résumé: Des lignes et des rhizomes – L’élément transcontinental dans les philosophies africaines: Introduction. Le présent numéro spécial de *QUEST* offre un nombre d’études unifiées par ce qui semble être une orientation commune (bien qu’elle reste implicite dans certains cas): tous les contributions

affirment que la philosophie soit, de l'un côté, localisée, orientée vers un chez-soi par son encadrement dans le corps d'un philosophe, dans une langue, dans un système d'écriture, une communauté des savants, une revue, une histoire régionale et continentale, etc. ; mais que de l'autre côté et en même temps, la philosophie ne connaît pas des frontières – ce qui veut dire que sans une inspiration mondiale, sans l'exploration aboutant à l'expertise dans des modes et des systèmes de pensée (formels aussi bien qu'informels) qui sont loins du chez-soi, l'élément universalisant impliqué dans toute conceptualisation et dans toute articulation verbale, risque d'être rendu incapable d'étendre, jusqu'au maximum, ses pouvoirs d'imagination par lesquels il crée et recrée le monde ; incapable aussi de se renouveler et d'adresser les problématiques nouveaux tels que l'histoire des deux siècles plus récents, et surtout des deux décennies les plus récentes, nous ont imposés en grand nombre. Ce que nous voyons ici, c'est un ensemble d'auteurs qui, dans plusieurs façons, qualifient comme collectif de philosophes africains, le plupart d'eux nés en Afrique, tous vivant avec et écrivant sur l'Afrique, mais néanmoins engagés dans une orientation transcontinentale qui nous rappelle combien de temps s'est écoulé depuis la fin du débat sur la possibilité et l'existence d'une philosophie africaine. Si l'Afrique est une réalité, c'est comme partie du monde humain entier. Si la pensée africaine est une réalité, c'est comme ressource pour, et comme célébration de, la pensée humaine entière. Par conséquent, les limites définissant et protégeant une identité historique et une organisation locale qui, il y a cinquante ans, étaient indispensable pour nous permettre de penser la différence africaine, aujourd'hui deviennent de plus en plus des champs d'échange – en poursuivant les promesses lointaines dans l'espace et dans le temps, et en reconnaissant un fond commun dans ce qui, avant, était mutuellement construit comme exotique, excluant et exclu.

Key words: Transcontinental, African philosophies, historic identity, localisation, globalisation, African difference, Greek-African continuity, universalism, rationality, Afrocentrism, Socrates, sagacity, panpsychism, anthropocentrism, Teilhard de Chardin

Mots-clefs: Transcontinental, les philosophies africaines, identité historique, localisation, mondialisation, la différence africaine, la continuité grecque-africaine, universalisme, rationalité, Afrocentrisme, Socrate, sagacité, sagesse, pan-psychisme, anthropocentrisme, Teilhard de Chardin

The present special issue on 'Lines and rhizomes – The transcontinental element in African philosophies' brings together a number of studies united by what seems to be a common – though in some cases implicit – orientation: the recognition that philosophy, whilst localised and home-bound in the philosopher's body, a language, a writing system, a community of scholars, a journal, a regional and continental history etc., is at the same time unbounded in the sense that without worldwide

inspiration, exploration and finally expertise in modes and systems of thought (both formal and informal) away from home, the universalising component of all conceptualisation and all verbal articulation risks to be unable to unfold its powers of imagination by which it creates and recreates the world; unable, also, to renew itself and to address the kind of novel problematics that the history of the last two centuries – and especially of the last two decades – has strewn so generously over our heads. What we see here is an assembly of authors who in many ways qualify as a collective of African philosophers, most of them hailing from Africa, all of them living with and writing on Africa, yet in a transcontinental orientation that reminds us how long ago it is that the debate on the possibility and the existence of an African philosophy has subsided. If Africa is anything, it is part of the world of humankind as a whole. If African thought is anything, it is both a resource for, and a celebration of, the thought of humankind as a whole. Therefore, the boundaries of historic identity and localising organisational structure that were once necessary so as to allow us to think African difference, may now increasingly become interfaces of exchange, the pursuit of distant promises in space and time, and the recognition of a common ground in what was once construed to be mutually exotic.

In this protean and kaleidoscopic process, which defies strict definition and runs in the face of established institutional and emotional interests, we are fortunate to take our lead from a contribution by that great ambassador of African difference in universalism, Valentin Mudimbe. In the opening contribution to this special issue, he ponders on the apparently trivial question: *what is a line*. (The smallest unit of graphic marking, the minimum way in which we can make a lasting impact on the world? The minimum gesture by which we can assault the sacrality of sacred books – to which we have been summoned not to alter even the smallest, line-like letter?¹ The basic component of the string games that, for some profound reason that yet escapes us for the time being, are one of the conspicuous universals of us, Anatomically Modern

¹ Cf. the *New Testament* of the Christian *Bible*, Mt. 5: 18.

Humans, who have constituted the only surviving human group on earth for the past 20,000 years? The scratches that, throughout the Upper Paleolithic, appear on animal bones and that have been rather convincingly argued to represent counting systems and lunar calendars? The boundary we draw on the ground. The sign Jesus of Nazareth drew on the ground, as his eloquent comment in a dispute on boundedness and unboundedness?).² For a start, let me cite the abstract of Mudimbe's inimitable text, which combines a profusion of heterogeneous inspirations from all over time and space, with yet, a common purpose – marking him as a post-African who dedicates this particular contribution to philosophy (protected and hallowed by layer upon layer of reference and quotation at the beginning of the piece) to his Latin American students, inhabitants of a largely diasporic continent where, by the vicissitudes of history and political economy, one is often compelled to be (structurally) African in a way not unlike Mudimbe's own way.

‘What is a line? The question is naïve. That is the way it would seem to anyone: simple and credulous, it would not need to be checked in a dictionary. Does not the notion of line bring to mind images and representations that are transparent to the point of not needing explanation? Any speaker knows that a line, real or imaginary, signifies a path, a continuous point, a moving mark. It is from such a perception, that one might invest it in expressions in which it functions as both designation of a reality and its figure; thus, for instance: the line of a mountain, for contour; the line of a body, for its shape; the line of water, for a demarcation. *A metaphor, it operates in our everyday life with such efficiency that we come to forget that this simple word not only organizes our spatial perception, but determines our conceptualization of basic rapports between front and back, deep and shallow, in and out, near and far, on and off, up and down, past and present, today and tomorrow, etc.* Looked at, from this awareness, one may then move toward what the directionality of the line implies, both the idea of *separation and distinction of parts it creates*. Our physical geography, the whole domain of our culture, including mental configurations and our relations to nature, are *topographies structured by lines*. It is not my intention to orient this reflection into debates brought, few decades ago, to the core of structuralism about whether binary oppositions—they are not detachable from the notion of line that defines their distance—are, or are not social constructs. *My purpose is, from the ordinariness of lines as figures determining spaces in the practice of everyday life, to interrogate what they suppose and impose in allegories that bring us in dialogue or separate us*

² Cf. the *New Testament* of the *Christian Bible*, John 8: 6.

in confrontation.' (Mudimbe, contribution below)

What is particularly interesting is that, in his play on lines, Mudimbe strongly emphasises the way lines may serve as boundaries separating A | from B. And of course, from him as a post-structuralist we expect to be reminded of *the separation that is not a separation but a union* – a trope recurring in his own work (e.g. on the distinction of night and day) and worked out into many of its profound implications by Derrida. However, this one-sided emphasis on separation goes at the expense of what is yet a line's most obvious characteristic: *that it constitutes the shortest connection between two points* (in other words, not A | B but A – B). The latter notion has been scientifically canonised at least ever since – millennia after the rise of mathematics as a distinct subject in Egypt and Mesopotamia – the Hellenistic Greek Euclides formalised his planimetry. Yet this notion of line as most effective connection is infinitely older in humankind's conscious conceptualisation of the world: see the above allusion to string games; of the African myths of people, cattle, agricultural seeds, implements, even the Creator himself (herself?), descending from heaven on a line (a spider's thread?) – an idea which, according to myths, people were soon to revert so as to try and ascend to heaven.

The transcontinental lines that are at the heart of the present collection, are *lines of connection* – real, imagined, hoped for or resented, sometimes implied but overlooked or shunned, the choice of a distant reference group, a distant example that is 'good for thought', a thinker probing in a different language in a largely unfamiliar culture, hundreds of years ago, a problematic that yet has much in common with those challenging our thought here and now.

Such variegated lines of real or virtual intellectual connection are not always manifest, above ground, and rectilinear. Usually they are the opposite: not directly visible to the eye, but manifested by the sudden growth that pops up in unexpected places – the mushrooms spread in a circle around their invisible mycellium that has secretively survived in the earth during winter, spring and early summer, and that only towards autumn makes its presence known indirectly. It is the place where one

solemnly positions oneself to make secret wishes. In the last few decades, the conceptual toolbox of philosophy and literary studies has been enriched by Deleuze and Guattari's illuminating use of the concept 'rhizome', with similar implications.

Although united by this common theme of distant, often hidden, often vicarious, often virtual, yet unmistakable lines of connection which usually are transcontinental and transcultural, the collection that makes up the present special issue ramifies off in all directions, as befits a rhizomatic process revolving on the powers of thought and of imagination. Let us briefly review the contributions.

After Mudimbe's breath-taking and immensely inspiring equilibrium act on the suspended line high near the roof of the circus (and let us not forget that it is lines that keep the tent in place, and taut), Samba Diakité shows us an apparently very different equilibrium act which yet, in its hope for a trans-African universalism and his deconstruction of things (usually constructed to be) African, somewhat reminds us of Mudimbe: the prominent Cameroonian philosopher Marcien Towa as a 'Wanderer zwischen zwei Welten' (a wanderer between two worlds, or cultures). Here the rhizome appears to have toxic qualities: in the face of the West and its impact, the original African home is poisoned and rendered uninhabitable, and Towa's response to this situation is very different from Mudimbe's. Instead of the latter's positive affirmation of meta-African world citizenship,³ Towa *retreats*:

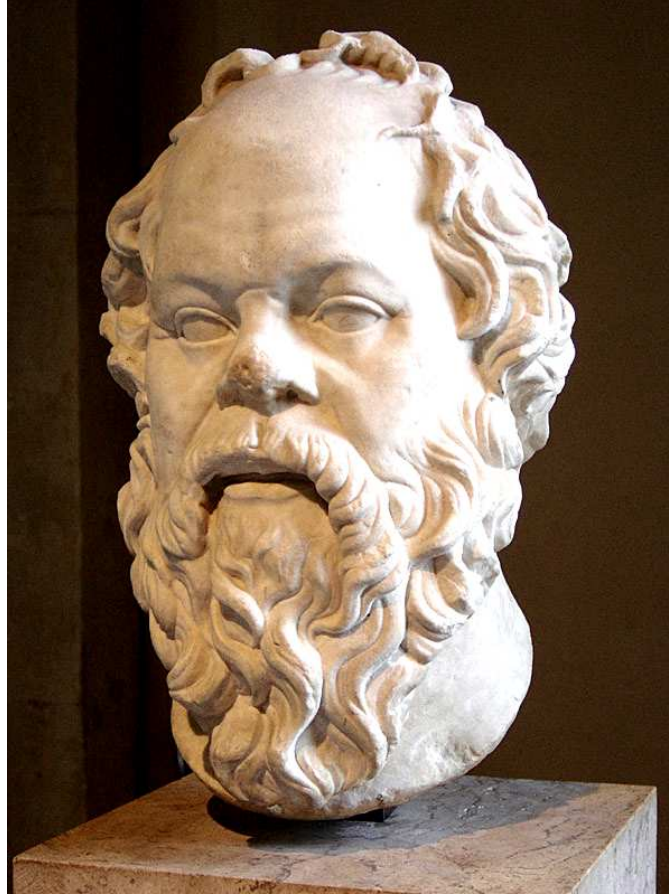
'A retrospective view of the past gives way to ironic distancing from the uncertainties of the African continent, staggering on the bridge between two oceans.' (Diakité, contribution below).

³ In this respect my earlier analysis of what I identified as the central theme of Mudimbe's thought: homelessness in the face of death, was too negative and pessimistic: between homelessness, and the poetics (in Wittgensteinian terms, the language games) of philosophy, stands – as I have been privileged to experience in personal contact with Mudimbe in recent years – the recognition and celebration of a shared humanity in fellow human beings; cf. 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; http://www.shikanda.net/african_religion/mudil0.htm.

Because of its truncated nature as an obituary, Jean-Bertrand Amougou's paper on the recently deceased Cameroonian philosopher Hebga (1928-2008) had to be put in the section 'QUEST laboratory'. Yet Towa's position is strikingly thrown in relief by comparison with Hebga's life-long, insistent, eclectic and essentially optimistic probing for philosophical inspiration that would enable him and his readers (may they be many!) to address the specifics of modern Africa with the help of conceptual and analytical tools that – like so much in modern Africa – would combine local and transcontinental sources, resources, traditions and misconceptions. Amougou recently took a PhD on the basis of a thesis exploring in detail Hebga's highly original variety of rationality, one that did not prevent the latter to engage with Kant and Habermas, and to find – as a priest – shelter in the universalising conceptual and organisational edifice of Roman Catholicism; yet at the same time that form of rationality allowed Hebga to take African spirituality very seriously, and to write one of the most significant and sophisticated treatises on paranormal phenomena from an African perspective. Hebga thus situates himself firmly in the tradition of clerical intellectualism, that has brought us some of the finest philosophy from and in Africa, including Mudimbe's. Here the transcontinental connections make Africa appear, not as a staggering drunk unable to make up his mind whether to drown himself either in the Indian or the Atlantic Ocean, but as an essentially composed and sane, once richly endowed person, determined to find conceptual solutions for the problems of meaning that beset him at present, and drawing great comfort from realising that his resources are not just local but global, and extending across all of human history.

It is a universalising and globalising, yet at the same time Africanising positioning that we may also detect in Appiah *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*, and we are fortunate to have, in the present issue, Mohammad Hossein Seifikar's review of Appiah's recent book on cosmopolitanism.

Fig. 1. Bust considered to represent Socrates, 1st c. CE Roman copy, now in the Louvre museum, Paris, France



As compared to Towa as mediated by Diakit , our next paper, by Victor S. Alumona, engages in a far more optimistic transcontinental encounter: a detailed analysis of the flow of verbal exchanges in Plato's *Protagoras* shows that one cannot teach new tricks to an old horse (which clearly applies to both characters, the inquisitive and incisive Socrates as well as the inveterate sophist Protagoras). But it also, implicitly, shows us something else: the flight of the spirit makes light with the compartmentalisation of the world in neatly demarcated provinces, regions, cultures and competences, and it is perfectly normal for an African scholar to address a debate in the history of ancient Greek philosophy, and make a contribution there – which is therefore also a contribution to philosophy in Africa –, without the word 'Africa' entering

even once into his or her argument. In recent decades we have seen the attempt to conveniently but also naïvely – almost Hollywood fashion – localise this sort of endeavour, by making of Socrates a Black man in continuity with sub-Saharan African culture. This Afrocentrist interpretation (and, in the present collection, Lusala lu ne Nkuka Luka's review of Jean Foukoué's book on Cheikh Anta Diop reminds us once more of one of its brilliant main inspirators) was passionately contested by North Atlantic classicists like Mary Lefkowitz; and admittedly it is not much of a convincing argument to go by the blunt, unclassical features of the man depicted in the one portrait bust (dating from over four centuries after Socrates' death!) traditionally considered to represent Socrates (Fig. 1).

The physiognomy of the depicted man follows a convention well established in Hellenic and Hellenistic sculpture – that of the rustic Silenus, whose more overt connotations would be Asian rather than African. However, as lies in the nature of the rhizomatic connections of thought and imagination that we are interested in here, there is much more to this than meets the entrenched scholarly eye of the classicist. I am thinking of Greek myths insisting on the need for a murderer to be cleansed before being re-admitted to human society (for all we know we may be reading pages from Evans-Pritchard's account of the Nuer leopard-skin chief and his functions as an earth priest).⁴ I am thinking, more in general, of Africa's time-honoured institutions of community democracy and reconciliatory procedures and rituals, suggesting that the proto-historic bedding from which democracy issued – probably not very different from the proto-historic bedding from which *philosophy* issued – was much more extensive, in space and in time, than merely the Aegean region in the Middle Iron Age, and somehow seems to have included a considerable African component. And I am thinking of the Greek myth depicting two primal gods so locked in embrace that their offspring, representing creation, cannot issue from the primal womb (cf. the Yoruba

⁴ Evans-Pritchards, E.E., 1967, *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people*, Oxford: Clarendon; reprint of the original edition of 1940.

myth of Obatala and Oduduwa similarly engaged).⁵ It would be an interesting experiment – probably long realised already – to let selected dialogues of Plato be presented at the stage by West African actors in some Soyinkan, thoroughly Africanising *mis-en-scène*; it would show that Robert Graves, the poet, novelist, and amateur editor of Greek myths, had a point when stressing the continuity between Ancient Greek intellectual culture, and West Africa. Literally making of Socrates an African amounts to taking recourse in a fallacy of misplaced concreteness, but the fact remains that the flashing, confrontational, challenging style of argument seeking to create fixed points in a fluid context of mutual impression management, as depicted in Plato's dialogues, has an unmistakable African flavour about it, difficult to miss for anyone who has spent years sitting in on African village moots, informal conversation under village shelters, at beer parties and at funerals. This is not the place to pursue these lines of connection with firm historical, linguistic and genetic evidence of Greek-African continuities;⁶ all what matters in the present connection is that, rhizomatically, such connections exist at least *in thought*, enough to make us look at Plato's *Protagoras* with eyes enriched by an African perspective.

Whereas Alumona's paper revolves on the critical representation of, and reflection upon, European philosophy by Africa, a more common occurrence has been the reverse: European representation of African non-academic modes of thought known through more or less extensive fieldwork, yielding a measure of cultural and linguistic competence typically built up in adulthood rather than (as is far more standard in cultural learning) from earliest infancy on. Barry Hallen has been one of the most successful Northerners engaged in such a process, and his name

⁵ Scheub, Harold, 2000, *A dictionary of African mythology: The mythmaker as storyteller*, Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press. There is a further transcontinental connection here since the same myth has been recorded for various parts of Oceania – but that is regrettably beyond our present scope.

⁶ Much of my research over the past ten years has concentrated on this question and related issues. Soon I hope to present, in the pages of *QUEST*, an article 'Before the Pre-Socratics' that explores these issues more fully.

reverberates through this volume of *QUEST*, with Kibujjo Kalumba's critical article assessing Hallen's approach, and Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo's review of Hallen's book, *African Philosophy: The Analytic Approach*, published in 2006.

However, apart from conditions created by historic accident during the ephemeral colonial period, there is no reason why the representation of African non-academic modes of thought should not be undertaken more effectively and congenially by people who from infancy have acquired the linguistic and cultural competence – including the many implicit and non-verbal elements – required for an appreciation and understanding of African life-forms and worldviews: by Africans themselves. It is here that the pioneering work of the lamented Odera Oruka situates itself, as brought out by Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo's full-paper contribution to the present special issue. He reminds us how Odera Oruka initially defined his own project:

Would it be possible to identify persons of traditional African culture, capable of the critical, second-order type of thinking about the various problems of human life and nature; persons, that is, who subject beliefs that are traditionally taken for granted to independent rational re-examination and who are inclined to accept or reject such beliefs on the authority of reason rather than on the basis of a communal or religious consensus?³

The difficulty does not so much lie in the identification of such African philosophic sagacity, nor in the communication with its spokespersons in the field, but in the subsequent *textual representation*. For what Odera Oruka had in mind was not making the wisdom of African sages available in the time-honoured format in which they had dispensed it so far (orally, and within the narrow horizon of the local community), but the form of discursive academic text, in print, in an imported world language of North Atlantic origin, and worldwide. This choice of format, taken to be self-evident yet bringing with it an entire Pandora's Box of intercultural confusion and misunderstanding (notably on the possibility, nature,

³ H. Odera Oruka, 'African Philosophy: The Current Debate' in H. Odera Oruka, ed; *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, Nairobi: ACTS Press, 1991, p. 17; as cited in Ochieng'-Odhiambo's contribution below.

format, academic setting, and possibility of African philosophy),⁷ situates Odera's project in the same rhizomatic transcontinental space as Hallen's, as that of ethno-philosophy, and at a somewhat greater distance, that of religious and worldview ethnography. Part of the attending misunderstandings are cleared up by Ochieng'-Odhiambo's argument.

Whilst Hallen's approach is painstaking, grounded in prolonged local engagement with African actors and in the process critically tested by them, a more common, North Atlantic initiated, form of transcontinental connection of African modes of thought is that of distant and stereotyping second-hand appropriation, as brought out in Wim van Binsbergen's critical study of the French post-structuralist philosopher Guattari – even though it is Guattari to whom we yet owe one of the focal concepts informing the present special issue. Here we have a typical paradox of transcontinental connections: while they fail to convince to the letter (for it is demonstrated that Guattari's handling of cultural material from outside the North Atlantic region is flawed in ways that fling into the face of his own philosophy of *reterritorialising* liberation), the subterranean rhizomatics of inspiration ensure that in the end our assessment of Guattari turns out to be much more positive. While anthropology (in itself an immensely problematic form of transcontinental connectivity in knowledge production)⁸ can act as a touchstone for Guattari's omissions and one-sidednesses, the more central themes in Guattari's thought may yet contribute, it is argued, to make

⁷ To avoid misunderstanding: I consider the commission of African philosophical oral text to a format of scholarly text to be a Pandora's Box (in the original, Hesiod sense of a sealed package containing assorted trouble), not because the task is impossible or futile, let alone because Northerners would be better equipped for it (they are not), but only because that Pandora's Box was allowed to remain an unanalysed *black box*, in other words, because the many and profound, completely distortive implications of the transition from orality to written, edited, translated text had been insufficiently addressed, and have insufficiently been brought to bear on the protracted debate on the possibility etc. of African philosophy. With the spate of writing on orature etc. in recent decades, this condition no longer obtains, and the debate has largely subsided.

⁸ Cf. my 2003 book: van Binsbergen, Wim M.J., 2003, *Intercultural Encounters: African and Anthropological Lessons towards a Philosophy of interculturality*. Berlin / Boston / Muenster: LIT.

anthropology's transcontinental mediation more effective and less entrenched, in other words far more palatable from an African point of view.

What can we use of the North Atlantic philosophical tradition, how can we selectively deploy it to elucidate our specific problematics in Africa today, and how can we hold our own – even go beyond – in the face of this transcontinental overkill in the way of resources, prestige and authority, publication facilities, canonisation. These are, implicitly, the considerations that appear to inform the remaining three contributions to this special issue.

Godwin Azenabor examines the Golden Rule principle which he imputes to underly significant forms of African ethics, and compares it with Kant's categorical imperative. It is refreshing to see how African ethics, even though somewhat cursorily identified, can be invoked as a vantage point from which to take a critical distance from Kant's rationalistic lack of social and humanitarian considerations. This points to another, largely unexplored way which the transcontinental connection in the context of African philosophy can take: the way in which African philosophy can contribute significant new, identifiably African, viewpoints and modes of analysis to globally circulating philosophical problematics and debates. In the last decade, the discussion around *ubuntu* (see below) has been one of the view signs of such a positive South-North feed-back in philosophical matters. Another growth-point would seem to be the reflection on African paranormal and divinatory phenomena.

Jacques Nanema, inspired by the development discourse that is one of the major public expressions in Africa especially informing transcultural encounters of a political and economic nature, seeks the confrontation with another Northern thinker, the educational philosopher Mounier and his humanism. Nanema's position combines obvious admiration for the person and work of his subject, with an implicit sense of resourcelessness and helplessness on the African side. Admittedly, North Atlantic formal education (along with Christianity as a world religion, the modern formal organisation informing the modern state and

the modern economy) has been one of the major transcultural transformational forces on the African continent in the past two centuries. But need it lead to a situation where the African commentator seems to be almost paralysed by awe and respect? After all, Nanema himself begins by affirming that education is the commonest thing in the world – so surely there is a plethora of African discourses on this matter, as a basis to ‘speak back’ to Mounier, and transcend his inspiring but obsolescent, and culture-specific message. One would have wished for an affirmation of African time-honoured or recent educational practices and perspectives (what about the institutions of extensive puberty training, once found over much of Africa? what about the many twentieth-century studies of African childhoods? what about new forms of training emerging in modern African religious organisations, both of an Islamic and of a Christian nature?), in order to prevent too great a submission to an imported North Atlantic model that – considering the massive socio-cultural changes of the last fifty years – would have lost much of its topicality and applicability anyway.

Finally, Dieudonné Zognong, in his piece on ‘Philosophie de la nature et sauvegarde écologique de la terre chez Teilhard de Chardin’, concludes these three attempts to find Northern inspiration for thinking Southern topicalities (which in fact turn out to be global topicalities). It is heart-warming to see my childhood hero Teilhard acknowledged as a pioneer of ecological consciousness, and as exponent of pan-psychism, of a new anthropocentrism, and of panhuman planetisation. But again one wonders whether not more of an affirmation of African difference had been possible when mediating Teilhardian thought for an essentially African audience. Planetisation (Teilhard’s biologicistic, even – considering its dominant imagery of geological layers – geologicistic pioneering of a notion of globalisation, and therefore greatly in need of social-science and culture-philosophical revision) may not readily find antecedents in recognised African modes of thought. But pan-psychism certainly does, reasonably well recorded for many parts of Africa. By the same token,

one wonders whether the *new* anthropocentrism of Teilhard,⁹ should not be offset against the time-honoured African anthropocentrism, detectable all over Africa at so many levels, but most poignantly expressed in the language and worldview of speakers of Bantu languages, and ushered into African philosophy under the heading of *muntu* ('human being'), and more recently in the Southern Bantu version of *ubuntu* ('being human').¹⁰

Mediating, to an African audience, a North Atlantic version of themes that, on second thought, turn out (without the fact being acknowledged) to be already deeply and originally ingrained in African philosophy anyway, is a common form for transcontinental encounters to take. Hegemonic intimidation and submission have been part and parcel of Africa's intellectual encounter with the wider world in recent centuries, and in that sense the word 'line' regrettably begins to mean, primarily not so much 'connection', but a line of north-south demarcation, and of one-way North-South traffic. It is time to try and dig up the rhizomes of long-range

⁹ 'New', notably as a response to the zoologisation of humankind in the context of modern biology, in the course of the 19th and 20th century CE, which pushed humankind away from the centre of nature where – for the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition – Genesis had put it, not very differently in this respect from Graeco-Roman intellectual culture, and where – for North Atlantic culture – the Renaissance had reinforced it in new terms.

¹⁰ Cf. Kagame, A., 1956, *La philosophie bantu-rwandaise de l'Être*, Bruxelles: Académie royale des Sciences coloniales; Tempels, Placide, 1959, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris; orig. pub. in Flemish 1945 and French 1949; Eboussi Boulaga, F., 1977, *La crise du muntu: Authenticité africaine et philosophie*, Paris: Présence africaine; Jahn, J., 1958, *Muntu: Umrisse der neoafrikanische Kultur*, Düsseldorf / Köln: Diederichs; Bimwenyi, O., 1968, 'Le muntu, à la lumière des ses croyances en l'au-delà,' *Cahiers des Religions Africaines*, 1968, 65-74; Motoshi M., 1995, 'Le Muntu ne meurt que pour vivre. Réflexions sur les 'morts-vivants' africains et le Danaoshi japonais,' *Telema*, 21: 37-43. Specifically on *ubuntu*, cf. Ramose, M.B., 1999, *African philosophy through ubuntu*, Avondele (Harare): Mond; Samkange, S., & Samkange, T.M., 1980, *Hunhuism or ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*, Salisbury [Harare] : Graham; Boele van Hensbroek, P., ed., *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, special issue of: *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 15, 1-2, 2001; Battle, Michael, 1997, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press; Bewaji, J.A.I., & Ramose, M.B., 2003, 'The Bewaji, Van Binsbergen and Ramose debate on ubuntu', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 22, 4: 378-415.

links and continuities, so that the lines between thinkers in time and space become once more the shortest possible connection between equal points. The rhizome of transcontinental connectivity grows, perhaps hidden, but in common ground extending across time and space to include the whole of humankind.