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The principal challenge facing the African philosopher today

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EDITORIAL

The principal challenge facing the African philosopher today

In this volume of *QUEST* (XVIII-2004), we have once more (like in Volume XVII) chosen to let the kaleidoscopic riches of philosophising in and about Africa, be represented in their wide-ranging variety, without imposing any particular thematic emphasis or selection.

Meanwhile we have found that, by and large, the contributions as submitted to *QUEST* fall in a relatively limited number of categories, most of which are represented in this volume:

- the debate on the nature and the possibility of an *African philosophy*
- the development of a philosophical perspective on *African identity*
- the development of an African philosophical perspective on *Religion*
- the development of an African philosophical perspective on *Politics and law*
- ‘*Voices from the North*’, where Africanists who would not identify as Africans (in the Sobukwe sense of ‘agreeing that Africa is their home’) reflect on topical issues and trends in Africa
- the development of a philosophical perspective on *African societies and cultures*
- contributions to *World philosophy*, especially to mainstream North Atlantic / Western philosophy, in recognition of the fact that it is largely in critical debate with the latter that African philosophy has developed
- the *QUEST laboratory*, as a rubric seeking to initiate new debates and to highlight current ones, occasionally by highly polemic and/or highly personal contributions
- and finally the *Reviews Section*.

The ensemble reflects basic orientations in current African intellectual life, and in the influences (in the political, economic, religious and educational domains) that have shaped it, especially in the course of twentieth-century

colonial rule, decolonisation, and the postcolonial experience. Contributions on any of these topics continue to pour in at the editorial mailbox, and many more are welcome.

Yet, what is perhaps the most intriguing about the above list is what it does *not* entail.

In the first place, even as a factual summing up of possible themes it has certain blind spots, for instance in the natural and life sciences, with a special eye to their place and role in Africa, and to the ethical problems they pose; technology and its philosophical critique and/or appraisal; philosophical approaches to economics, belles lettres, myth, history; the construction and deconstruction of ethnicity; the development of an African approach to interculturality and interlinguality, hegemony and dependence; local and regional cultural self-affirmation versus global and consumerist boundary-effacement – or the critique of such facile juxtapositions; violence versus consensus, legitimacy versus coercion; a consideration of current world politics from the African perspective; and (beyond the clearly Christian antecedents of much of African philosophy today) a reassessment – positive or negative – of the global role of Islam on that basis, etc.

If the selection of topics that penetrates to *QUEST* seems to be rather narrower than the range of topics that are of potential relevance given the *QUEST* mission and terms of reference, what does this mean? It reflects, in the first place, the historical orientation of African philosophy departments, and the specific personal and institutional ties they have with the rest of the world. Secondly, it is not only in Africa, but also in the North Atlantic, that many philosophers try to steer away from the ‘illusions’ of the day, and concentrate on apparently perennial themes, to be approached in a format recognisably in line with a canon that has been with us for decades, centuries, even millennia. Given the fact that academic philosophy in Africa has developed in the course of the twentieth century in critical exchange with North Atlantic counterparts, it is not surprising that philosophers who (aspire to) write in *QUEST*, show a certain predilection for the presentable and modernist faces of Africa, easily to be grasped and appreciated from a North Atlantic point of view, whilst these philosophers may be somewhat disinclined to engage with the postmodern: the chaos, the rupture, the controversial, and the absurd.

What our above list lacks is a systematic basis in a coherent, comprehen-

sive conception of the specifically philosophical tasks that face African philosophers today. One might pragmatically – and circularly – define African philosophy as ‘African philosophy is what African philosophers do’, and then the above list would be as good as any other. As a venue of publication open to contributors regardless of origin or identity, *QUEST* reflects a heterogeneous set of practices, not a coherent philosophical movement. *QUEST* can never define what philosophy in and about Africa should be like. It cannot set the agenda. Yet individuals within *QUEST* may make suggestions towards such an agenda, on their own account, and with all due respect for the complex variety and the impressive expertise accumulated among African philosophers, for the principles of dialogue, and for historic South–North sensitivities.

There seems to be one recurrent echo in the background of any discussion of philosophy in the African context. *What is it in African philosophy that, time and time again, both in individual careers and in the collective pulse beats of decades, schools, generations, makes it go through the pendulum swing movement of*

- *now exposing North Atlantic hegemony and condescension, even racism – and*
- *now seeking recognition, access, shelter, in the North, at whatever hidden or dissimulated costs of exclusion, humiliation and indignation?*

Does the answer lie in sheer economic dependence? Or (as Mudimbe¹ would have it) in the redeeming power of place-less universalism? Or in uncertainty about the nature and the value of the local African heritage? Or in the individual philosopher’s awareness of having been hegemonically expelled from the latter, through the micropolitics of education and economic necessity of making a livelihood outside the village and the kin group?

Explosive questions, that may bring the visiting lecturer the enthusiasm

¹ Wim van Binsbergen, 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.

of a student audience and the dismay of their professors at the same time. Yet the contributions in the present volume show that such questions are to a large extent rhetorical in the non-specialist, pejorative sense. These questions are predicated on an *essentialism* that does not seem to contain much promise for humankind – the essentialist assumption that Africanity is, *ipso facto*, more than a simple pragmatic situation in space and time. That essentialist assumption would claim that being African, more than just a locus from where to ask questions, also entails a locus where a repertoire of eminently illuminating and redeeming *answers* may automatically be found.

The contents of this volume pleads against such essentialism on several counts.

In the first place, the great bulk of the present volume consists of African contributions displaying the considerable variety indicated by our initial list of topics: from Moses Òkè's critique of J.S. Mbiti (a plea for an African epistemology) to Ahmadou Tidiane Talla's glimpses of the exchange between two seminal North Atlantic philosophers of the twentieth century CE, Wittgenstein and Popper; from Hamidou Talibi Moussa's reflections on the nature of globalisation / 'mondialisation' in relation to modernity, to Kasereka Kavwahirehi enthusiastic account of P. Ngoma-Binda's recent approach to political power in Africa; from Sanya Osha's grappling with African sexualities as filtered through the Scandinavian perspective of Signe Arnfred, to F. Ochieng'-Odhiambo drawing up, once more, the balance-sheet of African philosophy with a critical reflection on Barry Hallen's aggregate account of the subject; Mohammed Seifikar's review of Englund and Nyamnjoh's edited collection exploring the applicability of Taylor's concept of the politics of recognition to Africa; and finally, in Bongasu Tanla Kishani assessment on naming, decolonisation and gender, with an abstract in the Nso' language² and other passionate excursions that reveal the author

² Nso' (or Lamnso') happens not to be the mother tongue of the majority of the *QUEST* readership. Also, scholarship needs to be outward-looking (as the author's English text is, after all), in addition to inward-looking. Therefore the Editor, however sympathetic to the author's position, decided to steer a middle course and added the present English abstract to the author's Nso' one. This ensures that the author's text is accorded the same inter-continental dissemination as other *QUEST* articles, through the abstracts journals and their online links. Moreover, in an argument dealing with personal proper names, understandably the author preferred to use all full names for all persons to whom he makes reference.

as a splendid poet as much as a philosopher. However rich the variety, in all these contributions one can see the sustained attempt to get beyond facile juxtapositions and essentialist stereotypes, to use the North as a resource without becoming subservient to it, and to quietly imply an African identity without being trapped in it, either.

The principal challenge facing the African philosopher today seems to lie in her or his ability to engage in an amazing, and admirable, balancing act, between deconstruction and affirmation, between African essentialism and globalising or universalising detachment, between metaphysics and epistemology, between philosophy and empirical enquiry – between philosophy and the world, and between Africa and the world. (One is reminded of the ‘placelessly local’, or the ‘locally placeless’ – the apt formula, literally utopian (in the sense of nowhere-ness), that the Indian–German philosopher Mall puts at the centre of intercultural philosophy).³

In the second place, heeding this challenge allows one to mobilise selectively whatever can be contributed from *beyond* the realm of essentialist identity. For instance, in the present volume, Peter Geschiere, an internationally renowned Africanist identifying as a social scientist *cum* historian, deals with questions of autochthony and citizenship in Africa today, in a way that many of our readers will recognise as topical, relevant, meaningful and insightful; but Geschiere is neither an African nor a philosopher. By the same token, Fred Woudhuizen, one of today’s world specialists on Luwian, Etruscan, Cretan, and other ancient languages of the Mediterranean, in his short contribution states a rather convincing case to the effect that we may claim, on the basis of an Etruscan document, *400 years more of written history to the name and the concept of Africa, than hitherto conceded in intercontinental scholarship*. This is certainly music to the ears of Afrocentrists and to all who have made Africa an important cornerstone of their individual and/or collective identity – but again, Woudhuizen is neither a philosopher

However, we have insisted on the ‘shortened Harvard’ format. The problem is illustrative of the contradictions that arise from the affirmation of counter-hegemony through mediums (writing, the printing press, the academic format of the scholarly article, the English and French languages) that are wrought with hegemonic implications.

³ Mall, R.A., 1995, *Philosophie im Vergleich der Kulturen: Interkulturelle Philosophie, eine neue Orientierung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

nor an African. Perhaps such outside contributions are all the more inspiring because they can hardly be swept aside on the accusation of partisan wishful thinking.

With Louise's Muller's brief comparison between four African philosophers (Idowu, Mbiti, Okot p'bitek and Appiah) in their approaches to 'truth' and the 'High God', these 'voices from the North' show that scholarship, including philosophy in and about Africa such as is at the centre of *QUEST*, may well entail: *venturing beyond one's own chosen boundaries, regardless of whether such boundaries are defined in a geographical, an identity, a disciplinary, or a logico-conceptual sense.*

Boundary-reifying essentialism, however tempting as an ideological strategy, is a sign of weakness.

Yet, the *attack on essentialism* (however facile; however much *en vogue* during the past few decades of deconstructive constructivism; and however much applauded by sophisticated academic audiences dealing with the critique of identity, of ethnicity, and of religious fundamentalism) seems largely a sign of the *complementary* weakness: it is, notably, the sign of an unwarranted, excessive belief in the redeeming social applicability of rationality, and a lack of empathic understanding of what makes the essentialist tick, emotionally and existentially.

We have advocated a balancing act, between deconstruction and affirmation, between African essentialism and globalising or universalising detachment. Such a form of philosophising in Africa has a lot in store, for Africa and even on a global scale. It is therefore pertinent that in the *QUEST Laboratory* section, we present (in addition to the self-presentation of the German Society for African Philosophy) some 'African Notes on the UNESCO strategy on philosophy', seeking to identify where the global and the local/ regional may meet to mutual benefit, which certainly includes mutual criticism; and where we recognise that the specific *format* under which such a meeting takes place (and in UNESCO's case, this is the universalist and elitist format of the *formal organization*) has implications for the success or failure of such a meeting.

Wim van Binsbergen

Articles

AUTOCHTHONY AND CITIZENSHIP

New Modes in the Struggle over Belonging and Exclusion in Africa

by Peter Geschiere¹

ABSTRACT. In many parts of Africa, the 1990's brought a crisis of citizenship. The idea of national citizenship – in the preceding decades of nation-building so strongly emphasized as the central identity – seemed to lose much of its meaning. This void seemed to be filled by a true ebullition of more fuzzy identities, often highly localist in character. It is in this context that the author presents a few aspects of recent work he conducted in collaboration with several Cameroonian colleagues – Francis Nyamnjoh, Antoine Socpa, Basile Ndjio – , and also with Jean-Francois Bayart (Paris) and Bambi Ceuppens (Brussels), on the upsurge of “autochthony” and an obsession with belonging as an overriding theme in the new style of politics since democratization. The argument was first presented as a key note address at the 2003 annual conference of the Netherlands Association of Africanists (NVAS).

KEY WORDS: Africa, autochthony, belonging, Cameroon, citizenship (crisis of), democratization, fuzzy identities, localism, nationality, nation-building, politics

In many parts of Africa, the 1990's brought a crisis of citizenship. The idea of national citizenship – in the preceding decades of nation-building so strongly emphasized as the central identity – seemed to lose much of its meaning. This void seemed to be filled by a true ebullition of more fuzzy identities, often highly localist in character. Since this is a development with which most Africanists are confronted in their work – wherever in the continent it takes place – this might be an important topic to address in the present connection, i.e. as a keynote for the annual conference of the Netherlands Association of Africanists (NVAS).

It is in this context that I want to present a few aspects of recent work I

¹ This article is based on the author's as a keynote address for the annual conference of the Netherlands Association of Africanists (NVAS), Leiden, 26 September, 2003.

did with several Cameroonian colleagues – Francis Nyamnjoh, Antoine Socpa, Basile Ndjio – and also with Jean-Francois Bayart (Paris) and Bambi Ceuppens (Brussels) on the upsurge of “autochthony” and an obsession with belonging as an all-overriding theme in the new style of politics since democratization.²

Most people in the audience will know only too well from the areas where they work (or come from) that the flip side of such preoccupations with belonging are ever more vicious forms of exclusion of “the other”: the stranger, the *allogène*. Often this *allogène* is a citizen of the same country. Then “autochthony” becomes a dangerous rival to the very idea of national citizenship. Indeed, in many parts of the continent, “nation-building”, the shibboleth of the first decades of Independence, now seems to be something of the past. The same authoritarian regimes that used to preach national unity as a primary political necessity for development, now seem intent to play the autochthony card – supporting all sorts of localist movements – in order to divide the opposition and thus neutralize the impact of multi-partyism. However, at least as important, is a similar *volte-face* of the development establishment, that also used to advocate nation-building as a primary condition for realizing development, but now insists on “by-passing the State”, decentralization and support to NGOs (who, on the ground, are often highly localist in character).

I just said that this theme is, unfortunately, becoming ever more topical in many parts of Africa. However, it may be important to emphasize that, in the present-day global setting, Africa is not at all exceptional in this respect. On the contrary, the language of autochthony and belonging seems to be in fashion throughout the world – which is somewhat paradoxical, in view of all the talk on globalization. Indeed, I became particularly interested in the topic when, on my return from Cameroon in 1996 and after just having seen

² See P. Geschiere and F. Nyamnjoh, “Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging”, *Public Culture* 12, 2 (2000): 423-453 (special issue on *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, eds. Jean and John Comaroff); Jean-François Bayart, Peter Geschiere and Francis Nyamnjoh, “ ‘J’étais là avant’: problématiques politiques de l’autochtonie”, dossier ‘Variations’, *Critique Internationale* 10 (2001): 126-195; Peter Geschiere, Francis Nyamnjoh and Antoine Socpa, “Autochthony versus Citizenship – Variable Effects of Political Liberalization in Cameroon”, report for *Ministère des Affaires Etrangères*, Paris, 2000.

the fierce images of autochthony demonstrations in Douala on Cameroonian TV, I turned on the radio at home and heard exactly the same slogans, but this time in Dutch, from Philip Dewinter, the successful Belgian politician and leader of the Neo-Right political party *Vlaams Blok: Eigen Volk Eerst* (“Your Own People First”) etc. Unfortunately, I no longer have to switch to the Belgian radio to hear this kind of language in Dutch. Since the meteoric career of Pim Fortuyn – when the New Right in the Netherlands finally found an equally charismatic leader – many Dutch politicians, even those who see themselves as placed in the middle of the political spectrum, now see fit to use thinly veiled versions of the same slogans.

Of course, there are parallels all over the globe. The New World Order predicted by Bush Sr. at the end of the Cold War has turned out to be not so much an order of cosmopolitans and free flow, but rather one of struggles over belonging, exclusion of “strangers” (whoever they may be) and the drawing of constantly new boundaries. The frantic attempts to close “Fortress Europe” and the appalling consequences this has already had for our African colleagues and students when we invite them to the Netherlands for conferences, fellowships our scholarships are another indication of what this “New World Order” is turning into: endless queuing in front of Dutch consulates and embassies, being told to come back the next day even though the visa is already there, being harassed at airports, and once in the Netherlands not being allowed to return home for several months (even in case of serious family-problems) as long as the immigration service has not arranged the papers etc. Decidedly, “globalization” can mean very different things for different people!

So, Africa is certainly not the only continent in which globalization is marked by frantic efforts towards closure.³ But it is clear also that in the Southern hemisphere this general obsession with closure and exclusion takes on special forms and is pushed by special factors. In her challenging publications on the role of the concept of “indigenous peoples” in Southeast Asia, the Canadian anthropologist Tania Murray Li speaks of a “conjuncture” of quite different but converging tendencies, who all seem to promote an upsurge of localist identities that seem to be “traditional”, but are in practice

³ See Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere, eds, *Globalization and Identity – Dialectics of Flow and Closure*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

highly situational and constantly shifting.⁴

Li is a Canadian anthropologist, who worked on development projects and NGO's especially in Sulawesi, and who does not mince her words. She even speaks of "ethnic cleansing *by* indigenous peoples" (not *of* indigenous peoples but *by* them) – referring to recent attacks by "indigenous" Dajak, complete with a somewhat artificial renaissance of head-hunting traditions, on Madurese on Kalimantan.

I think her term "conjuncture" is very apposite to the topic I want to address. It is indeed striking that tendencies with quite different backgrounds seem to converge towards a growing obsession with "autochthony" and belonging. In our earlier work on Cameroon, quoted above, we mainly related this upsurge of autochthony since the onset of democratization in this country (1990) to political manipulations of the regime of President Paul Biya. It is certainly true that in many parts of this country the fear among local people to be overrun by immigrants from other provinces was much older – especially of Bamileke migrants, originating from the western highlands, who had fanned out throughout the country, and succeeded to dominate the local trade in many parts. But this fear acquired new dimensions by the very fact that, with democratization, elections became once more of real importance. Hence the locals, especially in the coastal zones, had indeed good reasons to fear that they would be outvoted by more numerous immigrants. Thus, democratization triggered fierce debates about questions like: Who will be allowed to vote? And even more importantly: Who can stand for candidacy? Or in more concrete terms: can a Bamileke be allowed to run for major in Douala?

In retrospect, it is clear that one of the secrets why the former one-party regime of President Paul Biya succeeded – against all expectations – to hang onto power (Biya will soon be running for a new term as President for another 7 years), was its cleverly playing the autochthony card. This was also the main reason why no opposition party – despite a very promising start by several of them in the early 1990's – succeeded to retain a national profile.

⁴ T.M. Li, "Articulating Indigenous Identity in Indonesia: Resource Politics and the Tribal Slot", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000): 149-179; and "Ethnic Cleansing, Recursive Knowledge, and the Dilemmas of Sedentarism", *International Social Science Journal* 173 (2002): 361-371.

Indeed, after 13 years of democracy, the opposition is now hopelessly divided against the all-powerful governing party that made full use of the autochthony conundrum for its divide-and-rule strategy.

Yet it is clear that other factors play at least an equally important role in the upsurge of autochthony and belonging. I mentioned already the impact of the striking reversal of the policies of the development establishment, from a highly statist conception of development towards an equally simplistic emphasis on decentralization and support to NGOs as a panacea solution. In the 1960's and 1970's, the keywords for realizing development were strengthening the state and promoting nation-building. Now, the need to "by-pass" the state and to decentralize have acquired a similar ideological status in the new development thinking. The problem with this fairly abrupt change, however, is that there seems to be little concern (or even little consciousness) among those who advocate this new policy that this new tenets will inevitably promote an intensification of struggles over belonging: about who is "in" and who is "out"? – that is: who does not "really" belong and can, therefore, be denied access to the development-money-new-style? Tania Li emphasizes also another, but related, global trend, that has also considerable impact in Africa: the global concern for "indigenous peoples", often with a strong ecological flavour. Here a basic idea is that indigenous people have to be protected because they are vital to the protection of the world's ecological heritage.

All these new ideas have certainly sympathetic overtones. Yet, it may be important to emphasize that on closer inspection their flip side is the exclusion of others. They tend to dilute the very idea of national citizenship, that at least formally used to be one of the pillars of our world order. Of course, we all know now that the nation-state is out of fashion. Yet, again, the parallels – and even more the contrasts – with what is going on in the West might be important. It is one thing to talk about surpassing national citizenship in, for instance, the European context, where citizens' rights have been entrenched by a long history. It is another thing to launch such ideas in, for instance, Africa, where national citizenship and especially the idea of at least a formal equality of all citizens in the face of the law is still little institutionalized and protected. There may, therefore, be good grounds to question whether all the emphasis on decentralization and the rights of minorities does not allow the very idea of national citizenship to go down the drain too

easily. All the more so, since instead of this we seem to get highly fuzzy and constantly contested identities.

Let me give two rapid ethnographic examples of how omnipresent and unexpected the ramifications of this autochthony conjuncture have become.

The funeral as a final test of belonging

My first example concerns funerals: the proliferation of funeral ritual – and especially the obsession with the funeral “at home” – in many parts of the African continent. The Cameroonian economist Celestin Monga speaks even of “une mauvaise gestion de la mort” (bad management of death). This is, of course, quite strong language. Monga is clearly worried by the rapidly growing and ever more ostentatious spending at such occasions. He shows also that this private occasion is highly politicized, precisely because “belonging” has become such an all-overriding criterion in democratic politics.⁵

The quite complex implications this idea of the funeral “at home” is acquiring in the new political configuration, as a celebration of belonging, became clear to me during a visit to Mamfe (South West Cameroon) in 1996, when people were still talking excitedly about the funeral of the wife of a general from the region that had taken place a few months earlier. On the map Mamfe, situated close to the border with Nigeria, does not seem to be that far away from Cameroon’s main city and economic center, Douala. Yet, throughout the country Mamfe is considered to be a really far-out place because of the condition of the road that leads there. Indeed, the Mamfe road has become proverbial in Cameroon for the misery of travelling under adverse circumstances, especially during the wet season. I went to the place to visit Margaret Niger-Thomas who, only two years ago, defended here in Leiden her strong Ph.D. thesis on women, structural adjustment and smuggling in this area. Since it was still in the wet season, the road lived up to its

⁵ Célestin Monga, “Cercueils, orgies et sublimation – Le coût d’une mauvaise gestion de la mort”, *Afrique 2000*, 21 (1995): 63-72.

reputation – as predicted we spent a night on the road.⁶

In Mamfe, the talk of the town was still the spectacular funeral that had taken place a few months before, when the rains had already begun. People still made wry comments about how all urban elites had to come down to Mamfe and how they all got stuck on the road. There was true Schadenfreude in these stories: it served the elites right to be stuck in the mud since they had always neglected their own area. Now they found out for themselves what a misery this road was. The whole funeral seemed to become problematic. But finally the general took a drastic decision. He “chartered” several helicopters from the army and had his wife’s body together with the main guests flown in from Yaounde.

People talked about all this as if the whole exercise was more or less self-evident: as if urbanites always had to be brought back to be buried in the village. To them, it appeared to be only logical that the general went to such great length to have his wife buried “at home.” However, it was quite striking that especially older informants had other stories to tell. Indeed, to them this whole emphasis on burying “at home” seemed to be new. The Banyangi (the people of the Mamfe area) have a long history of migration: especially the women are famous for their readiness to engage in trade of all kinds (or to put it in less diplomatic terms: they are known to be all over the globe as prostitutes). In earlier days – already during the interbellum – Banyangi elders had sent delegations to the coast, in order to persuade the women to come back and marry at home, in most cases without much success.⁷ So it always had been an issue how to bring women back “home.” But the elders could not remember this strong emphasis on bringing back the bodies of deceased kin.

In many parts of Africa, people insist now that this emphasis on burying “at home” – that is, in the village – has been a traditional custom which exists since time immemorial. And, indeed in cities like Yaounde or Douala, there are still hardly any cemeteries: to be buried in the city is now seen a

⁶ Margaret Niger-Thomas, “Buying Futures’ – The Upsurge of Female Entrepreneurship – Crossing the Formal / Informal Divide in South West Cameroon”, Ph.D.thesis, University of Leiden, 2000.

⁷ See also Malcolm Ruel, *Leopards and Leaders: Constitutional Politics among a Cross River People*, London: Tavistock, 1969.

sign of social disgrace. But on closer inspection it seems that for many groups this “custom” is quite new – probably copied from groups who did this already much longer.⁸

It is clear also that, especially in recent times, this burying at home acquired great political significance. In a recent interview, Samuel Eboua, an *eminence grise* of Cameroonian politics, explained for instance:

“Every Cameroonian is an *allogène* anywhere else in the country... then where his ancestors lived and where his mortal remains will be buried. Everybody knows that only under exceptional circumstances a Cameroonian will be buried elsewhere.”⁹

This is, indeed, powerful language: any idea of the equality of all Cameroonian citizens, that was – at least formally – so dear to Cameroon’s first President Ahmadou Ahidjo, seems to have disappeared here.

Yet, it is quite clear that Eboua voices a current opinion here. This emphasis on “burying at home” is also *the* argument for *les autochtones* to justify their insistence that immigrants – these *allogènes* – should go “home” and vote there; and even more that they should stand candidate there, and not in their new surroundings where they are only “guests.” The argument is that, since the latter still want to be buried in the village, they clearly consider that to be their home. So if they want to join in politics they should

⁸ Cf. also the famous case of the funeral of SM in Kenya (see David W.Cohen and A.S.Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa*, London: Currey / Heinemann, 1992). The funeral of SM, the nickname of a famous lawyer in Nairobi, led to a fierce fight – finally decided in the national Court of Appeal – between his Luo clan and his Kikuyu widow over where the corpse should be buried. The widow wanted to bury SM at their sumptuous farm in Nairobi and, together with her lawyers, emphasized SM’s identity as a modern Kenyan citizen. But the representatives of his clan insisted that whether a modern person or not, SM was foremost a Luo and a Luo should be buried “at home.” Strikingly enough, they were finally put in the right by the Court of Appeal, according to strong rumours after a direct intervention by President Arap Moi himself (who, thus, clearly gave precedence to ethnic forms of belonging over the idea of modern Kenyan citizenship) But at least as surprising was, in view of all this emphasis on custom, that Oginga Odinga, the grand old man of Luo politics, sided with the widow. He declared that all this stress on burying at home was new. According to him, the Luo as an expansionist group, rather used to bury their dead in newly conquered areas in order to confirm new claims.

⁹ Translation mine. Interview with Eboua, *Impact-TribUne* 1995, 005: 14.

rather do this there than to try and prevail over their “hosts.” After all, a “guest” should never try to dominate his “host” in his own house.

The consequences of all this is a rather macabre traffic of bodies in order to confirm contested claims of belonging. In the articles quoted above (see note 2) we discuss at greater length cases of people digging up their father’s body and re-burying it elsewhere in order to prove a “belonging” that seemed politically more opportune. An even more complicated case took place in 1999 in Buea (also in South West Cameroon) when gendarmes disturbed a funeral to “arrest” the body in order to have it buried elsewhere. Clearly they acted on behalf of a politically more influential faction among the deceased’s kin who wanted to prove a different kind of belonging.

Of course, all this is not completely new: the funeral was always important as a mark of belonging. Yet is it quite clear that with democratization and the return of real politics, this emphasis on belonging got new impetus, turning the funeral into a crucial and often fiercely contested moment in these politics of belonging.

Striking is also the direct involvement of the national political leadership in such struggles. When these concern important persons, even the President himself may get involved – and, indeed, in all the cases we have, invariably on the side of the *autochtons*, defending their “belonging” over against “strangers.” Thus the funeral has become an important moment in the “politics of autochthony” that over the last decade has proved to be so effective for maintaining the Biya regime in the saddle.

The new forest law: Autochthony in an almost empty area

In Cameroon, it are particularly the more developed coastal areas, like the South West Province or the city of Douala, that are hotbeds of autochthony struggles. This is hardly surprising. These are quite densely populated areas whose economic dynamism attracted, moreover, numerous immigrants.

My second example, however, shows that even in the forest area of Southeast Cameroon – generally seen as one of the most backward parts of the country, very thinly populated (only a few inhabitants per square mile) and hardly attracting any immigrants – the language of autochthony and ex-

clusion of *allogènes* can emerge with surprising force. But here the background is not so much the new style of politics since democratization, but rather the new approach of the global development establishment, quoted above, with its emphasis on decentralization and local autonomy.

This example can show also a danger that seems to be inherent to this language: namely, its “segmentary” nature. The “other”, the “stranger”, can be constantly re-defined, and at ever closer range. There is never an end to debates about who “really” belongs. Even your own kin can be redefined as *allogènes* or outsiders. And, again, the parallels with the equally volatile ways in which this language is used elsewhere – for instance in present-day Europe – is striking.

Two years ago I did a brief study of the effects of the new forest law in East Cameroon (where I do field-work since 1971).¹⁰ The new Cameroonian forest law of 1994 is generally seen as a major breakthrough in the struggle to save the rain-forest. Over the last decade this struggle has become a most confusing tangle of divergent interests: of the global ecological movement, the Cameroonian state, expatriate logging companies, development projects, the local population and many more. Moreover, this knot is complicated by surprising alliances. For instance, ecologists and logging companies – *bien étonnés de se retrouver ensemble* – often seem to agree that the first thing to be done is to empty the forest of its population by forced re-settlement.

The 1994 law is deeply imbued with ecological considerations.¹¹ It was almost literally forced down the throat of the Cameroonian Parliamentarians by the World Bank. Only under very heavy pressure of financial sanctions did the Parliament pass the law. Indeed, it is striking how strongly “ecological” the Bank has become – at least when the Cameroonian rain-forest is concerned. A major advance of the law is that ecological concerns are coupled with attention to the rights of the local population. Indeed – and this might be quite new in the ecological movement – the initiators of the law seem to have understood that in these sparsely populated areas conservation

¹⁰ See Peter Geschiere, “Ecology, Belonging and Xenophobia – The 1994 Forest Law in Cameroon and the Issue of ‘Community’” in Harri Englund and Francis Nyamnjoh, eds, *Rights and the Politics of Recognition in Africa*, London: Zed Press, 2004.

¹¹ Alain Karsenty, “Vers la fin de l’État forestier: Appropriation des espaces de la rente forestière au Cameroun”, *Politique africaine*, 75 (1999): 147-162.

of the forest is only possible with the participation of the locals. Consequently, there is now less emphasis on emptying the forest by re-settling the population. Instead, the local communities are recognized as major stakeholders in managing the forest resources: they acquire the right to create their own “community forests” and exploit these themselves. Moreover, they are supposed to receive a major share from the profits on logging by others. Indeed, the law takes the new ideal of financial decentralization very seriously: 50 % of the taxes on logging are supposed to remain in the area and to go to the municipality or even the village concerned.

As said, Cameroon’s East province, where the main remaining forest resources are to be found, has long been the most neglected part of the country. So, some guarantee that at least part of the logging revenues will be invested locally is most welcome. Nonetheless, one can not help wondering whether the ideal of financial decentralization is not applied here in an all too simplistic sense. On paper, the new law would imply that huge sums of tax money would go to municipalities of a few thousand inhabitants. Of course, the extremely centralist traditions of the Cameroonian administration guarantee that all this money will never get there. However, the official calculations raise high expectations; and these immediately trigger fierce struggles over belonging in what were highly fluid societies.

The same applies to the role attributed to “the local community.” What is striking is that the law is careful not to define this notion more closely. No doubt for good reasons: the forms of social organization prevailing in the forest area were (and are) extremely segmentary. These used to be very open societies, with constant splitting and fusing of segments, and without fixed positions of authority.¹² In such a context a logical consequence of proclaiming “the local community” (without further specification) as a major stakeholder in the management of the forest is, again, intense fighting over belonging and exclusion: Who will be allowed to profit from the new “community forest”? And who can be excluded as ultimately an *allogène*?. Such questions become all the harder to solve since, in the segmentary logic

¹² See Philippe Laburthe-Tolra, *Les seigneurs de la forêt – Essai sur le passé historique, l’organisation sociale et les normes éthiques des anciens Beti du Cameroun*, Paris: Karthala, 1981; P. Geschiere, *Village Communities and the State – Changing Relations of Authority among the Maka, S.E. Cameroon*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1982.

of these societies, the “stranger” can be constantly re-defined, at ever closer range. In the case studies I have of the few villages who had their “community forest” already formally attributed, the first struggles over exclusion were directed against a few persons who had, indeed, come in quite recently from outside. But subsequently accusations of not “really” belonging were directed against people closer-by: for instance, against relatives who – at least according to some – did not “really” fit into the patrilineal order (even though they had lived for generations in the village).

Indeed, the rapidity with which the forest law triggered such struggles over belonging even in the very thinly populated East Province, shows the elasticity of the autochthony discourse. As said, in the Cameroonian context it was to be expected that belonging would be an issue in the quite densely populated coastal zones where there is a real pressure on land. But my second example shows that there is no end to autochthony, precisely because it is such an empty term. It means no more than “I was here earlier” and that can become a claim towards the exclusion of “the other” in any circumstance.

The wider African context

No doubt, my examples reflect specific aspects of the Cameroonian context. Yet, it seems that there are many parallels in present-day Africa.

It would be interesting to compare, for instance, with the recent trajectory of the notion of “autochthony” in the Ivorian context. There, it was first directed against people from outside the country: mostly against the Burkinabe who, ever since the 1950’s migrated in such great numbers to the South in order to participate in the booming plantation economy of Ivory Coast. As long as the autochthony label was directed against immigrants from beyond Ivory Coast’s borders, such fear for *allogènes* rather strengthened the idea of an Ivorian national citizenship. However, developments over the last few years showed how quickly the term could be re-interpreted and re-directed against fellow Ivorians: against the Northerners who are now more or less assimilated to Burkinabe outsiders. In this new setting, the autochthony craze seems, here as well, to weaken the idea of an Ivorian national citizen-

ship (to say the least).

Even more shocking parallels can be found in Northeastern Congo/ Zaire – in the Bunia-Goma region, which recently has been the scene of such terrible upheaval. In a recent study, Stephen Jackson masterfully analyzes all the complications and deliberate confusions around the Banyamulenge (these pseudo-Tutsi) and the issue of their national citizenship.¹³ The national regime – in the person of Mobutu – played a particularly perfidious role in this context: constantly playing off the Banyamulenge against the self-styled autochthonous groupings (in some years defending the Zairean citizenship of the Banyamulenge; but then again supporting the locals in their efforts to exclude them etc.). And, in this context also, the global worries about “indigenous people” – which for this region meant particular attention of aid organizations to the Ituri “pygmees” – further complicated the issue.¹⁴

An obvious question is whether all this is new? Of course, all these conundrums have a long history that reaches back far into colonial times and even before.

However, I think it is important to emphasize that, since the end of the Cold War, all sorts of global processes – the “conjuncture” mentioned before – gave new impetus to such tensions. We have to get away from the seductive image that the authoritarianism of the one-party state (and before this, of the colonial state) served as some sort of lid that contained all these tensions, and even more from its implication that, now that democratization (and decentralization) took away this “lid”, all these “traditional” tensions are again boiling over, as was only to be expected. Precisely because this image seems to have some sort of self-evidence, it is all the more important to emphasize that the changing global context – democratization, but also the new style of development politics, the international attention for indigenous peoples, ecological concerns with disappearing bio-diversity and even globalization in its broadest sense (increased circulation of people and images) – created new scope and new modes for this quest for belonging and exclusion.

In an earlier publication Francis Nyamnjoh and I suggested that “autoch-

¹³ Stephen Jackson, “War Making – Uncertainty, Improvisation and Involution in the Kivu Provinces, DR Congo, 1997-2002”, Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 2003.

¹⁴ Compare also the controversial affair of SM’s burial in Kenya, mentioned in note 8 above.

thony” can be seen as a new phase of ethnicity, in some sense even surpassing ethnicity.¹⁵ Of course, we all agree now that ethnicity is highly constructed and situationally circumscribed.¹⁶ Yet there are certain limits to its malleability: after all, an ethnic group needs to have a name and create its own history. Autochthony is a much more empty notion. It states no more than “I was here before you” and, as said, this can be applied in any situation and constantly redefined. Thus it seems to fit much better in a context of globalization – of intensifying global flows, that have as their flip side a constant search for new boundaries and new forms of closure.

Indeed, one of the striking aspects of this language of autochthony is its extreme elasticity. As said before, the same slogans seem to apply in Europe, Africa and really anywhere on this globe. Of course they hide, on closer inspection, very different constellations: xenophobia reflects very different concerns in Belgium or the Netherlands, then on the Cameroonian coast. Yet, the secret of this language’s power seems to be that, notwithstanding such great differences, it always appears to express self-evident or even “natural” emotions and desires: the protection of ancestral heritage, the fear of being contaminated by foreign influences and so on. Clearly very different notions of “ancestors” or “contamination” are at stake here. But the autochthony language sweeps such differences under the carpet and seems to be capable to adapt itself to constantly changing circumstances and re-definitions, superseding these by its appeal to what appears to be “natural” instincts.

It might, therefore, be quite an urgent task for social scientists (and linguists?) to gain a deeper insight into the surprising elasticity of this language – its capacity to come across as self-evident and natural, despite all these adaptations and re-definitions. Or, to put it more directly, our task is to try and de-naturalize this language: to deprive it of some of its cogency by ana-

¹⁵ See Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000, o.c.

¹⁶ See for a pioneering text in this respect Wim M.J. van Binsbergen, “From Tribe to Ethnicity in Western Zambia”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 8, 1 (1981): 51-81; see also his *Kazanga: Etniciteit in Afrika tussen Staat en Traditie*, inaugural lecture, Free University, Amsterdam, 1992 –English version with postscript: “The Kazanga festival: Ethnicity as cultural mediation and transformation in central western Zambia”, *African Studies*, 53, 2, 1994, pp 92-125.

lyzing the different concerns it expresses in space and time.

Conclusion

To end on a more practical note: the above might suggest also greater concern for what is left of national citizenship in the young African states. Especially the new emphasis in development policies on by-passing the State, decentralization and support to NGO's seems to have quite worrying consequences on the ground: all the more because of the rigid and simplistic ways in which these new ideas are applied. Africa seems to remain the laboratory for development experts for all sorts of experiments that they would never dream of applying at home. Sometimes one can not help wondering whether all these experiments would have been carried out if the responsible persons would first have tried them out in their own societies.

It is striking that, in the vivid debate on citizenship which is waged now notably in the US and to a lesser degree in Europe, everybody seems to agree that national citizenship remains crucial, despite all the talk about the nation-state as being something of the past.¹⁷ This might be a very good reason to be more careful about promoting processes in Africa and elsewhere in the South that replace national citizenship, that had at least has some sort of formal basis, by all sorts of fuzzy, localist identities that can only trigger endless struggles about belonging and exclusion.

¹⁷ Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy, An Introduction*, Oxford U.P. 2002; Etienne Balibar, *Nous citoyens d'Europe? Les frontières, l'État, le peuple*, Paris: La Découverte, 2001; Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism – Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton U.P., 1994.

FROM AN AFRICAN ONTOLOGY TO AN AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

A critique of J.S. Mbiti on the time conception of Africans

by Moses Òkè

ABSTRACT. The ontological thesis that this paper focuses on is the claim of Mbiti that Africans lack the concept of future time. The ontological core of the traditional view of time reported by Mbiti is that 'to constitute time is to be lived through'. With reference to perception, since existence in space presupposes existence in time, it should follow from the premise that 'time is essentially experienced time only' that 'to exist is to exist in time alone'. Assuming that Mbiti's claim about Africans' conception of time is true, Africans should be incapable of conceiving a "perception-transcending" or "knowledge-transcending" world. In which case, they should be incapable of a scientific epistemology. Given that it is living humans that have experiences and reckon with time, this position, in the context of Mbiti's thesis that Africans lack the concept of future time, is ambivalent and needs to be further explicated. The paper has undertaken an explication of the epistemological consequences of such position. Although the general laxity of Africans about time, especially future time, pervades their collective attitude to work, the best we can say is that they lack 'time-discipline', not that they do not have the concept of future time. A philosophically significant concern with the African concept of time, therefore, no matter what it is, should be highly critical of received notions and should point out the consequences of holding an unprogressive outdated idea of time or time-related patterns of behavior. In this regard, Mbiti ought to have pointed out the grave dangers inherent in a 'futureless' conception of time such as he attributed to Africans. This would have helped the people to adopt a better conception of time that could lead to improvement in their lives, and that could better guarantee their survival and independence as a race.

KEY WORDS: Africans, discipline, epistemology, experience, future, knowledge, Mbiti, ontology, perception, time, transcendence

Introduction

John Mbiti is famous for his work *African Religions and Philosophy*,¹ in

¹ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Double Day and Co. Inc., 1970, especially pp. 19-36.

which he attributes a conception of time to Africans. A crucial part of Mbiti's objectives was to

“discuss the African concept of time as the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts”²

of Africans. He believed that a study of the concept of time might enhance our understanding of the thoughts, practices, values and designs for living of African peoples.³ In short, Mbiti was of the opinion that from the ontology that Africans have, we can articulate the “philosophical systems of different African peoples.” That is, we can from such ontology arrive at

“the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African people think, act or speak in different situations of life.”⁴

Given the foregoing, Mbiti appears to have envisaged the possibility of the movement from ontology to epistemology that this paper sets out to do, although he did not make it. The possibility of such a movement had also been suggested to the effect that a critical African perspective on empirical knowledge could be constructed from Mbiti's account of an African conception of time.⁵

Mbiti's treatment of time as “an ontological phenomenon” that “pertains to the question of existence or being,”⁶ provides the basis for the analysis that this paper attempts. The analytical movement from ontology to epistemology consists in examining the conception of empirical knowledge that may be implicit in an idea of time. Given⁷ that concepts always occur in clusters, the movement presupposes that there are theoretical and practical

² Ibid; 20-21.

³ Ibid; 21.

⁴ Ibid; 2.

⁵ M. Akin. Makinde, “Of Chance Philosophy and Obsolete Philosophy: Some Anti-Scientific Features of African (Traditional) Thought”, in *Second Order (new series): An African Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1988): 8-15.

⁶ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*: 15.

⁷ M. Òkè, *The Nature of Political Concepts and Ideologies*, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001: 12.

links between the ontological issues of time and existence and the epistemological issues of experience and our knowledge of the external world.⁸ The discussion in this paper will therefore involve an explication of the interconnections between the ideas of time, existence, experience and knowledge of the external world, and life that can be constructed out of Mbiti's reported African concept of time.

Critique of Mbiti

The ontological thesis that this paper focuses on is the claim of Mbiti that Africans lack the concept of future time.⁹ This concept of time that Mbiti attributes to Africans has already received attention of scholars on several grounds different from the present one.¹⁰ As already indicated above, the

⁸ For related discussions, see M. Òkè, "Towards an African (Yoruba) Theory of Empirical Knowledge: A Critique of Hallen and Sodipo" in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXV (2), 1995: 205-216; and Barry Hallen, "Moral Epistemology – When Propositions Come Out of Mouths: Reply to Òkè", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XXXVIII (2), 1998: 187-204.

⁹ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 21-23. He says here, for example, that what is not now occurring or certain to occur immediately belongs to the category of "No-time" such that "time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present, and virtually no future." (21)

¹⁰ Cases in point are:

- (a) D.A. Masolo, in *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, and Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 1994: 103-104, gathers some of these criticisms as follows:
- Mbiti did not provide the philosophical analysis of the ontology that he described,
 - Mbiti's work on 'African philosophy' is obscure; he does not say what he means by African Philosophy,
 - Mbiti merely parades "African traditional beliefs (...mythology) as 'philosophy'", and
 - Mbiti did not separate 'African philosophy' from African religious concepts.

concept of time is closely related to the concepts of perception and the external world. It is this connection that we shall now proceed to explicate.

The ontological core of the traditional view of time reported by Mbiti is that

“to constitute time is to be lived through.”

As such,

“time is either present time or used time.”

With reference to perception, since existence in space presupposes existence in time, it should follow from the premise that

“time is essentially experienced time only” that “to exist is to exist in time alone.”

This consequence may be seen as identical with the Berkeleyan ‘*esse est percipi*’ thesis (‘to be is to be experienced’). The direct implication of this for perceptual knowledge will be that ‘to be known is to be perceived either in the present or in the past’. Thus, if Africans lack the concept of future time, they should logically be incapable of conceiving objects either to exist

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- (b) Segun Gbadegesin, in his *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*, New York: Peter Lang, 1991, p. 22, says Mbiti’s thesis is merely “a report of a communal world-view without an attempt to evaluate” it.
 - (c) Makinde, in his “Of Chance Philosophy and Obsolete Philosophy...” (above), describes Mbiti’s discussion of the African concept of time as a specimen of ‘chance and obsolete philosophy’, because it is uncritical and so unsuitable for improving the lot of Africa and Africans in the face of contemporary realities; to be considered philosophical, Mbiti’s account, assuming it is correct, needs to include a critical analysis that can lead to a corrective synthesis on the nature of time.
 - (d) Based on linguistic considerations in his Akan culture, Gyekye finds Mbiti’s account both false and fallacious. False, because it is not the case that Akans lacked the concept of future time; and fallacious because Mbiti too hastily generalized from what he observed (assuming that it is true) of a very small part of Africa to the whole of Africa. See: Kwame Gyekye, “*African Religions and Philosophy* by J.S. Mbiti, “ a review article in *Second Order*, vol. IV, no 1, Jan. 1975: 86-94. See also, Alexis Kagame, “The Empirical Apperception of Time and the Conception of History in Bantu Thought”, in *Culture and Time*, The UNESCO Press, 1976, pp. 101-102.

unexperienced or to possess unsensed qualities. It should follow, therefore, that for Mbiti's Africans who lack the idea of future time, a past experience could not be projected into the future, which is no time. Hence, if an object or event does not co-exist with present experience, then it does not exist and probably it never existed. The truth of the foregoing consequences would imply that Africans are some kind of ontological immaterialists and epistemological idealists. In which case, they will be neither metaphysical realists nor epistemological realists.

Given the truth of Mbiti's claim about Africans' concept of time, Africans should be incapable of conceiving a "perception-transcending" or "knowledge-transcending" world.¹¹ This is because a conception of time that excludes the future cannot be compatible with a conception of a world that is self-subsistent or a world of things, processes and events having "an enduring identity of its own."¹² By extension, such a conception of time will be incapable of sustaining a conceptual scheme, or be compatible with such a scheme, in which direct objective knowledge of

the external world is granted possible. In order for such knowledge to be possible, the object of knowledge, i.e. the world, must be physically or materially real, meaning that it must be

"a permanent possibility of sensations—actual or possible."¹³

In order to be such a world, it must, in addition "admit universality of access" and exhibit "autonomy or independence."¹⁴ These features will ensure that the world transcends any set of occurrent finite perceptions. Such a world can however not exist and knowledge of such a world cannot be claimed by anyone whose conception of time is limited to only the present

¹¹ Nicholas Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 348.

¹² Rescher, p. 348.

¹³ J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, London: Longmans, Green, 1865: XII, 234-243. See also Moses Òkè, "A Critical Study of the Viability of Phenomenalism as an Alternative Theory of Perception", Doctoral Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1990.

¹⁴ Rescher, *Epistemology*, p. 348

and the past. Yet, within the wider context of what Africans say, do and believe, epistemological idealism cannot be truly ascribed to them. Perhaps, then, with respect to the conceptualization and the knowledge of reality, Africans may tentatively be best regarded as phenomenologists.

According to Rescher,

“Authentic reality is human reality – reality as we experience it.”¹⁵

Africans, in Mbiti’s account, espouse an ontological order in which apart from God, the distantly and the recently dead persons, non-human living things, and non-living things, there are also living human beings. As Masolo rightly sees it, it is the mode or level of existence of living humans that is “directly related to the concept of time.”¹⁶ It is these living humans that have experiences and reckon with time. In these, Africans, through their cultural practices,¹⁷ express unanimity with the rest of humanity that reality extends beyond their present and past experiences. Even if it is true that they do not have a linguistic expression for futurity or infinitude in any of their languages, in as much as they do not claim that, or live as if, the world must terminate with their occurrent experiences, it should not be supposed that they do not subscribe to the infinite continuity of the external world in which they live.

Among such cultural practices are the following; community organization, co-operative labor, education, government, language, science and technology, law, medicine, family and religion.

Discussion

From Mbiti’s claim that Africans are notoriously religious, living as it were in a religious universe,¹⁸ we may plausibly suppose that Africans are some sort of Berkeleyan ‘deity-phenomenologists’. In that case, matter will come to be defined for them in a special way (modifying J. S. Mill), as the permanent

¹⁵ Rescher, p. 362.

¹⁶ D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, p. 110.

¹⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 37-46.

possibility of sensations, actual in human minds and possible in God's mind.

So defined, Mbiti's Africans can postulate God as the guarantor of the future existence of the external world. This will lead to saying that the future exists for god, but not for human beings. Such a position can be used to explain some of the ways in which many Africans do things in private, as well as in public life. Also, saying that future time exists only for God can be used to explain most Africans' peculiar carefree attitude to time, to work, and to development. This position, in the context of Mbiti's thesis that Africans lack the concept of future time, is however ambivalent and so needs to be further explicated.

In the first place, this position appears to lead those who hold it into a self-contradiction. Since for them, the very idea of God involves infinitude, to deny the future will result in a logical absurdity. This is a point raised against Mbiti by Masolo and Gyekye.¹⁸

Although it may be true that the Akans, the Yorùbá,¹⁹ and other African peoples have the concept of infinitude in their languages and engage in practices that imply it, it should be noted that the charge of self-contradiction may not hold against Mbiti concerning the Africans who are said to lack the concept of future time.

According to Mbiti, for example,

“Africans are notoriously religious...”, and “...for Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon, man is a deeply religious being in a religious universe”(African Religions and Philosophy: 1, 19).

This is an amalgam of Berkeley's and Mill's definitions of matter.

The physical world or real being within which people live and which they know is the only one they can experience as human beings, but God is not a part of this physical reality. Hence, any reference to God in their ontology is, epistemologically, a gratuitous ratiocinative postulate. Although this may have initial validity in its psychological utility, it does not appear that it can be validated, retrospectively, in terms of any pragmatic utility or inven-

¹⁸ Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, p. 111, and Gyekye, “African Religions and Philosophy by J. S. Mbiti”, pp. 86-94.

¹⁹ John A. A. Ayoade, “Time in Yoruba Thought”, in Richard Wright, ed; *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, New York: University Press of America, 1984, pp. 93-112.

tive versatility. The net effect of this is that even if Africans have, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, the concept of infinitude, they do not take it seriously.

The general laxity of Africans about time,²⁰ especially future time, pervades African peoples' and nations' collective attitude to work. It manifests in their politics and economy, as well as in other aspects of national life in almost all the countries on the continent. The general observation is that most African nations lack the foresight to institute enduring economic programs; hence the continuous cycles of poverty, bad governance, monumental backwardness and a seemingly perpetual over-dependence on other peoples of the world for minimal survival. This, however, cannot be read to mean that Africans lack the idea of infinitude. The best we can say is that they lack 'time-discipline'.

On the other hand, since as noted earlier, what we are concerned with is reality as human beings experience it, to say that future reality exists for God alone will not be self-contradictory for people who deny the reality and knowledge of the future for themselves. Since they do not have that phenomenon in their experience, which is the only way by which they can be acquainted with reality, their lack of a concept for the future will not necessarily lead to any logical or practical absurdity, although it might adversely influence their systems of valuation and responses to events and situations in the world.

Since for these people, only God exists infinitely, and can know beyond the present, they may, for instance, be comfortable with a short-term ambition or expectation in life. They may not be motivated to strive for progressive social and societal development which is a distant futuristic phenomenon. They may also lack material accumulative tendencies, since, ideally, one only accumulates for future utility. This is, however, very sharply contradicted by the observable lives of many Africans in the home, in politics, and in business, both in traditional and in contemporary times. Many of them procreate profusely, acquire property voraciously, engage in cash crop plantations laboriously, have inheritance procedures, embezzle in

²⁰ See, for example, Ademola Adejumo, "The Concept of 'African Time': Its Manifestation in the Traditional Art of the Yoruba of Nigeria", *The Nigerian Field*, 62 (1997): 41-50.

public life excessively, engage in several forward-looking sharp practices in business, play hard rough ‘sit-tight’ politics, struggle for education and strive to be in good health, traditionally and contemporarily.

However, for Africans, based on Mbiti’s thesis, whether the world will extend beyond the present or not is beyond human knowledge or justifiable imagination. It is possible, however, that God (or some other spiritual being) knows that it will. For human beings, it is merely an ontological article of faith; it is not a claim based on anyone’s personal experience. For these Africans, then, anything can happen beyond the present and anything that will so happen is known (or knowable) only to God on whom alone it depends.

Ultimately, therefore, from Mbiti’s thesis, we may conclude that Africans have a religious epistemology, as opposed to a scientific epistemology.²¹ This emergent religious epistemology is empiricist in methodology, but problematically realistic in ontology. The Africans may thus be said to be committed to the existence of

“a mind-dependent physical reality to which our enquiries address themselves....”²²

As such, they can confidently say that ‘the world is out there now’; but they cannot, and need not, say or think that it will continue to be there, as far as any human being knows or can know. Perhaps, this explains why the people

“have little or no active interest in events that lie in the future beyond, at most, two years from now.”²³

They may thus be said to distinguish between ‘divine knowledge’ and ‘mun-

²¹ Rescher, *Epistemology: An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, p. 360.

²² From Mbiti’s claim that

“Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology...”, (p. 20),

we may rightly infer that if Africans have their own science, it is a religious science; if they have their own epistemology, it is a religious epistemology; etc., where by ‘religious’ is meant ‘spiritual’, ‘ancient’, ‘God-centered’, ‘transcendental’, ‘dogmatic’, ‘mystical’, and ‘mystifying’, especially in the light of his claims on pages 37-49.

²³ Rescher, *Epistemology*, pp. 318-319.

dane knowledge':²⁴ only God knows infinitude; humans, if they know anything at all, know, and can know, only the past and the present.

The ensuing religious epistemology, which may be used to explain the behavior of many Africans in many aspects of life, does not countenance the progressive nature of knowledge. It is antithetical to progress and innovation. It is limited to the

“presently purported truth; truth as we ourselves see it, here and now.”

It does not aspire to “futures truth”, not to talk of “completed truth” and “perfected truth.”²⁵

Conclusion

Had Mbiti addressed himself to the existential implications of a lack of the concept of the indefinite future in a given culture, he would have become aware of the need to introduce it into that culture as part of the task of a worthwhile philosophy conceived as ‘the constructive critique of cultures’. He would thus have gone beyond just describing traditional African cultures (correctly or incorrectly) to making attempts to change them for the better, by infusing them with the crucial concepts that they might lack or appear to lack. On the other hand, if they had the concept of futurity, no matter how they designate it,²⁶ but are unserious about it, it is still the task of philosophers to introduce to them a new orientation and attitude to time, in view of the debilitating effects that a poor time orientation might have on their life.

Finally, had Mbiti addressed himself to the epistemological implications of the ontology that he attributed to Africans, he would have also seen the need to be philosophically critical, rather being patronizing, of traditional

²⁴ Rescher, pp. 320-321.

²⁵ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 82.

²⁶ H.A. Oluwasanmi [then Vice-Chancellor, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Nigeria], “Philosophy and University Goals”, Foreword to the maiden edition of *Second Order*, vol.1, no.1, Jan. 1972: 4.

ideas and patterns of behavior. Such critical approach would have enabled him to

“point out the contradictions involved in old faiths, beliefs and concepts and draw attention to the need to seek some kind of new basis.”²⁷

In this regard, it is important to note, with Mbiti, that:

“Not all philosophies are useful or worthwhile. Some have no root in the life of the community.... On the other hand, merely to perpetuate traditional African thought-forms in a situation to which they are no longer relevant would be an equally lifeless and uncreative activity.”²⁸

This comment is especially pertinent for Mbiti, whose objective was to use his thesis on the African concept of time to

“explain belief, attitude, practices and general ways of life of African peoples, not only of the traditional set-up, but also of the modern situation (whether in political, economic, educational or church life).”²⁹

It is as a consequence of this concept of time that, according to Mbiti:

“In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving ‘forward’ towards a future climax.... So African peoples have no ‘belief in progress,’ the idea that the development of human activities and achievements moves from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the future nor ‘build castles in the air.’”³⁰

With due respect for Mbiti, his concern with the African concept of time would have been more philosophically significant if he had been critically analytical of it as to have pointed out that if Africans lacked either the concept of the indefinite future or a progressive commitment to it,

²⁷ Professor Galloway, “The Useless Disciplines”, A Lecture given before the Philosophical Society, University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, on January 11, 1956, p. 7, quoted in H. A. Oluwasanmi, *op. cit.* p. 6.

²⁸ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p. 83.

²⁹ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 21.

³⁰ J.S. Mbiti, pp. 29-30.

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“they would have to acquire it or else hold themselves ready for eventual recolonization,”³¹

or, indeed, eventual inevitable early extinction.

³¹ My emphasis.

POUR UNE NOUVELLE ORIENTATION DE LA PHILOSOPHIE AFRICAINNE

A propos de *Philosophie et pouvoir politique en Afrique* de P. Ngoma-Binda

par Kasereka Kavwahirehi

RESUME. Ce texte présente les éléments de la théorie inflexionnelle que le philosophe congolais P. Ngoma-Binda propose, dans son livre *Philosophie et pouvoir politique en Afrique*, aux philosophes et intellectuels africains comme voie de maximalisation de leur capacité d'infléchir le pouvoir politique et d'avoir un impact réel et palpable sur les sociétés africaines. Après la présentation du livre où cette théorie est présentée, on relève quelques points qui méritent un large débat: par exemple, la minorisation extrême de l'économique au profit d'une hypertrophie du politique hissé au rang de voie royale de toute réflexion qui se veut pertinente et efficace en Afrique, l'élévation du patriotisme comme vertu philosophique par excellence, la nécessité d'une éthique de l'intelligence, etc.

MOTS-CLE: Philosophie africaine, pouvoir politique, efficacité, authenticité, théorie inflexionnelle, idéologie, patriotisme philosophique, Ngoma-Binda, herméneutique dialectique.

ABSTRACT. This text offers an introduction to "la théorie inflexionnelle" proposed by the Congolese philosopher P. Ngoma-Binda in his last book, *Philosophie et pouvoir politique en Afrique*, as a way for the African philosophers and intellectuals to maximize their capacity to "inflect" politics and to have real impact on the concrete life of African societies. After a short presentation of the dynamic that leads Ngoma-Binda to elaborate "la théorie inflexionnelle", the author highlights some points that, from his point of view, should be discussed. For example: the articulation between politics and economics in Ngoma-Binda's theory, patriotism as a philosophic value, the necessity of an ethics of intelligence, etc.

KEY WORDS: African philosophy, political power, efficacy, authenticity, inflective theory, ideology, philosophical patriotism, Ngoma-Binda, dialectical hermeneutics.

Dès les premières années du débat philosophique lancé, en Afrique, par le livre de Placide Tempels, le questionnement lié à la raison d'être, au rôle et au pouvoir réel de la philosophie dans les sociétés africaines talonne les phi-

losophes africains. Quelques repères bibliographiques peuvent suggérer le caractère incisif de ce questionnement en Afrique francophone.

C'est le texte de Taita Towet intitulé « Le rôle d'un philosophe africain » paru en 1959 dans *Présence Africaine* qui est parmi les premiers à avoir posé la question des tâches de la philosophie et du philosophe en Afrique. Dans le contexte des indépendances politiques des états africains, Taita Towet assigna au philosophe la tâche de réfléchir sur les buts poursuivis par les gouvernements africains et, donc, sur les modalités de gestion du pouvoir politique.

Durant la décennie 60, qui a été marquée par ce que Marcien Towa et Paulin Hountondji ont appelé « ethnophilosophie », on s'interroge moins sur la raison d'être de la philosophie. En fait, la *ratio* qui préside aux recherches des « ethnophilosophes » semble aller de soi dans cette période de consolidation des États-Nations issus de la colonisation et du désir de montrer la richesse des civilisations africaines marginalisées par la raison coloniale. Il existe une sorte de connivence idéologique entre les acteurs de la décolonisation et les « ethnophilosophes ». Il faut attendre la décennie 1970, celle de l'émergence des critiques de l'ethnophilosophie et des idéologies des indépendances pour voir se poser plus souvent la question de la raison d'être de la philosophie en Afrique. Cette question d'ordre pratique va alors de pair avec celle des exigences propres à la discursivité philosophique.

Aussi voit-on paraître, en 1972, dans *Présence Africaine*, un texte, « Philosophie et sous-développement » de L. Ankunde, dans lequel apparaît clairement l'idée d'une philosophie fonctionnelle, au service du développement. Une année après, le Béninois Issiaka Prosper Laleye, dont le couple « penser et pouvoir » constitue une ligne de fond du questionnement philosophique, publie, entre autres, dans *Cahiers Philosophiques Africains*, « La philosophie? Pourquoi en Afrique? Une phénoménologie de la question » (1973). Il sera suivi de « La philosophie dans la situation actuelle de l'Afrique » (1982) et de « Penser et pouvoir. Essai sur les limites du pouvoir de penser dans la société contemporaine » (1982). Dans cette mouvance, le Congolais Elungu Pene Elungu publie, en 1977, « La philosophie, condition du développement en Afrique aujourd'hui », et Paulin Hountondji, « Que peut la philosophie? » en 1981, une réponse à la critique de Olabiyi B. Yai intitulé « Théorie et pratique en philosophie africaine: misère de la philosophie spéculative (critique de P. Hountondji, M. Towa et autres apparentés) » (1978). A

ces articles, il faut ajouter les livres de Marcien Towa (1971, 1979), Paulin Hountondji (1977, 1997), Fabien Eboussi Boulaga (1977), Anthony Kwame Appiah (1992) et V.Y. Mudimbe (1973, 1994) dans lesquels on trouve souvent des réflexions sur le rôle du philosophe ou de l'intellectuel africain dans les sociétés africaines.

Il faut enfin signaler que cette interrogation a fait l'objet des congrès nationaux ou internationaux organisés régulièrement aux Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa. Ainsi la trouve-t-on directement ou indirectement au cœur des actes des colloques *Philosophie et libération* (1978), *Philosophie Africaine et développement* (1984), *Philosophie africaine et ordre social* (1987), *La responsabilité politique du philosophe africain* (1996), *Philosophie et politique en Afrique* (1997), etc. En somme, en empruntant une expression de V.Y. Mudimbe, on peut dire que l'histoire de la philosophie africaine est, d'une manière ou d'une autre, sous-tendue par la volonté, chez les intellectuels africains, de

« réconcilier pratique de la connaissance et praxis révolutionnaire » (1973: 13).

Mais cette volonté est-elle devenue effective?

C'est dans l'horizon de cette question que se situe l'ouvrage du philosophe congolais P. Ngoma-Binda qui apparaît comme l'actuel représentant de « l'école philosophique de Kinshasa ». Il réfléchit sur le rapport entre la pratique philosophique et le pouvoir politique en Afrique actuelle ou, plus précisément, sur les voies et moyens de rendre la pratique philosophique ou intellectuelle plus efficace et utile aux sociétés africaines. On mesure la portée du livre à entendre l'auteur affirmer, sans détour, dès l'avant-propos, comme pour fonder la légitimité de son projet:

“La question de la réflexion sur le pouvoir du philosophe et de la philosophie, comme capacité à influencer sur le pouvoir politique, doit constituer, logiquement et chronologiquement, le tout premier devoir du philosophe. En effet, le pouvoir politique d'une nation, quel qu'il soit, est nécessairement appelé à assumer une très large part de responsabilité dans les efforts pour générer la joie d'exister de chacun des citoyens au sein de la famille étatique. Le philosophe ne sera véritablement pris au sérieux, et ne sera digne d'exister, que si lui-même considère comme important le problème de sa propre insertion dans la société, de sa fonction sociale en tant que citoyen armé d'un savoir en principe éminent, de l'efficacité de sa contribution dans les efforts communs pour l'accroissement des possibilités d'optimisation de la vie et de la joie d'exister pour tous au sein de la cité. [...] Tout intellectuel qui néglige de réfléchir sur la *stra-*

tégie contributive optimale qu'il convient d'adopter et d'appliquer dans la recherche des solutions aux problèmes de l'être humain et de la société à la fois manque de lucidité et s'offre comme un gros mollusque socialement dépourvu d'utilité, de pouvoir, et de place réelle dans la cité" (Ngoma-Binda 2004: 7-8).

C'est fort de cette exigence de lucidité, de responsabilité et d'efficacité qui, on le devine, ne lui semble pas avoir été suffisamment honorée en Afrique, que l'auteur s'est lancé dans l'élaboration d' « une théorie normative de la pratique de la philosophie » en vue d'indiquer

« les principes et règles d'une production philosophique qui soit véritablement efficace, sur le double point de vue interne et externe, c'est-à-dire de la philosophie en elle-même et de la société comme telle » (8).

Ainsi, d'entrée de jeu, Ngoma Binda montre ses cartes: expression d'une pratique intellectuelle « décidément orientée vers le *service au peuple africain en détresse* », laquelle pratique « exige de la philosophie africaine de se concevoir comme un outil de création et de perfection de la société et, donc, comme une instance théorique à effets pratiques palpables, comme un pouvoir » (14), veut instaurer une autre manière de philosopher. Il veut ouvrir une nouvelle perspective qui pourrait être perçue non seulement comme le dépassement dialectique du courant critique mais aussi comme un désir de mener vers son accomplissement toute la tradition philosophique en Afrique qui, fait-il remarquer, se meut, depuis ses origines, sur un fond où domine la question du pouvoir, colonial d'abord, ensuite postcolonial (14). Plus, si l'on considère la question heuristique au centre du livre, à savoir

« de quelle façon doit s'élaborer la philosophie africaine pour prétendre, en toute légitimité, à un pouvoir sensible sur la société africaine cherchant à progresser? » (15),

l'ouvrage s'offre comme étant à la recherche d'une nouvelle volonté de vérité. Il participe de la dynamique de quête d'un nouvel ordre du discours perceptible dans le livre du théologien et sociologue camerounais Jean-Marc Ela significativement intitulé *Repenser la théologie africaine* (2001). En effet, la débâcle des États africains postcoloniaux en mal de transition démocratique et les nouveaux défis que le continent africain doit relever pour avoir sa place dans l'ordre mondial où le maître mot est devenu la globalisation rendent nécessaire le réajustement des paradigmes intellectuels, cultu-

rels, et la redéfinition du rôle de l'intellectuel en tant que conscience critique de la société.

Pour atteindre l'objectif qu'il s'est fixé, l'ouvrage se subdivise en trois grandes parties. La première, « Pouvoir et degré de conscience politique de la philosophie africaine », est une lecture critique de la tradition philosophique africaine quant à son pouvoir (efficacité) et à sa relation avec le pouvoir politique; la deuxième, « La théorie inflexionnelle », présente les exigences d'une plus grande efficacité de la philosophie en Afrique; enfin, la troisième, « Éléments argumentatifs », porte les deux premières à leur achèvement théorique en montrant que c'est la philosophie politique, qui est une nécessité en Afrique, qui constitue la voie royale pour tout acte philosophique qui se veut socialement efficace. L'auteur s'efforce alors d'en définir les tâches possibles et les exigences premières.

Dans la première partie qui examine « le pouvoir et le degré de conscience politique de la philosophie africaine », l'auteur part d'une hypothèse à l'aune de laquelle les deux courants classiques de la philosophie africaine contemporaine, à savoir le courant herméneutique et le courant critico-prospectif, seront appréciés. Voici cette hypothèse: dans la situation actuelle de l'Afrique dominée par la déraison politique, les violences, les injustices et la malgouvernance, l'élément principal déterminant le degré de conscience politique d'une activité philosophique est la prise en compte des questions politiques. Autrement dit,

« le degré de conscience politique d'une philosophie est la mesure essentielle de son potentiel d'efficacité pratique » (25).

Tout en reconnaissant que le travail herméneutique des « ethnophilosophes » est une exigence théorique de la formation de la conscience historique qui se présente comme une nécessité psychologique, morale et politique, Ngoma-Binda n'en souligne pas moins la limite liée à son dogmatisme et, surtout, à son passéisme. La philosophie herméneutique africaine telle qu'elle a été pratiquée par les ethnophilosophes se caractériserait par la désertion des contradictions de la situation actuelle pour ressusciter un passé glorieux, harmonieux, dans lequel les gens se reconnaissent de moins en moins (29). Cependant cette orientation philosophique ne doit pas être délaissée. Dans la mesure où la mise en valeur du patrimoine culturel africain s'impose comme une nécessité légitime, – elle constitue une source

[d'] « énergie spirituelle particulièrement efficace...dans l'affrontement actuel...entre les pays occidentaux et les pays pauvres du Tiers-Monde » (33),

l'auteur pose que l'urgence aujourd'hui est celle de chercher une voie herméneutique

« qui serait la plus susceptible de maximiser les chances d'authenticité et d'efficacité de la philosophie » (94).

Qu'en est-il du courant critique? Ce courant dont Hountondji est le porte étendard souffrirait d'une pauvreté politique qui serait le *quantum* de son attachement exagéré à la question de la philosophicité du discours philosophique africain et à son élitisme. Si l'on ne peut lui dénier une intention politique, celle-ci, déclare l'auteur, est, cependant,

« une intention politique de surface, simplement incidente dans la mesure où elle relève beaucoup plus de la polémique sur son propre être philosophique que de l'examen serré des concepts, théories et opinions politiques définis » (40).

...le défaut majeur de cette pensée critico-prospective est celui de situer le débat au niveau de la surface et, largement et pour longtemps, à celui de l'épistémologie spéculative, laquelle se donne simplement, à y regarder attentivement, comme une propédeutique à l'essentiel éthique et politique constitutif de toute vraie et bonne philosophie... Elle est de la philosophie propédeutique en tant qu'elle est suspendue à des questions de pertinence et de méthode... De la sorte elle se prend elle-même pour objet: elle ne cesse de se dire en disant, elle spéculé, elle réfléchit sur elle-même comme savoir possible (39-41).

Ngoma-Binda suggère que la seule manière de dépasser ce narcissisme philosophique consisterait à se mettre à l'écoute des populations de l'Afrique actuelle dont la plus grande préoccupation est la nécessité d'instaurer des gouvernements corrects et la transformation des conditions de vie. Ce qui signifie que ce dont on a urgemment besoin en Afrique, c'est

« d'une philosophie politique (entendue comme réflexion sur le pouvoir politique des États africains) ».

Celle-ci, continue-t-il, constitue, pour le philosophe africain,

« la voie principale d'une contribution efficace à la lutte contre la terrible menace de non-être qui pèse, de manière insistante, sur l'homme et les sociétés d'Afrique » (41).

Avant de s'atteler à l'élucidation de cette thèse majeure de son livre dans la deuxième partie, l'auteur, partant de l'évolution de la conscience philosophique au Congo-Zaïre durant les dernières années qui sont justement celles d'une véritable turbulence politique, prend soin de montrer comment, même si elle

« n'a guère ébranlé les tenants du pouvoir politique dans le sens de les amener à repenser leur pratique, et n'a pas eu d'impact important sur les consciences des populations » (75),

la conscience politique de l'acte philosophique s'affermir de plus en plus chez les philosophes.

« Désormais, le philosophe est compris, éminemment, comme à la fois un « veilleur » et un « éveilleur de consciences » (Ngimbi), principalement des consciences politiques...comme un acteur politique dont la responsabilité est immense dans la direction et la gestion de la destinée globale des citoyens et des peuples » (69).

Partant de ce constat, Ngoma-Binda propose alors dans la deuxième partie de son ouvrage les principes qui permettraient à la pratique philosophique africaine de devenir plus efficace et pertinente. Parmi les éléments de ce qu'il appelle « théorie inflexionnelle », on peut citer: « l'authenticité du discours », « la pertinence méthodologique », « l'idéologie comme technologie de la philosophie », la création des structures concrètes d'un philosophe postcolonial et la conception d'un nouveau type d'enseignement philosophique orienté vers l'efficacité pratique.

L'authenticité du discours qui est perçue comme une condition fondamentale du pouvoir inflexionnel de la philosophie recouvre plusieurs choses. Elle recouvre entre autres:

- 1) la nécessité d'articuler le travail philosophique sur les réalités africaines actuelles et pertinentes et en langue africaine, porteuse d'identité et

« l'une des grandes signatures attestatrices d'authenticité » (94);

- 2) la révolutionnarité des modes de lecture et la proximité intime,

« spirituelle, culturelle et idéologique du philosophe face aux pensées, valeurs et aspirations de la société et donc par la rencontre, pour ainsi dire

complice et inévitablement intime, des visées aussi bien du philosophe que de la société à laquelle il appartient » (91-92).

On voit ici la volonté de l'auteur de se dissocier de Hountondji, qui, naguère, par souci d'échapper aux pièges d'une métaphysique de l'identité héritée de la négritude, définissait le philosophe africain par l'appartenance géographique. L'auteur, lui, privilégie l'intimité avec le peuple. Dans ce cas, un européen ayant longtemps vécu en Afrique peut produire une œuvre d'une authenticité africaine incontestable.

3) La visée émancipatoire. En clair, pour prétendre à l'efficacité, la philosophie africaine doit

se manifester comme une réflexion herméneutico-dialectique, préférablement en langue africaine, sur des problèmes d'Afrique, et ayant pour visée consciente de contribuer à l'émancipation de la personne humaine, c'est-à-dire une réflexion coulée dans un discours philosophique qui se manifeste comme produit d'un Africain, sur l'Afrique, pour l'Afrique (105).

Inspiré de J. Habermas (1975, 1976) qui apparaît comme le réflecteur majeur de la théorie inflexionnelle, l'herméneutique dialectique consiste à aller « du présent vers le passé en vue du présent et du futur ». Le présent y est donc la catégorie fondamentale en tant qu'il

« détermine la nature et les modalités de la présence de l'homme ou de la société, au présent et au futur » (98).

Outre ces exigences d'authenticité, la pratique philosophique doit intégrer, comme « *noyau vivant* » (110), les traits pertinents du pouvoir idéologique et pratique. Ngoma-Binda, après Olabiyi B. Yai (1978), pense que l'inefficacité de la « philosophie-science » ou de la philosophie spéculative à la Hountondji vient du manque d'une dimension idéologique. Il écrit:

l'idéologie est vis-à-vis de la philosophie ce que la technologie est vis-à-vis de la science. L'idéologie est la technologie de la philosophie. Car, à bien voir les choses de près, la science en elle-même ne transforme pas le réel, n'agit pas sur le monde matériel, sinon indirectement en engendrant la technologie qui, elle, transforme la matière. De même, la philosophie ne saurait agir sur l'homme et la société autrement que par le biais de l'idéologie qu'elle conçoit et engendre comme son prolongement, et qu'elle propose à la société (111).

Autrement dit, l'idéologie est pour Ngoma-Binda, en accord en cela avec Elungu Pene Elungu, le couronnement de la philosophie, car elle est

« la réalisation des exigences philosophiques du bien et du vrai au sein de la société, faisant de celle-ci l'alpha et l'oméga de toute entreprise philosophique. Dans l'idéologie, la philosophie trouverait son achèvement social et son accomplissement humain » (Elungu 1982: 77, Ngoma Binda, 237).

D'où l'invitation faite aux philosophes universitaires, dont le pouvoir idéologique est fort limité, de reprendre à des frais intellectuels nouveaux et en guise de dépassement de la méfiance vis-à-vis du pouvoir politique,

« le contenu idéologique des philosophies des leaders et hommes d'États africains » (116).

Enfin, pour rendre effectif ce nouveau mode de penser, il faut trouver des structures d'expansion des idées en s'appropriant, par exemple, les appareils populaires adéquats de diffusion des idées (121), renouveler l'enseignement philosophique en l'orientant vers le discernement et en articulant la réflexion théorique sur la pratique éthique, économique et politique de la société (147), enfin, créer

« des structures concrètes d'un philosophe postcolonial efficace »

du genre de l'*Institut de Formation et d'Études Politiques* créé par l'auteur à Kinshasa en 1990 pour donner à ceux qui exercent ou sont appelés à exercer le pouvoir politique

« une formation philosophico-politique, à la fois théorique et pratique, axée sur les impératifs de la vie sociale, juridique, éthique et économique des nations africaines » (148).

Notons en passant que cet institut reste paradoxalement élitiste car post-universitaire alors que la « théorie inflexionnelle » se voudrait accessible à la masse populaire, sinon tout simplement une philosophie populaire. Enfin, l'auteur va jusqu'à proposer la création d'une structure normative, une sorte de police philosophique, dont la mission serait de veiller au bon fonctionnement de la vie philosophique dans chaque pays (152). Cette proposition rappelle curieusement la police littéraire qui avait été proposée, au moment fort de l'authenticité, par Mbulamoko Nzege Movoambe (1973) pour authentifier

et rappeler à l'ordre ceux qu'il appelait « les écrivains de caricature », c'est-à-dire qui ne respectaient pas l'esthétique et la thématique normatives de l'idéologie de l'authenticité, laquelle indiquait

« ce qui est bien et ce qui est mal, ce qui est beau et ce qui est laid, ce qui est vrai et ce qui est faux, ce qui est sublime et ce qui est vil » (Kangafu 42).

Après avoir énoncé les douze principes normatifs de la philosophie inflexionnelle, c'est-à-dire de

« toute philosophie qui s'organise de manière à pouvoir infléchir le gouvernement de la vie sociale et politique vers de meilleures options et modalités d'exécution, de sorte qu'il produise les effets sociaux les meilleurs possibles » (169),

l'auteur s'attache à affirmer sa thèse en dévoilant ce vers quoi toute la démarche tendait, savoir, d'une part, qu'une philosophie soucieuse d'efficacité doit

« s'intéresser, de manière préférentielle au domaine politique »

et, d'autre part, que dans la situation actuelle de l'Afrique, une philosophie politique est à la fois une nécessité et une tâche qui s'impose. Enfin, sous forme de couronnement, Ngoma-Binda met en exergue une exigence ultime attendue du philosophe ou, plus généralement, de l'intellectuel africain résolument engagé dans la quête du salut de l'Afrique, à savoir « le patriotisme philosophique » inséparable d'une « philosophie du patriotisme » (245). Partant du fait que

« le patriotisme naît et vit d'une *philosophie de la terre*, d'une vision particulière de sa terre héritée de ses pères et grands-pères » (253)

que l'on veut sauver de la perte ou de la disparition, Ngoma-Binda définit le patriotisme philosophique, facilement assimilable au nationalisme, comme

« un engagement, un combat intellectuel tendant à faire triompher dans la société, sa patrie, les valeurs susceptibles de la sauver des dangers qui la menacent » (255).

Cette exigence d'une philosophie soucieuse de rendre service à sa patrie a une généalogie qui, selon l'auteur, plonge ses racines dans l'histoire même de la philosophie. Car c'est elle qui servait de fondement à l'action de

« Socrate s'investissant dans la mission ... de devoir sauver sa patrie grecque de la déchéance intellectuelle et morale, Johann Gottlieb Fichte plaidant pour le salut de la nation allemande, à travers une valorisation adéquate des énergies intellectuelles de son peuple soumis et humilié par l'entreprise napoléonienne de conquête foncière et politique ».

C'est elle qui est au cœur de la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit* débouchant sur l'absolu de la nation prussienne. Enfin, c'est en son nom que

« Martin Heidegger invite la nation allemande à reconquérir les attributs authentiques de l'être oublié, et qu'il lui assigne la tâche orgueilleuse de se placer à la tête de la civilisation du monde moderne » (255).

La page d'où ces passages sont tirés donne la mesure de l'enracinement de la pensée de Ngoma-Binda dans la situation actuelle du Congo-Zaïre. C'est le danger qui guette la nation congolaise prise d'assaut par les violences et l'irresponsabilité politique qui montre la nécessité, pour les intellectuels/ philosophes, de sortir des tours d'ivoire académiques où ils gardent leurs mains propres pour réfléchir à visage découvert sur le pouvoir politique et, le cas échéant, prendre le risque de s'engager jusqu'au sacrifice ultime à la manière de Socrate.

« Comme tout citoyen, le philosophe est obligé de confier au pouvoir politique une large part de son droit et de son pouvoir de gestion de sa propre destinée. Mais il n'est pas libre de laisser le pouvoir politique gérer à sa guise toute sa destinée ni celle d'une tranche entière de l'humanité tout entière. C'est la raison ultime qui fonde la détermination à réfléchir sur la politique, et qui justifie toute volonté saine d'entrer en politique » (282).

Magnifique illustration de ce que cela peut signifier que de philosopher lorsque sa patrie traverse un temps de crise politique et sociale aiguë, le livre de Ngoma-Binda pose des questions fondamentales au sujet du rôle, de la place, de la mission, bref du pouvoir du philosophe ou, plus généralement, de l'intellectuel africain dans la situation actuelle d'une Afrique en ruine. Il donne une dimension résolument politique à la question qu'on trouve au cœur des travaux de Mudimbe (1988) et Appiah (1992), à savoir: que signifie être africain et philosophe/ intellectuel aujourd'hui? L'accent mis sur l'engagement politique va de pair avec un écart majeur: alors que Mudimbe et Appiah, dont la perspective est surtout celle d'une philosophie de la culture dans un monde postcolonial, sont des intellectuels cosmopolites et,

comme certains le disent, « postmodernes », Ngoma-Binda, lui, promeut un patriotisme philosophique ou intellectuel en tant que loyauté et fidélité à une nation, presque sur le modèle du XIX^e siècle.

Tout en reconnaissant la valeur du livre, surtout la force de conviction et la compassion qui sous-tendent son argumentation, je voudrais très brièvement épinglez quelques points qui méritent d'être débattus. Plus précisément, je voudrais suggérer que, dans la conjoncture actuelle du monde, le « patriotisme philosophique », inséparable d'un certain « politicisme » qui descend de Habermas, pourrait constituer la force et la faiblesse de la théorie inflexionnelle. Lié à

« l'obligation de payer la dette généalogique » et à la fidélité à la terre de ses ancêtres (Certeau 1975: 324),

le patriotisme peut émuresser l'audace critique qui fait

« prendre le risque d'aller au-delà des certitudes faciles fournies par nos origines, notre langue, notre nationalité » (Said 1996: 13)

pour réfléchir soigneusement aux alternatives et « dire la vérité au pouvoir » sans compromis dégénéralant souvent en compromission. Je pense ici aux propos d'Anthony Kwame Appiah à propos de la famille royale Asante qui, à la mort de son père, a voulu exploiter son appartenance au clan royal pour le faire entrer dans son jeu aux visées d'une noblesse douteuse. Il écrit:

And often, so it seems to me, as in this case, those who urge compromise as an African virtue are only supporting a compromise with the status quo, a concession to those with money and power, and a little bit of concern for abstract rights might reflect not a colonized mind but an urge to take sides against the mighty, and « speak the truth to power » (Appiah 1992: 189).

Mais avant d'aborder de front ce problème, disons un mot sur le cadre global du livre.

Au tout début du chapitre VI de *Branchements. Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures* (2001), Jean-Loup Amselle s'interroge:

« Peut-on réfléchir à nouveaux frais sur l'existence d'une philosophie africaine ou d'une ethno-philosophie? » (177).

Il répond:

« Les débats des années 1970 et 1980, au sein desquels se sont illustrées des figures marquantes de la pensée comme Paulin Hountondji et Valentin Y. Mudimbe, doivent à mon sens être radicalement renouvelés par la prise en compte de la traduction [en français] et de la publication d'un certain nombre d'œuvres d'auteurs africains qui ne sont pas issus de la tradition philosophique occidentale. » (Amselle 2001: 177).

Certes, le projet de Ngoma-Binda n'était pas de revenir sur le débat dorénavant inutile sur l'existence de la philosophie africaine; cependant il y a lieu de penser que la première partie de son livre consacrée à la relecture du débat philosophique africain depuis Tempels gagnerait largement à s'investir dans la voie du renouvellement suggéré par Amselle. Le phénomène Tempels occulte un courant de penser inspiré de l'Islam qu'il importe de prendre en compte aujourd'hui pour une meilleure présentation de l'histoire des idées et de la formation de la conscience historique et politique en Afrique.

De plus, la présentation des positions de son interlocuteur majeur, à savoir Paulin Hountondji, dont il n'utilise que quatre textes, tous parus entre 1970 et 1981, ne rendent pas justice à son évolution dans le temps. S'agissant d'un livre sur la capacité des philosophes africains d'infléchir le pouvoir politique et de la nécessité de s'engager en politique, il aurait été intéressant d'analyser l'expérience de Hountondji qui, entre 1990 et 1993, a accepté d'assumer successivement les postes de ministre de la culture, de l'éducation et de conseiller du président Nicéphore Soglo avant de démissionner pour se consacrer à la recherche et à la formation des jeunes universitaires béninois.

On peut reprocher au « jeune » Hountondji une conception étroite de la philosophie fondée sur une exigence de rigueur méthodologique dans la pratique de la philosophie assimilée à une forme de discours scientifique coupé des relents idéologiques. Mais il faut noter que depuis les années 1990, Hountondji (1992, 1997, 2001) a sensiblement assoupli sa position et évolué vers une sorte de pragmatisme qui se concrétise d'une part dans la dénonciation des structures injustes régissant la production du savoir dans le monde, d'autre part, dans un effort pour réactualiser les systèmes de savoir endogènes en Afrique afin de promouvoir leur prise en charge par les savants africains. Dans la perspective de Ngoma-Binda, l'évolution de Hountondji est notable lorsqu'on considère que dans son livre au titre fort significatif, à savoir *Combat pour le sens. Un itinéraire* (1997), le philosophe béninois reproche à Valentin Y. Mudimbe d'avoir « choisi une certaine forme

d'apolitisme » et de ne pas mettre sa vaste érudition « au service de quelques idées-forces » (1997: 252).

On s'étonne aussi de la quasi-absence d'une discussion avec Fabien Eboussi Boulaga dans le livre de Ngoma-Binda. En effet, quoi que dans un langage qui n'est pas « clair, simple et accessible à la masse » (Ngoma-Binda 2004: 118), – Ngoma-Binda feint d'oublier que le style, chez Eboussi tout comme chez Mudimbe, a des enjeux véritablement philosophiques¹ – *La crise du Muntu. Authenticité africaine et philosophie* (1977) me semble avoir analysé avec une profondeur remarquable certaines questions qu'il pose dans son essai, telles la question de l'institutionnalisation et donc du pouvoir de la philosophie en Afrique postcoloniale, de son enseignement inefficace ou aliénant, de la langue de production d'une philosophie africaine pertinente, enfin des exigences d'une philosophie africaine authentique. Mais venons-en à la thèse majeure de Ngoma-Binda et à la méthode qu'il trouve appropriée pour élaborer une philosophie authentique et véritablement émancipatoire, à savoir l'herméneutique dialectique.

J'éprouve quelque réticence à propos de cette méthode reprise de J. Habermas en tant qu'héritier et continuateur de la tradition dite herméneutico-dialectique (Ngoma-Binda 2004: 97). Ma réticence face à cette méthode vient de son enracinement dans une tradition monotopique, ignorant des aspects importants de la situation du sujet africain à émanciper, et du peu de travail théorique d'appropriation effectué par Ngoma-Binda. Ce travail me semble nécessaire pour montrer comment transformer cette tradition herméneutico-dialectique « servante des riches, des privilégiés » de la modernité, afin d'en faire une tradition au service

« des pauvres, des misérables, de l'Afrique dominée »,

bref de ceux qui portent le poids de l'irrationalité du « système mondial » (I. Wallerstein) –le capitalisme sauvage – et dont les souffrances comme la relation de domination politique, culturelle et économique par rapport à

¹ Voir à ce sujet ma contribution, « Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga ou l'honneur de penser et l'art de l'inservitude », à un ouvrage d'hommage à Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga à paraître prochainement aux Éditions Dianopia sous la direction de Paul-Aaron Florent Ngomo et mon essai *V.Y. Mudimbe et la réinvention de l'Afrique. Poétique et politique de la décolonisation des sciences humaines*, Amsterdam/ New-York, Rodopi, 2005 (sous presse).

l'Occident ne sont pas suffisamment problématisées par la tradition habermasienne qui célèbre la modernité (Dussel 1996). Ne sont-ce pas ces souffrances qui constituent le point de départ de la théorie inflexionnelle?

Essayons d'être plus clair. Comme cela peut apparaître dans le passage précédent, la réticence par rapport à la méthode concerne aussi une d'hypertrophie du politique dans le discours de Ngoma-Binda au prix d'une minorisation extrême de la dimension économique. On sait qu'Habermas, au tout début de *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel* (1987), affirme que la sociologie est de plus grand intérêt pour sa réflexion philosophique que l'économie (sciences économiques). Peut-il en être autant pour un Africain?

Dans une note en sandwich entre deux références à Max Weber, sociologue allemand du début du XXe siècle, Ngoma-Binda écrit:

« Il va de soi qu'il existe d'autres activités pratiques, telle l'économie. Mais je suis d'avis que c'est la politique qui dirige l'économie, même si celle-ci influe à son tour sur la politique. Le politique a une préséance sur l'économique. C'est ainsi qu'il paraît adéquat d'articuler la réflexion sur la politique de manière prioritaire » (2004: 207 note 25).

Au regard du monde dans lequel nous vivons, monde où les multinationales tendent à orienter les décisions politiques et à conditionner la vie sociale, je crains que ces propos ne trahissent un brin d'idéalisme dans la théorie inflexionnelle. Si l'on convient avec le philosophe argentin Enrique Dussel qui a cette formule,

« There is no economics without politics nor politics without economics » (Dussel 1996: 227),

ne conviendra-t-on pas aussi de la nécessité de les penser dans un rapport dialectique. On verrait peut-être alors qu'en Afrique comme dans d'autres parties du Tiers-Monde,

« to speak of democracy or politics is not enough. What is necessary is a social or material-economic democracy, and a political philosophy articulated adequately through an economic philosophy » (Dussel, 230).

C'est à ce prix que le philosophe peut proposer un projet de société concret et mobilisateur.

C'est aussi au regard du système global dans lequel la destinée de

l'Afrique doit se négocier que j'éprouve quelque réticence lorsque Ngoma-Binda affirme qu'une pratique philosophique authentique doit se manifester comme

« une réflexion coulée dans un discours philosophique qui se manifeste comme produit d'un Africain, en Africain, sur l'Afrique, pour l'Afrique » (2004: 105).

C'est que, ainsi que le proposait Fabien Eboussi Boulaga dans *La Crise du Muntu*, le récit pour soi du Muntu doit aussi « se constituer pour autrui », c'est-à-dire « se montrer universel, intelligible et accessible à tous ». Ceci est d'autant plus important que l'Afrique est située dans un système global injuste sur lequel il faut aussi agir pour transformer les conditions de vie des Africains et d'autres peuples qui souffrent.

« Les problèmes de la particularité sont déterminés par l'avènement d'une histoire mondiale » (Boulaga 1977: 226).

Il incombe à l'intellectuel d'être capable

« d'universaliser la crise, de donner une plus grande dimension humaine à la souffrance d'une race ou d'une nation particulière et de la mettre en rapport avec d'autres souffrances » (Said 1996: 60).

La globalisation, avec ses conséquences sur la vie socio-économique et politique des sociétés africaines, est aussi une dimension que la « théorie inflexionnelle devrait pouvoir prendre en compte.

Mais enfin de compte, tous les philosophes ou intellectuels africains doivent-ils faire de la politique le seul sujet prioritaire et, ultimement, « entrer en politique » pour y introduire un peu de rationalité? La question est embarrassante quand on songe au nombre d'« intellectuels » qui, en Afrique, sont entrés en politique, ont tenu des discours sur le nationalisme, le patriotisme, le développement, les droits de l'homme, lesquels ne les ont pas empêchés de nous ruiner politiquement, économiquement, socialement et moralement.

Je me demande si on ne devrait pas avant tout se demander, en reprenant les figures (Voltaire, Zola, Sartre, Chomsky, etc.) et les fonctions de l'intellectuel à travers l'histoire occidentale qui nous sert encore de référence, sans oublier la tradition de ce que les anthropologues ont appelé « intellectual peasant » ou « philosophe indigène » (Radin 1927), s'il y a de la place pour l'intellectuel dans les États africains tels qu'ils existent au-

jourd'hui (Eboussi Boulaga 1993: 33). Toutes les conditions matérielles et spirituelles indispensables à une vie intellectuelle viable sont presque inexistantes. On pourrait même dire, en partant de l'exemple d'un pays comme le Congo/ Zaïre, que les hommes au pouvoir ont tout fait pour saper une vie intellectuelle et débaucher les vocations intellectuelles en faisant croire qu'il n'y a que la politique qui est la voie vers l'honneur, la notabilité, la reconnaissance. Les mots de Hountondji restent d'actualité.

« Il nous appartient ... créer [en Afrique] un milieu humain dans lequel et par lequel les problèmes les plus divers pourront être débattus librement, et où ces discussions pourront être non moins librement enregistrées, diffusées grâce à l'écriture, pour être soumises à l'appréciation de tous » (1977: 36).

Et il ajoute aussitôt, rejoignant Ngoma-Binda:

Cela suppose, on le voit, la liberté d'expression. Une liberté que tant de régimes politiques s'efforcent aujourd'hui d'étouffer, à des degrés divers. Mais cela veut dire, précisément, que la responsabilité du philosophe africain (comme celle de tout homme de science africain) déborde infiniment le cadre étroit de sa discipline, et qu'il ne peut se payer le luxe d'un apolitisme satisfait, d'une complaisance tranquille à l'égard du désordre établi, à moins de se renier lui-même comme philosophe et comme homme... Nous sommes aujourd'hui au cœur d'un nœud de problèmes enchevêtrés, intimement solidaires les uns des autres. La nécessité de la lutte politique se fait sentir à tous les niveaux, sur tous les plans. (1977: 36)

La reprise des figures et des fonctions de l'intellectuel dans les deux traditions mentionnées ci-dessus pourrait révéler que si l'apolitisme est inacceptable pour un intellectuel conscient de sa responsabilité historique, l'intégration dans les structures du pouvoir n'est pas non plus la meilleure façon de s'engager politiquement en tant qu'intellectuel. La manière dont des intellectuels qui se voulaient révolutionnaires avaient rejoint le parti communiste pour aussitôt le quitter en se plaignant de son dogmatisme peut être éloquente. Il se pourrait qu'une certaine marginalité en tant que marque d'une distance critique soit nécessaire à l'exercice de la fonction d'intellectuel qui, loin d'être un fonctionnaire de la Vérité quelle qu'elle soit (théologique, politique, scientifique, etc.) est plutôt à sa recherche². Ce qui

² On peut aussi penser à une autre figure majeure comme Fabien Eboussi-Boulaga qui, dans la marginalité pleinement assumée comme exigence d'une pensée critique, n'est pas

nécessite une bonne dose de scepticisme que n'aiment pas les partisans passionnés ou les experts au service des hommes au pouvoir.

« La voix de l'intellectuel est solitaire, mais c'est bien à sa liberté qu'elle doit sa résonance, à sa liberté de s'associer aux luttes et aux aspirations d'un peuple, à la mise en œuvre commune d'un idéal partagé » (1996: 117).

Pour éviter l'activisme sans vision, la prise de parole de l'intellectuel doit être nourrie par une « érudition sans répit » (Foucault) indispensable à qui veut

« confronter des sources contradictoires, exhumer des documents enfouis, ressusciter des histoires oubliées (ou abandonnées) » afin de « dire la vérité au pouvoir »

et de consolider la conscience historique et politique du peuple. Sous peine de se nier, l'intellectuel doit choisir et soutenir des causes et des idées conformes aux valeurs auxquels il est attaché. Mais cela exige qu'on se mette à la recherche de ce que Eboussi Boulaga appelle « une éthique de l'intelligence » (1993: 34). Comme l'économie, elle sera une dimension importante de la théorie inflectionnelle.

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moins une figure morale importante et influente au Cameroun. Il faut aussi dire qu'on n'a pas beaucoup prêté attention à l'appel déjà lancé en 1971 par Marcien Towa, de la nécessité de passer en Afrique de l'intellectuel postmissionnaire à l'intellectuel laïque qui n'est au service d'aucune divinité (Towa 1971; Hountonji 1977).

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IDEOLOGIES OF WOMEN'S NAMES AMONG THE NSO' OF CAMEROON

A Contribution to the Philosophy of Naming, Decolonization and Gender¹

by Bongasu Tanla Kishani

ABSTRACT. This article deals with the impact of colonialism on culture, as exemplified by women's names among the Nso' of Cameroon, a strongly hierarchical society with a complex pattern of social organization. The affirmation of local identity and the defiance of cultural erosion through colonialism is brought out by the author's refusal to offer an abstract and key words unless in the Nso' language. The mechanisms of this erosion are studied in the first part of the article, with a rich inventory of the items of material culture, and the associated lexical items, involved. A contradictory effect has been that European and mission-derived names have been greatly en vogue among the Nso'. The church-related dynamics of this phenomenon is closely studied by the author, with special emphasis on women, and contrasted with the intricacies of the historic Nso' system of personal names.

KEY WORDS. Cameroon, Christian missions, church, cultural erosion, European, impact of colonialism on culture, lexical items, material culture, naming system (historical), Nso', personal names, social organization, women, words

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Yír sé vikìy seé Liì Nso' si dzè jeéy fo sé aliì veé wòŋ símó' sí. Á kù yii yám shu yír sé vikìy é Liì Nso' réŋrèŋ moo yír sé vilum. Kóy vilum wùn à kóy vikìyí yii táti wún kfàn ji kifá kimò'ón e Liì Nso'. Nso' yii dzè'èr Fon, á dzè'èr Yaà. Atàrla' Nso'o kù yii kér sa wán woo wíy woó la' wùmò' wo

¹ Our abstract in Lam Nso' instead of the usual English or French versions is intentional. It is a corollary of some of our contentions in favour of the initial practical use of African / Cameroon languages in scholarly Journals and reviews. However, our main contention is, therefore, that the time is now ripe for Africanists and African scholars writing in European languages to present at least an abstract in the languages of the peoples who are directly concerned with their research findings. In this way, instead of speaking as it were behind Africa's / Cameroon's languages, we can sound the opinions of those directly living within and experiencing their cultures mainly through the use of African / Cameroon languages.

á yii lóo dzè'èr áwune á lèm. Nso' yii shurì yír sé wón nyù y à vee vilume, à vee vikíyí rénréñ sikweè sikweè: Lúkòñ, Tàatà, Ìgòñ wùn à Túkòv fo vilum mbìv; Bìy, Sheè, Ntàn, wùn à Kfǎkfǎ fo vikíy mbìv.

Yii bèy, a Liì vitum ve Bàrà' wìy ne a sùm Nso' sùmen e yír sí. Nso' yò' dzè shó ashàr ve á sí laysìn Liì Nso' woo kùm yír sé vikíy. Wánlè wíy lóo dù lán e lum vé lav, wù nèn a mà'ày yír ré má'ayin, a li a dzè yé lum vè ji dzè á ndzè yee lèn. Nso'-oò kì kév jii, lùmèn wùn wíy vè kù yii kér a yír sév wír adzè. Á yii lóo tooví wón bo lum wùn wíy vè bóñrí e kòóy yír se fíy si e sè Taàlúkòñ kìn Yeèlúkòñ fo wan wo mbìy kì dzèèn lumen, Taàbìy kìn Yeèbìy fo wan wo mbìy kì dzèèn wíy. Kin kì din ji yii yám yii wón é liì Nso' e ghan símó' sí é bo wíy wáa kuvsín yír ré. Liì vitum ve Bàrà' wìy ne a yii moo ji wù waà shem a Liì Nso' woo shooy bèy. Wánlè wíy lo lán wù nèn a biimé a dzè yír tàr wov cá'cá'. M lòo suñnén e fèn, a dzèr ji Nso' sà ta' a mà'ày Liì Nso' woo ben má'ayin á! A Bàrà'-aà wìy e vífá vi moo mbàm sév, cíwàr wóv, ñwà' wóv, ñgar wov, wùn à kintam kév kí, bo bó yò' dzè ji Nso' yò'-oò waà sí bunrì, ma' rér, fer vinyo vév é njà kimfèr, yii wáy, kúr vífám vév. Shií wo mbìy dzè ji Nso' wàa leéy e sàyrí ji sà bòñ kaá, e bóo a bì'nèn Liì vitum ve Bàrà' bí'nen (taaka kinyo kee kùm yír sé vikíy), là kwa'tì!

Sàñ: Bónaasu Tanla Kishaane

Introduction

In a way similar to the Fondoms in the Cameroon Grassfields, the Fondom of Nso' in today's Cameroon boasts a longstanding authority. The latter is woven from pre-colonial times by the Nso' people and vested in the hands of the Fon (King) and the *Atarla'* (Nobles). the Fondom of Nso' is significantly marked by its culturally distinctive, localized patrilineal, and, spatially mixed, but identifiable matrilineal units. But, beginning with the trauma of colonialism which was earlier preceded by the plague of the Transatlantic Slave Trade there has been a continuous interaction between these centuries-old units of indigenous Nso' / African culture and the influential European colonial and neo-colonial institutions of a wider-range of political power. To judge from the practical ambitions of their agents and goals of their institutions, these Western European colonial and neo-colonial powers have always been anxious to implant a different cultural dynamism rather than to empower and promote the ones they found already developed there. Moreover, the foreign character of the European powers and cultural systems rarely shared the same common interests with their African local counterparts.

As a result, Western colonialism or neo-colonialism and African local

cultures compete for separate goals of cultural interest in terms of the names of individual peoples, places, and countries. Our interest here cannot, completely avoid those issues of cultural misunderstanding and conflict which result from the pursuit of these separate goals. For, all African names and the cultural values they confer, arise from, depict and reflect a variety of cultural origins from both inside and outside Africa, even if they tend at times to call some of their conflicting choices and practical uses into question.

By relying mainly on their locally contextual and cultural origins, this essay presents an insider's point of view which can account for a better understanding of women's naming systems among the Nso' from the pre-colonial era to the period of African independence. In other words, Western European colonialism and African / Nso' cultures constitute the entire corpus from which we can choose and determine some of our main interests and goals. Africa as represented by the ethnic traditions of its peoples and Europe as experienced in Africa through the tentacles of its colonization, spreading along with the Transatlantic Slave Trade into the American continent will constitute our main focus, as we interrogate them all in an attempt to gain inspiration for a better comprehension of the ideologies of naming among human communities. Our emphasis on women's names and naming systems as cultural values aims at reflecting both the cultural experiences of Nso' women and the cultural network of the entire Nso' ethnic group. Our study of Nso' women's names cannot be carried out in isolation from the study of the Nso' men's names, since the Nso' themselves are ever culturally self-conscious of their complementary roles as men and women, in general, and in fact, also manifest this self-consciousness through their naming systems.

Ambiguous Tools of Colonization

It is important to find out why and how Western European colonization interacted with African ethnic cultures in a way that ambiguously rendered it simultaneously contestable and acceptable, especially as this can enable us to have a balanced view of its contributions as regards African naming systems and names. The conflict within and the resistance against Western

European colonization, which arose essentially from its inhuman principles, corollaries, and assumptions in relation to Africa, had their repercussions in the African naming systems. For, according to scholars and thinkers like Aimé Césaire, author of *Discourse on Colonialism (Discours sur le Colonialisme)*, one of the best representational equations for European colonization was the historically shameful ‘equation: colonization = thingification’,² whereby Africans were arbitrarily forfeited their rights to name even themselves independently of the languages of colonial European powers. This meant that the essential cultural differences between the Western powers and their more numerous African counterparts were quite often wrongly presented in terms of a sheer power struggle. For, it is still important to note that, contrary to the aspirations of the local units of culture and power, the colonial Western powers though numerically smaller, kept to their already propounded wrong principles as well as to the colonizing directives of their own politically misguided intentions.

In fact, Western European colonialism from its early stages gradually made inroads into the most receded hinterlands of Africa through its practical use of, and faith in the strength of its ‘Five C’s’: its *coin*, its *cannon / gun*, its *cross*, its *cloth / flag* and its *crayon* or *computerizing pen*.³ All of these human-made instruments enabled European colonialists to sap and drain Africans of their identity including their names and naming systems, thus treating them as if they were things or merchandise, but not human beings. Historically, even before the actual official colonization with European flags began to partition and name Africa and Africans, country by country, according to the corresponding names of their Western European colonial powers in the Berlin Conference of 1884, these ambiguous magnetic elements of attraction and repulsion had been inseparably employed by European explorers, adventurers and missionaries to promote by various violent means what later became known and defined as the *mission civilisatrice* of the European colonial task or mission to civilize African men, women and children by depriving them among other things of their rights to name and to be named in accordance with African cultural traditions.

² In Eze 1998: 226.

³ A pun on the English expression concerning the so-called three R’s in primary education: *wRiting, Reading, and aRithmetic*.

As barbaric and obnoxious as this was, it was rare even to find groups of Africans who could present a common front of resistance against such odious intentions. The immediate concern of Western European colonization in Africa was neither the task of nation building nor that of consolidating existent and contesting African nations. The European colonial enterprise employed various strategies to rename (call it 'baptize'), destroy, plunder, denigrate and enslave Africans and Africa itself. Nation-building would have given every African an identity or citizenship in nations of their own in the same manner that any consolidation of pre-existing African Ethnic States would have done. Consequently, with their own instrumental agents of the *mission civilisatrice*, Western European powers set out to subdue and usurp Africans in every cultural domain of their rights to name even themselves. Their naming systems and names were ignored, contested, and downgraded as inferior to those of their Western European counterparts, which they were more than encouraged psychologically to use or to embrace in the original Latin meaning of grabbing a hold of something with both arms. So, to judge from the devastating cultural havoc which the introduction of these elements generally caused to African names of women, children and men, as well as to other cultural aspects of human life in Africa, one can only wonder how Africans successfully resisted and withstood such a high degree of an unprecedented cultural trauma.

For, the assumptions of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* were licentiously imposed on Africans as if Africans had only learned about *commerce* (the *coin*), *religion* (the *cross*), *warfare* (the *cannon* or the *gun*), *government* (the *clothe* or the *flag*), and *education* (the *crayon* or the *computerizing pen*) from their cultural contact with the European colonial powers. Actually, the *mission civilisatrice* gave Europeans, as it were, the unquestionable right not only to name, but also to plunder, wage wars, and, as Aimé Césaire puts it, *thingify Africans*, if not through a barbaric, at least through an inhumanly atrocious and unprecedented colonizing mission. As we know, in the course of the execution of *this mission civilisatrice*, the Western European powers introduced several colonizing systems: a *commercial system* in which African men and women and children could be bought and sold at will by Europeans with European money. Africans during the Transatlantic Slave Trade were often arbitrarily given names of the ships which transported them as slaves from Africa, the names of those Europeans who bought and sold them

under the name of ‘slave masters’ or otherwise, and even the names of the prices paid to procure them as slaves... in replacement and defilement of their African languages in general, and their African names and naming systems in particular. According to the 1854 *Polyglotta Africana* of Rev. Sigismund Koelle of the *Church Missionary Society*, the only spokesman out of the presently known *five slaves of Nso’ origin*, resident in *Free Town (Sierra Leone)* by 1840 was ironically identified and named, Robert *Shilling*.

Along with this kind of commercial colonial system *a new religious system* was also introduced marked by the sign of the cross and the notion of being believers (Christians) and non-believers (who identified themselves more as ‘home-keepers’ than as the so called Pagans) to the same creating God; *a new system of warfare* whereby European captors systematically nullified both the humanity and the names of their African captives whom they transferred abusively like commodities away from the cultural roots of Africa; *a system of government* in which the roots of the rivalry between local African and foreign European originated cultural administrative styles began to grow and deepen; and finally *a partial and imported system of education* whereby Africans were obliged to abandon their past – already stigmatized as devoid of history and therefore, uncivilized, unlettered and unworthy to rely upon – simply because knowledge of the ‘oraural’ past (i.e. an already spoken and heard past whose forte was the conversational use of the sense of hearing, functioning day and night, more than the use of the sense of sight, functioning only where there is light) of Africans (Kishani 2001), could only afford to promote a recollection of the past rather than its memory.

Aimé Césaire perhaps best summarizes some of our ideas here when he writes without any shades of rhetoric:

‘What, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies... the chief culprit in this domain is Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest ‘equation Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery, from which could but ensue abominable colonialist

and racist consequences, whose victims were to be the Indians, the yellow peoples and the Negroes' (Discourse on Colonialism in E. Chukwudi Eze: 1998 p. 222).

These facts become more evident in our examination of women's names among the Nso' of Cameroon or from similar research studies. Colonial powers, in exporting their cargoes to establish themselves among Indians, Japanese and Africans, have always surprisingly prided themselves in the fruits of their *coin* (Economy / Commerce), their *cross* (varieties of Christian religions), their *constitutional clothe / flag* (Government – Administration), their *cannon / gun* (Warfare – Empires – Industrialization – Science) and their *crayon or computerizing pen* (Education – Alphabetical Writing – Technological know-how – Philosophy), in a way indigenous cultures neither admittedly did nor knew. By considering these latter more as faithful messengers or agents for achieving their own colonial cultural goals than as culturally able human partners and / or competitors, colonial European powers instead prepared their own 'boomerang effect of colonization.'

Yet, mindful of its aftermath, this attitude which historically and contextually initiated and attached a certain degree of human superiority complex to the Western European violation of cultures is what we would like to refer to here as the *colonial mentality* of which the *mission civilisatrice* was ever its shadow and best form of application. For, beginning with "the Assimilados", "the Been-tos", "the Évolués", "the Saros", "the White-man-black-man", etc., who have been identified, known and referred to in the relevant African Literature and oraurality on the subject as "the first fruits of Western European Colonialism", or "the first generation of Westernized / colonized Africans", this *colonial mentality* traumatized, plundered and deprived Africans of every right to live with any form of human dignity, especially in matters concerning names and naming systems.

In the name of its *mission civilisatrice*, colonial mentality did more than merely denying the cultures of Africans. In fact, based as it was on the denial of the humanity of Black men, women and children, colonial mentality allowed Europeans to sell and buy Africans at will with currency as if they were commodities . Thus, forced to conjugate their own physical lives as an etymological biological verb of denigration, Africans were expectantly believed to become more docile and blind to the atrocities of the *mission civilisatrice*.

As a matter of fact, the agents of the *mission civilisatrice* really had no essential interest in understanding specific African systems of culture like the Nso' progressive naming system, which we shall explain later on in this article. Such specific cultural systems were only obstacles to the Western apparently static naming systems which the power of the colonial pen was eager to impose and implant in a somehow permanent way in Africa as a means of civilizing whatever was not yet subject to its invading colonial principles and assumptions. Actually, as it is evidently illustrated by the names of most African Christians, numerous Africans were influenced to take European names, which later seemed to mark them as militants in favour of the *colonial mentality* rather than as able competitors or rivals. In other words, any continuous and exclusive use of African names in themselves constituted a real challenge to the European colonial enterprise.

Not only was it the order of the day for the slave men, women and children to be obliged to forsake their African names, but ever since the advent of European colonialism in Africa, the Nso' like most African ethnic groups were more or less either given or cajoled to take Western European names simply as a sign that they had embraced the Christian European road to civilization. Today, contrary to expectations, such a historically passive involvement in the choice of their Western European names prevents any researcher from adequately determining an African's real sympathy for the choice of some names which were introduced by those historical Westernized colonial and neo-colonial institutions of power. For, there were times when the European *colonial mentality* seemed to have triumphed and established itself, politically and culturally in relation to the choice of the names of African men and women, in general, and Nso' men and women, in particular, so that it soon appeared normal to equate Christianity with having a European name.

This African / Nso' euphoria in favour of European names triggered by the religious interests of a pioneering African / Nso' Christianity which made it fashionable more or less for some Nso' men and women to arbitrarily choose and use European originated names, often revealed its weak and porous assumptions in the choice of names whose historical and contextual meanings were clear neither to the name-givers nor to the name-bearers of African / Nso' origin. The choice of such European names like *Hitler* and *Napoleon* can speak for themselves. But there have also been times, for ex-

ample, around the 1970s following the maiden historic visit of Pope Paul VI (June 21, 1963 – August 6, 1978) alias *Giovanni Battista Montini (1897-1978)* to Africa South of the Sahara in 1969, precisely to Kampala and actually on the same day that *Neil Alden Armstrong*, the first American astronaut to have walked on the moon was achieving his own feat, when it was quite fashionable for Nso' / African Catholics in particular to have recourse to a choice of Christian names from such names of the Ugandan martyrs like *Kagwa, Kisito, Luanga*, etc., instead of choosing a Christian baptismal name as a rule only from some of the European-culture based set of Christian names. And although the choice would have led to a kind of collaborative renewal and homecoming on their part, Nso' / African women do not seem to have joined hands with Nso' / African men in the practical use of such names like *Kagwa, Kisito* or *Luanga* in spite of the African basis of these names.

Could this have been due to the fact that most of the Ugandan Martyrs were men? Can one predict that an era will come in this Third Millennium when men and women from the Western World will initiate a change by choosing and using African names voluntarily and indiscriminately for themselves and their children? Whatever might be the case, since no sheer remorseful stain cleaner is really capable of effacing the already more than once historically disfigured, downtrodden and downgraded African's body marked by the shameful colonial acts of inhuman abuses and insults, humiliation, and genocide, it is necessary to liberate Africans from the colonial mentality which still dominates their main choice of Christian names thereby limiting it more often as a rule everywhere in Africa only to the names of Semitic and European colonial origin. Perhaps, by also choosing eventually to use African names in the future, both men and women, Christians or otherwise, from the Western countries might discover more comprehensive ideas for the re-formulation of their own religious systems and thus assist indirectly in eliminating the still haunting colonial prejudice against the naming systems and names of Africans in general. After all, once we perceive a universality that is simultaneously and equally enriched by its particularity, it becomes obvious that 'in conclusion, universality resides in this decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures, once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded' (Frantz Fanon in Eze 1998: 310).

An African Complex for European Values

In fact, the truth is that, on account of the colonial premium of a superiority complex attached to Western European names, even at the beginning of Christianity in Nso' not a few Nso' people gave themselves Christian names before they actually became Christians, while some of those who became Christians took names which tended to betray rather than to portray to a certain degree their limited acquaintance with the meanings of their chosen Christian names. To have chosen, for an example, a name like *Peter Ñgò'* / *Peter Tíydzéé* portrays either a repetition or a reduplication since *Ñgò'* in Lamnso' means rock which the name *Peter* stands for, and *Tíydzéé* signifies the rocky / stony road through which every pilgrim on earth goes.

Some Nso' people including women on the other hand successively attended various denominational Christian churches for curiosity's sake and acquired names, which never became permanent due to the fact that they were soon disgusted with the very practice of Christian religious churchgoing. In this way, some of the Nso' have only reluctantly submitted to the exigencies of the *mission civilisatrice*, although from the beginning they were not less divided and dissuaded in time and in space by some of the motivations and ideologies underlying Christian beliefs and naming systems than were most Africans in other parts of Africa. Actually, depending on the era, the European-originated *cuius regio, eius et religio* principle that equally affected some Nso' villages as other parts of Africa, was not only resisted and challenged, but also at times entirely rejected on account of the foreign nature of its cultural history.

Moreover, since the Nso' like most Africans inserted religion into their daily public lives, thereby manifesting a different cultural approach to religion, Western European segregated and compartmentalized Christian Churchgoing was in almost every aspect of it, alien. Even within a particular denomination like that of Catholic churchgoers, the same women's name could acquire, if not a multiplicity of pronunciation, at least a significant variety of different meanings which were not always orthodox to Catholicism. For example, the English language name, *Mary*, pronounced *Meèri* was indicative of, and most often used by a scholar in the then 'Shisong Girls' School, ' which its Lamnso' version of *Maària* was equally indicative

of, and used by, an elderly Catholic lady in some Nso' villages like Shisoñ, Ñkar, Kimbo', Kiyán, Kitiwum, Sov, Mbam-Ndzéàvru', Meluv, Memfu, Jotin, or Mbo'ntsém which first welcomed the Catholic Faith in the Nso' region. The same name became *Miriaya / m* among the Basel / Presbyterian Churchgoers in the Nso' villages of Kishooñ, Kiyán, Nsé' or Mantum-Mbiame, even if these Presbyterians had the impression at times of using only a name from the Old Testament.

It is however interesting to note that while some of our informants disputed the idea, others simply suggested that the Islamic name *Mayrama*, is still a version of the same name which surfaced with the advent of an increasing number of Nso' Islamic Churchgoers in the early 1950s. This means that like

'the missionaries who were largely responsible for spreading the use of the European colonial languages, which created a demand for people educated and able to communicate in them (...) (as) the most important tie which later bound the independent African nations to their former colonizers economically, socially and politically' (Karen Jenkins in Sandberg 1994: 86),

early Nso' Churchgoers constituted linguistically and culturally a bridge between Nso' / African religions and Christianity. As such, this bridge served at identifying to suppress or make use of areas of both cultural obstacles or inroads to Christianity, if not to the *mission civilisatrice* as a whole.

There was room, therefore, for what could be orthodox or not from the religious points of view of both the Western Christian religions and the African cultural religions. For this reason, the initial stage of the religious acculturation of Nso' Christians was reassuring since Nso' culture was seen to be inter-playing with Christian ideas. This is significantly revealing since contextually a woman's Christian name like *Mary* was not only linguistically and religiously pregnant with meaning, but also had a corresponding *Yír Nso' yee fó la'* (a Nso' homestead name) together with which it constituted a Nso' Christian's full names as well as a richer source of related cultural information. For an example, to the extent that both names were written in a Christian Register or in a Christian Baptism Card, while the daily usage of the names expressed and reflected their oraural values in this that they were spoken and heard among the Nso', it is enough to draw our attention to the opposition between writing and orauralizing (communicating them through

speaking and hearing) them, in ethnic cultural societies whose members had only just began to use the Western European form of an alphabetical writing.

Mary in its Lamnso' pronunciation was neither uniform in its meaning nor in its form / morphology. It was *Maària* for the elderly Catholic Churchgoers, *Meèri* for the schooling youth, *Miriaya / m* for the elderly Presbyterian Churchgoers and *Mayrama* for the Islamic Churchgoers. On the basis of this analysis and without having known her religious beliefs, our guess is that the South African professional singer, *Miriam Makeba* is / was a Presbyterian Churchgoer since it is equally likely that she is not of a Jewish origin to own the name *Miriam*. As we were explaining earlier, it was within this diversity of practice and usage that the Nso' characteristically, though not exclusively, conferred their own cultural stamp of values to the Christian European names of Nso' women. In other words, though simultaneously expressing and reflecting the *European mission civilisatrice* and the corresponding notion of *Western colonial mentality*, Nso' Christian names of men and women today still reveal Nso' / African men and women as being at once, though in varying degrees, the beneficiaries, agents and victims of the disadvantages more than the advantages of colonialism in Nso' / Africa itself. Generally speaking, Western European explorers, missionaries, administrators, etc., only viewed African cultures in terms of barbarism. In fact,

“The missionaries conceived that the teaching of Christianity and the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic had to be accompanied by the adoption of Western dress, names, food and styles. They insisted that a good Christian must drink tea and take walks with his wife. They could see little but barbarism in the traditional African institutions and sought to destroy the vestiges of African culture.” (R.L. Okonkwo in Eze 1998: 256).

Essentials of the Nso' Naming Systems

Consequently, while the Nso' woman in particular or the African woman in general, should be encouraged to enrich and be enriched by a more or less colonial initiative towards a 'global gender equality' rather than being hindered from it, today more than ever before, she also needs to be conscientiously aware of the historical and contextual cultural intricacies and

interplays of the underlying colonial and neo-colonial alliances for or against her interests. For, to argue simply that an alliance of patriarchal system in Africa, elsewhere, or both, was responsible for marginalizing women's systems of rule and/ or complementary roles to men, is to ignore some of the nuances which those differences, not only between historical and contextual cultural underpinnings of naming systems and concrete names, but also between the cultural systems of the single sex, dual-sex, etc. can offer.

For, if African women must defend their naming systems against whatever is marked and marred by the Western colonial mentality and / or by some of its subtlest policies, they need to rely on their knowledge and rights expressively reflected through the frameworks of their African cultures. Prof. Eugenia Shanklin has pertinently shown in a telling scholarly article on the Anlu – a women's organizational name among the Itañikom speakers of Cameroon, entitled 'Anlu Remembered: The Kom Women's Rebellion of 1958-1961' that

'Women were not only defending themselves, their crops, and their children; they believed they were defending Kom territory from outsiders who threatened to usurp control of the land and political control of the Kom kingdom as a whole... What political *anlu* did was usurp government (and men's) functions and rule Kom for three years; what they thought they were doing was exercising a right that belong to Kom women from time immemorial, the right to take over when their men had failed to protect them against the encroachments of a foreign regime. Accepting the outsider / minority view results both in fundamental misunderstanding of the anlu movement and in a failure to emphasize the movement's important aspects in other perspectives, that is anti-colonial use of the militant symbols of aggression and war. Accordingly, weapons, violence, and radical attempts to restore pre-colonial social structure have been de-emphasized, thus perpetuating the outsiders' misreading of events.' (Shanklin 1998: 163).

One of our ambitions in examining the ideologies of women's names among the Nso' is first to gain inspiration from the Nso' naming systems; and secondly to contribute in a way that can best clarify and present a reliably comprehensive insider's view of some frequently experienced cultural phenomena and philosophies like the essential characteristics of, and within these very Nso' naming systems. But, since Nso' names and naming systems have been conceived, collected, conserved and communicated orally for centuries and also in the Western European alphabetical lettered form since

the 1850s, it is interesting to determine what complementary role orality plays vis-à-vis alphabetical writing in order to avoid merely perpetuating some of the lettered misinterpretations of some Nso' women's names in particular. But still one would also like to know how the Nso' express their oraural usage of names and their discourse of / on their naming systems in a way that alphabetical writing either cannot or does not adequately represent.

In Lamnso' (the language of the Nso'), *Liì Nso'* (the culture of the Nso') has both *kóy vikiy* (the arm of women), and *kóy vilum* (the arm of men). In other words, without implying that every form of blessing is a feat, and every sin a failure, even in matters which concern la raison d'état, (for the sake of the state), Nso' culture simultaneously always counts its blessings of feats and its sins of failure which together make it what it is. This means that there must always be a certain cultural balance or equity, since above everything else, both the left and right arms of any human being are physically part and parcel of what forms the equilibrium of his or her integral physical body. In other words, since the physical left and right arms of every human being are constitutively complementary, they should reflect and serve as a guide to the ideologies of power in favour of leftism or rightism. As such, both left and right simultaneously constitute what is characteristic in a people's culture, to a certain extent the role played by, and the relation between the physical and the metaphysical perspectives in every human cultural life, according to, and from, this Nso' cultural point of view.

It is, therefore, significant that an American researcher of Miriam Goheen's standing entitled her more mature research findings and 'work over the past 16 years' among the Nso' in 1996 as *Men own the Fields, Women own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Though more or less politically conditioned by a female gender militancy, her research pertinently underscores the point that

'In many ways traditional views of gender persist in present-day Nso'. Farming-food-female continue to be linked as a gender marker while the axiom, amounting almost to a taboo, that 'men own the fields, women own the crops' remains central.

However, while women on the one hand have lost much of the complementarity of power inherent in pre-colonial gender roles, on the other hand at least some of them have gained access to new forms of symbolic capital embodied in education and jobs and in the ability to make decisions about their lives, which has put negotiations over the meaning of gender and gender roles at the heart of a discourse of counter-

hegemony' (p. 185).

Yet, it is equally significant that Nso' men and women as parents and / or children during the final stage in the progressive naming of the *wón nyù* (*children of God* i.e. sacred children), can all receive an equal number of codified names. Still,

'it is significant that, in the Nso' beliefs about conception, the man and woman are thought to play an equal role in the making of the embryo children derive flesh and blood from both parents'(Kaberry 1969: 186).

Co-Existence of Naming Systems

In other words, to judge from some characteristic Nso' cultural practices which have proven to be as expressively consistent as they are dynamic: farming, art, social organization, etc., there is evidently something which tellingly maintains a balance, if not culturally, at least philosophically, challengingly and metaphorically, in order to render it manifestly complementary in the naming systems and names of Nso' men and women which to say the least, analogously characterize the left and right arms of the Liì Nso' (Nso' culture) as being consistently and simultaneously upheld by and belonging to both men and women. In fact, Phyllis M. Kaberry, the first woman anthropologist whose pacesetting research among the Nso' has so far been rarely rivalled, was pertinently right to observe that 'The Nso' do not live by patrilineages alone. Marriage, the elementary family, ties of complementary filiation with maternal kin, and cosmological beliefs also have a hearing on the concepts of sexual offences, and a full understanding can be reached only by taking these into account (Idem p. 192-193).

But, in our Nso' world of today, things are actually falling apart and seem to disrupt that balance and to be moving away in a speedy and unpredictable manner from the Nso' classical or established cultural matrix and ideals. For, even if we were to agree with D.A. Masolo that

'the whole game of moral judgements is an appraisal of our approximation to the ideal, ' (Masolo 1994: 154)

the very concrete lives of contemporary African cultures enriched or impov-

erished by a certain peculiar cultural cohabitation with Western European cultures of influence, have not only been tearing Africans and African things apart as the novelist Chinua Achebe's expresses in *Things fall Apart*, but have also been obliging almost every cultural choice in Africa today to depend on more than one ideal. Truly speaking, in Africa today the former cultural ideals are somehow caught in or thwarted by an irreversible cultural web of Westernization in which every cultural choice constitutes more or less an *Ambiguous Adventure*, as the novelist Cheikh Hamidou Kane puts it. For, together with her African counterpart, apparently, the Nso' Westernized lettered woman has already betrayed her intention of introducing a different type of equality which consists in using either a father's or husband's name instead of her own full names as a form of her personal identity and appellation (especially in the alphabetical lettered expression), 'thereby producing what their Western models have never been known to practise without modifications in such explicit terms, such as identifying a gentleman as a *Mr. Theresa / Theresia, Susan, Mary or Magdalena* (Kishani 1998, 2002). In other words, it is quite striking and peculiar in a dual-sex naming system when a Westernized African / Nso' girl, woman or lady is called *Miss / Mrs. Lukoñ*, just as it is peculiar and striking to call a boy, man or gentleman *Mr. Theresa / Theresia* or by a highly codified woman's name. The point here is that today a Westernized Nso' woman readily identifies herself by her father's or husband's name as a *Miss / Mrs. Lukoñ, Taata, Ñgoñ, Tukov*, etc. which culturally are all men's names par excellence, to the detriment of a women's counterpart set of names such as *Biy, Shee, Ntañ, Kfèkfé*, etc., which equally exist among the Nso'.

To the extent that this Westernized attitude owes its origin to the advent of the colonial mentality or colonialism, though it never ended with the departure of Western European colonial powers or the dawn of the Independence of African nations, it has become a source of conflict, if not that of the rejection of some longstanding cultural values of the Nso'. Theoretically, therefore, it sins against the Nso' traditionally classical practice of genderization, even on the score of Elizabeth Lane Beardsley's definition of genderization as

'the linguistic practice of requiring a sex-distinction in discourse about human beings, in such a way that to disregard the sex-distinction produces a locution which is incor-

rect., or inappropriate' (1981: 155).

Precisely, from the Nso' point of view, not only a certain Westernized use of men's names, but also some uses of the Westernized Nso' names are incorrect and inappropriate even when they do not necessarily imply any type of prejudice and / or domination. As such, their de-colonization becomes an urgent necessity.

Setting out ploys from an interdisciplinary perspective, this essay is therefore exploring some of the cultural paradigms of women's names among the Nso' in order to assess some of the contemporary issues of the use and abuse embedded in or raised by them in a more comprehensive manner. However, without necessarily presenting an exhaustive list, even though it presupposes a good knowledge of some Nso' women's names, one of the essay's main arguments is that the apparently patrilineal *Fondom of Nso'* through its naming system reveals itself as influenced to a higher degree by the longstanding but dynamic oraural tradition, as well as by the use of more recently acquired alphabetical writing which tends to impose more culturally static uses and values of names. Moreover, Nso' naming systems have in terms of gender a basis on bifocal cultural system rather than on

'a single sex system that obtains in most of the Western World, where political status-bearing roles are predominantly the preserve of men' (Kamene Okonjo quoted by both Gilkes 1994: 88 and Shanklin 1998: 137).

In other words, one of our contentions here is that it is somehow necessary to set contemporary Nso' cultural life within the dynamic exigencies of both its oraural and alphabetically lettered cultural contexts of a dual-sex system which is similar to, but not identical with, some of the neighbouring ethnic groups, like its South-Western neighbour of Kom, in order to understand and appreciate the significant uses and / or abuses of Nso' women's names, in particular, and Nso' names in general. In order to achieve such a goal, one requires and expects a certain justifiably comprehensive analysis of consistent or coherent principles on which depend the cultural equilibrium, tensions and aspirations which we find persuasively inherent within the Nso' naming systems themselves. Such underlying cultural principles should, therefore, enable us to contrast the Nso' naming systems with other cultural naming systems in a creatively profitable manner. In other words,

such a cultural evaluation, if and when adequately carried out should serve as one of the guiding persuasive sources of reference for discerning and cross-checking every kind of error, including any misinterpretations of Nso' names. Both the Nso' naming systems and the entire corpus of Nso' names need to be well analyzed and interpreted in order to illustrate their coherence and consistency within the Nso' culture itself. For, just as from a certain Nso' classical vantage point of view both men and women play equal roles in the conception of the embryo, the names of both men and women must neither favour the one nor the other by allowing either men or women to exercise an abusive use of the other's set of names. In fact, such is the convincing impression one gets from a closer examination of the functional system of the Nso' codified names of *wón nyù* (verbally, children of God), sacred children. This means that there must be some logical correlation or complementarity between the underlying logical thought and its practical expressive materialization in some accessible areas of the Nso' naming systems which can enable us to affirm their consistency.

Lamnsó' codified names of both men and women are not only always in pairs, but also consistent, i.e. with an equal number of names for both men and women, the non-codified names by virtue of their capacity to belong invariably to both men and women, challengingly and apparently refuting and blurring the very idea of a consistent genderization with the Nso' naming systems. In other words, in so far as some Westernized forms of naming among the Nso' are concerned, philosophers of Nso' origin could either not be quite comfortable with a non bifocal genderization, or merely be in search for a better form of its conceptualization rather than work towards its complete elimination. For, Nso' cultural naming systems and names in the past have had various kinds of both genderized and non-genderized bifocal names, eponymic names known as mekfem, borrowed foreign names, etc., all of which rendered both individual names of men and women traditionally and creatively dynamic. This means that such creative traditions though upheld from the past are ever too weighty to be discarded off hand. On the contrary, without an indiscriminate attempt to discredit them, the Nso' naming systems or more concretely, the Nso' past oraural names and naming systems should serve as a persuasive springboard from which to evaluate our ways of using foreign names to renovate them.

In other words, since two main conflicting cultural systems apparently

now characterize the contemporary phase of the cultural values of the Nso' naming systems – the Nso' / African – mainly oraural system versus the Westernized European – mainly alphabetically lettered system – a choice between names requires not only an appropriated / appropriating cultural justification or substantiation, but also their contrasting contextual comprehension as items and issues of distinctive but perhaps integrating cultural systems. To opt for the use of one or the other, or for both, usually entails a dialectical cultural practice which may at times run the risk of leaving some of the users on the bridge instead of leading them to the expected opposite river bank of cultural transformation, innovation, or creativity. But, if an insider's tentative solution needs to first serve as a caveat by inviting a look-before-you-leap attitude which, otherwise, can easily turn into a sheer leap in the dark, it is to avoid an indiscriminate condemnation of centuries-old cultural values in the face of the relatively recent presence of the Westernized ones. For, evidently, today more than ever before, we are in search of new ways of a balanced cultural or inter-cultural renewal. Yet, what is best needed in a world of cross-cultural or inter-cultural exigencies should not overshadow our needs at the grassroots, even though, according to a Kiswahili proverb,

'a simple emancipation of the tree by the roots is no liberty for the tree' (courtesy of Prof. G. Kalonji of Washington University, Seattle, USA).

The heyday of colonialism introduced some new values which still need to be critically reassessed in relation to those of the pre-colonial times, even if this does not necessarily imply their acceptance or non acceptance especially, on the part of the insider-users and / or producers of those cultural values.

As Nso' cultural experiences of their progressive systems of naming tend to confirm, it is necessary to be prudent as regards what we, Nso' / African insiders choose from outside cultures as a replacement of ours. According to Kwasi Wiredu,

'I should like to repeat, however, that the process of sifting the elements of our traditional thought and culture calls for a good measure of analytical circumspection lest we exchange the good as well as the bad in our traditional ways of life for dubious cultural imports' (Wiredu 1980: 50).

In other words, one cannot, therefore, overemphasize the necessity of a pertinently cultural *caveat emptor* (let the buyer be aware) in the choice and use of both women's and men's names in the Africa of today. For, it is neither true that "everything that belongs to African cultures, especially those of the pre-colonial times is always bad", nor that "everything that originates from the Western European world, especially its contemporary technological organs of cultural conceptualization, collection, conservation and communication is always good."

In fact, a certain innovative use of Westernized Nso' / African names of women tend to favour more the perpetuation of men's names as they occur in a single sex cultural system rather than offer an elaborate development of the existing dual-sex traditions which have been comparatively more or less satisfying and promoting the aspirations of both men and women in Nso' / African classical thinking. For example, to the extent in which the very use of the Western systems of naming, some European women pioneered a certain new use of the African names of their African husbands in a way that might seem advantageous for the spread of African cultural values through names in the Western world, to refer respectfully or not, to a lady as late *Mrs. So and So*, (followed by the late husband's name) i.e. more or less the English equivalent of the French, *Madame Veuve telle ou telle* (followed by the late husband's name) is, from a dual-sex point of view and to a certain extent, a way of depriving the lady in question, or women in general of an equivalent use of their names. In fact, this manner of naming married women promotes even posthumously and connotatively the use of a husband's name at the expense of the wife's own name. Cultural systems of naming which are more avowedly dual-sex usually in principle also posthumously, consistently, metaphorically and / or symbolically reflect this dual-sex quality in their linguistic paradigms and systems of naming in favour of both married women and men.

What seems questionable, therefore, is why the Westernized Nso' woman cannot choose and use the non-westernized Nso' traditions of women's names in this particular context since they already respect the use of women's names. Moreover, although some people may still argue in favour of the cultural context in which a given name in use best establishes the quality of its value as being the ultimate norm on which a culturally pertinent name depends, the real issue is whether women requiring names as a

possible source of their identity should consistently appropriate men's names or not, especially within the centuries-old ethnic cultures like the Nso' culture which is reputed for its conscious traditions of a genderized bifocal system of naming. Should women and men encourage themselves to mutually exchange and use their names, or should they willingly or unwillingly avoid in principle any forms of intrusion into the use of one another's names?

In other words, practically conscious of the positive exigencies of some dual-sex naming systems in most African societies, how can and should we, Africans preserve the positive qualities of our naming systems and still remain critically selective and creative within our own dual-sex naming systems when we borrow from other cultures to inspire our own creative potentials? After all, a dual-sex naming cultural system does not only promote equity for both men and women, but also generally expresses its edge over other comparable naming systems thanks to its equally distinctive corpus of names which constitute a more democratically open or a more just system of naming. To what extent, then, can men and women establish and maintain their mutual relations through a naming system which, besides reflecting their socio-cultural values and problems to be solved, allows members of the opposite sex to respect their distinction by using their names without any psychological prejudice or complex of domination? Must a people's cultural naming system and language reflect an evident biological datum such as the dual-sex of men and women? In other words, how do human societies function with or without culturally expressive bifocal genderization i.e. sex reflecting systems of cultural values in their naming systems, since the truth is that

'The most important fact of human existence is that women can have children and men cannot. The distinction at issue is the one which traditionally marks the juncture at which a female becomes an expected bearer of children'(Michael Levin in Vetteerling-Braggin 1981: 221).

Conclusion

Actually, once we remain conscious of this evident biological distinction,

these two naming systems which we have been describing as dual-sex or single sex will be judged to follow more or less from the type of cultural options of the societies which consciously express and practise them. But they are neither apparently nor exhaustively the only ones in human societies. A single sex naming system in which men and women can be named with or without an explicit or implicit reference to their sex, and a dual-sex or genderwise bifocal naming system in which both women and men are named accordingly, cannot but be reflected in the languages of the societies to which their speakers / listeners or members belong! This is because naming itself is part and parcel of a people's language and culture.

This, therefore, essentially means that to begin an examination of how a cultural naming tradition or system functions through the whole corpus of the names both men and women as well as children of a given cultural community bear from birth to death, and / or beyond, is to confide not only in language, but also in the entire human culture. After all, the way we identify things is often reflected in or betrayed through our linguistically artistic conception of them in our various taxonomic cultural systems. Yet, when all is said and done, taxonomies such as those of human names are a special category of linguistic units, since the names of men and women can help to distinguish them among themselves, initiate, recall and aspire for some historical or cultural values which depend on the name-bearers, etc., in a way other linguistic units do not.

One of our informants told us that one would keep on waiting for her to come out from that house, if someone called for Theresia / Theresa or Biy to come out of a particular house, but, instead a man came out of it. This was in a way to convey the idea that Theresia / Theresa or Biy is a name more or less synonymous with a woman's personality, if not identity, than with that of a man. To Christian a girl, a woman or a lady as Theresia / Theresa Biy among the Nso' is, therefore, in a way to overemphasize her womanhood, though apparently in the name of Christianity. But then, we might want to specify the pertinent notions of when, where, how and why, etc., to justify the use of each of the names or both. Moreover, since the use of foreign European names usually follows historically the use of non-foreign ones among such African ethnic groups like the Nso', it becomes convincingly clear that both the foreign and the non-foreign names cannot always have the same cultural values in the eyes of the foreigner and the non-foreigner who

use them. But then, what role precisely does a foreign name play within its own cultural community that differs from a non-foreign one? Perhaps, such should be one of the basic questions for us to ask before engaging on an itinerary of any cultural borrowing of foreign names.

For the rest, so far we have argued that, since

'the waters of the Niger can efface the stain from the body but cannot wipe out an insult,' Niane 1965/1997: 20)

the scars of the insults of naming which Western European colonial and neo-colonial powers have been inflicting on Africans, at least psychologically still persist. We equally argued that the Nso' like most ethnic groups in Africa possess their own naming systems which merit and call for the researcher's more comprehensive analyses. The importance of such analyses is to confirm or refute not only the authority of alien names or borrowed naming systems within the framework of ideals already established by some earlier or contemporary oraural traditions in Africa, but also the idea that there is a cultural authority which predates the advent of Western European colonialism into Africa where its alphabetically lettered tradition is today increasingly exerting its own influence among other things and taking roots. We also tried to illustrate that women's names as cultural values pose problems which issue from, and are due to, cultures in contact like the Western European cultures and their African counterparts, though they are still marked and distinguished by their countless new issues of cultural prejudice, if not their unending stories of racism. For, it is certain that contemporary cultural values of naming systems and names of women in Nso' or in the Cameroon Grassfields as elsewhere in Africa tend to depend on the historical and contextual prejudices of both African centuries -old oraural traditions as well as the recently acquired alphabetically lettered Western European traditions, together with their so-called global problems.

With these ideas in view, we intend to successively examine the names of women's organizations, the ex officio names of women, and the individual names of women in Africa – particularly in the Cameroon Grassfields, using the Nso' cultural experiences within their contextual and historical perspectives as the pivot of our general analysis of naming systems and names among us humans.

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MODERNITE ET MONDIALISATION

Rupture historique ou mutation?

par Hamidou Talibi Moussa

RÉSUMÉ. La mondialisation est-elle la réalisation de la modernité ou son dépassement ? La modernité est tout aussi l'affirmation de l'universalité du Droit que la volonté d'émanciper toute l'humanité du besoin et de la domination. La mondialisation apparaît plutôt comme la réalisation partielle de la modernité, puisque le processus de globalisation économique s'effectue sans les présuppositions modernes qui la fondent : rationalité et universalité qui sont les principes émancipateurs qui doivent déterminer notre présence au monde.

MOTS CLE: mondialisation ; modernité ; émancipation ; universalité ; globalisation ; humanité ; solidarité ; ouverture ; inter culturalité.

ABSTRACT. Is globalization simply the implementation of modernity or is it something more ? Modernity affirms the universality of law and the desire to liberate humanity from excessive need and domination. Globalization, it seems, is rather like a partial implementation of modernity since economic progress occurs without the neoteric assumptions on which globalization in general is based: rationality and universality, the emancipating principles which must determine our presence in the world.

KEY WORDS: globalization; modernity; emancipation; universality; rationality; humanity; solidarity; opening, interculturalness.

La mondialisation, dans les discours qui cherchent à la caractériser, est présentée comme un phénomène nouveau, une nouvelle ère dans laquelle l'humanité entre. On en parle comme d'un processus d'uniformisation et/ ou de globalisation de la production et de la consommation mondiales¹, par le biais des Nouvelles Technologies de la communication et de l'information. L'espace et le temps semblent se *contracter* sous l'impulsion de ces nouvelles technologies; les vécus et les expériences des hommes, malgré

¹ Cf. Adda, J. *La mondialisation de l'économie (T1&T2)*, Paris, La Découverte, 1996; Chesnais, F., *La mondialisation financière: Genèse, Coûts et enjeux*, Paris, Syros, 1996.

l'éloignement et les différences culturelles, sont partagés réellement ou virtuellement. Techniquement, grâce aux moyens rapides de transport, on peut prendre son petit-déjeuner à Paris, le déjeuner à Moscou, le dîner à Dakar; grâce aux nouvelles étoiles (les satellites artificiels) que les hommes *accrochent* dans les cieux – dans la divine imitation –, il est devenu plus facile de communiquer dans le monde – des médiations plus aisées que les rapports de communication entre des hameaux voisins – avec la téléphonie cellulaire et Internet. La synchronie télévisuelle permet aux habitants de New York, de Douala et de Sydney de *vivre* en même temps et avec les mêmes émotions des événements mondiaux comme la Coupe du Monde de Foot bal ou les Jeux Olympiques². Et en outre, la consommation se mondialise: existe-il un coin au monde où on ne trouve pas de produits de consommation tels que *Coca-cola, Toyota, Philips*. Mais en même temps nous vivons la barbarie: comment, par exemple, comprendre les attentats du fameux 11 septembre, les bombardements sur l'Afghanistan par les Américains, et tant d'autres irrationalités? C'est dire que l'humanité semble intégrer cette ère de mondialisation sans avoir tourner le dos aux maux qui la minent, sans être véritablement préparée; du moins sans maîtriser les données réelles de la chose. En effet, ce processus paraît résulter d'un dynamisme qui échappe encore à l'homme. L'humanité reste fascinée et inquiète face à un mouvement qu'elle subit plus qu'elle ne détermine; un mouvement pour lequel le sens, la signification profonde ou la portée restent encore à chercher. C'est pourquoi la philosophie – qui prétend toujours au savoir total et universel – est convoquée ici, mise en demeure, de saisir *la conscience du temps*; convoquée pour formuler le sens profond de *ce qui arrive à notre commune humanité*. Cette convocation de la philosophie se justifie, parce que comme le dit Hegel, *la philosophie doit être fille* de son époque, saisir l'esprit du temps sous forme de concept. Dans ce sens, justement, si la modernité est considérée comme *la fin de l'histoire*³, qu'en est-il alors de la mondialisation? Serait-elle un

² Cf. Mattelart, M., *La mondialisation de la communication*, Paris, 1996.

³ Cf., sur cette question de la clôture historique par la modernité, Hegel (*Principes de la philosophie du droit*, Paris, Vrin, 1986) qui la thématise comme le stade ultime de l'Esprit absolu dont la réalisation correspond à l'histoire même; cf. également Fukuyama F., à travers *La Fin de l'histoire et le dernier homme* (Paris Flammarion, 1992) qui ren-

camouflet à l'historisme philosophique, comme celle de Hegel et de Marx qui, chacun à sa façon, ont clôturé l'histoire? Sinon n'avons-nous pas de raisons de considérer que ce qui arrive intègre toujours la logique de la modernité – qui suppose le progrès permanent? Autrement dit, la mondialisation n'est-elle pas l'universalisation, l'extension mondiale du principe moderne de rationalité? Car si son principe est autre chose que la rationalité, on serait en présence de ce qu'une certaine philosophie qualifie de post-modernité, c'est-à-dire d'une situation dont les catégories, les principes directeurs – s'il y en a – n'ont plus rien à voir avec la raison moderne.

Pour répondre à ces interrogations, il nous faut, peut-être, dessiner à grand trait le cadre campé par les philosophies modernes – dont l'Etat rationnel apparaît comme le dispositif central. Ensuite, il faut voir dans quelles mesures on peut estimer que la mondialisation déborde ce cadre. Auquel cas, il devient nécessaire de chercher la signification et les implications du cours pris par l'histoire de l'humanité.

La modernité ou le rêve de libération de l'humanité

A l'origine de la vision moderniste du monde était le rêve de libération de l'homme du joug de la nature externe et de la nature interne: c'est-à-dire du besoin et de la domination⁴.

Jusqu'au 17^{ième} siècle, il faut dire, la nature était considérée comme Force, Puissance. Et dans les conceptions métaphysiques et théologiques, elle ressortait comme *divinité personnifiée* quand elle n'était pas perçue comme réceptacle ou réplique d'un monde parallèle essentiel, vis-à-vis d'un monde terrestre, domaine du vécu existentiel: monde intelligible (monde sensible), supra-lunaire (sublunaire)...considérés comme domaine des essences ou de la perfection. Même chez un penseur comme Aristote – qui faisait autorité jusqu'à *la table rase* de Descartes – la Nature était cette Puissance.

chérit sur cette fin en mettant en avant la victoire indépassable de la démocratie libérale sur toutes les autres formes de gestion humaine.

⁴ Cf. Cassirer, E., *La philosophie des Lumières*, Paris, Payot, 1966.

D'après Auguste Comte, le « père » du positivisme, les raisons de ces attitudes théologico-métaphysiques sont que l'esprit humain, qui n'avait pas encore accédé à la méthode scientifique et à la véritable théorie pour percer la nature des choses, s'empêtrait dans la fiction, la spéculation et l'erreur. Les choses ont changé dès l'instant où la raison humaine a commencé à forger des théories, des hypothèses pour rendre possible l'observation scientifique.

Aujourd'hui, presque tous les esprits s'accordent pour dire que la science moderne s'est constituée à partir de l'établissement de la vision du monde impulsée par Copernic (1473-1543): cette vision mettait fin au *géocentrisme* – l'idée que les autres planètes tournaient autour de la terre –, instaurait l'*héliocentrisme* qui place le soleil au centre des planètes. Galilée renchérisait sur le mouvement rotatif de la terre et avançait surtout que *l'univers était écrit en langage mathématique*. Il n'en fallait pas plus pour vider la nature de sa substance et de sa puissance; puis la comprendre comme simple *étendue géométrique et géométrisation*. D'où l'idée de recueillir le savoir scientifique de la nature pour libérer l'humanité a commencé à germer dans l'esprit des penseurs: Bacon et Descartes en sont les premiers. Cela a fini par provoquer le mariage du *couple science et technique* qui préside désormais au destinée du monde. Mais il a fallu la fin du 19^e siècle pour voir le progrès scientifique devenir pertinent pour le développement industriel. Depuis lors ce progrès n'a cessé de déterminer la marche du monde: la globalisation ou l'uniformisation mondiales par les Nouvelles Technologies en est la preuve concrète.

Mais la science, avant de transformer radicalement l'économie, a d'abord provoqué, comme le dit J. Habermas, une révolution philosophique et sociale:⁵

«la vision mécaniste du monde de la physique moderne a induit une interprétation philosophique qui rend compte concurremment de la nature et de la société à partir des sciences de la nature; elle a pour ainsi dire, induit la vision mécaniste du monde du XVII^e siècle. C'est dans ce cadre qu'a été entreprise la reconstruction du droit naturel classique. Ce droit naturel moderne a été à la base des révolutions bourgeoises des XVII^e, XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles, qui ont définitivement aboli les légitimations an-

⁵ Habermas, J. *La Technique et la science comme « idéologie »*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 35.

ciennes de la domination »

Ainsi,⁶ sur la base d'une nature dominée par les sciences et techniques, les philosophes ont *rêvé* d'une société sans domination, d'un monde au sein duquel sont garanties, pour les individus, *la liberté, l'égalité, la justice*. Comme médiation entre l'individu et la société, le citoyen et l'Etat, les relations internationales, ils initient et instituent le Droit. Dès lors la religion, les valeurs féodales, les sentiments, les liens de communauté identitaire ou l'appartenance raciale et ethnique apparaissent comme autant de *paliers* que le sujet se doit de franchir pour se retrouver dans un *Etat de raison*: le Droit.

Dans l'histoire de la philosophie moderne, c'est chez E. Kant que nous rencontrons la première formulation véritable d'une philosophie de l'histoire à visée universaliste; où *la quête du sens* – de la marche du monde – est clairement exprimée, à travers son article *l'histoire universelle d'un point de vue cosmopolitique*⁷. Mais Kant n'avance modestement que des hypothèses sur le cours des choses. Pour ramasser rapidement la substance de ses conjectures qui sont au nombre de neuf, retenons ceci:

- 1) il faut d'abord partir de l'idée qu'il y a une « téléologie » naturelle qui assigne à chaque créature une fin;
- 2) ainsi chez l'homme, seule créature raisonnable, il faut supposer un développement de la « raison » dans l'usage que l'espèce humaine en fait;
- 3) comme troisième proposition, il faut partir de l'idée que « l'homme est ce qu'il fait » par l'usage de sa raison déterminée moralement;
- 4) comme quatrième hypothèse, il faut tenir compte de l'*insociable sociabilité* des hommes qui fait qu'ils inclinent et repulsent en même temps à vivre en société;
- 5) l'avènement d'un penseur, d'un historien philosophe, qui doit tenir compte du but ultime que la nature assigne aux hommes: la création d'un Etat de droit universel;

⁶ Cf. Habermas, J. *Le Discours philosophique de la modernité*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988; du même auteur, *L'Espace public*, Paris, Payot, 1990.

⁷ Cf. Kant, I. *La philosophie de l'histoire*. trad. par Stéphane Piobetta. Paris: Denoël, 1947.

- 6) la sixième proposition est l'idée du prince éclairé: l'homme a besoin de guide, de maître « qui batte en brèche sa volonté particulière et le force à obéir à une volonté universelle valable, grâce à laquelle chacun puisse être libre »;⁸
- 7) Kant propose aussi l'idée d'un droit international qui doit être le prolongement d'une constitution civile au niveau des Etats, pour harmoniser les rapports, prévenir les guerres;
- 8) il propose aussi de croire qu'il y a un but de l'histoire, un plan caché de la nature qui se réalise par l'établissement d'une constitution de droit universel et d'un droit international;
- 9) d'où, comme neuvième proposition, l'idée d'un *sens de l'histoire*.

Ces conjectures sont devenues chez Hegel, qui incarnera le modèle l'historien philosophe voulu par Kant, des thèses justificatrices non plus d'une téléologie naturelle mais d'un Esprit absolu qui instrumentalise les hommes, au cours de sa réalisation, qui est l'histoire même, en vue de l'établissement de l'Etat rationnel, terme de son parcours. Cela signifie que l'Etat de droit rationnel, c'est-à-dire fonctionnant avec des principes, des catégories qui ne se justifient que par la raison, devient le paradis terrestre, qui voit la résolution des problèmes humains – qu'ils soient politiques, économiques, socioculturels, etc. – par des procédures rationnelles. Dès lors, l'on est en droit aujourd'hui de s'attendre à ce que la mondialisation soit la réalisation de ce *monde de rêve*: du moins, que la science, la technique et le Droit emplissent l'univers de leurs bienfaits.

La mondialisation comme réalité ambivalente

Tout laisse croire, à première vue, que la technologie et l'économie ont unifié le monde, que ce dernier est devenu vraiment ce *village planétaire* – où la démocratie se reprend progressivement.

A y regarder de très près, la mondialisation s'apparente au processus de

⁸ « Idée d'une histoire universelle au point de vue cosmopolitique » in Kant, *Philosophie de l'histoire*, *op. cit.* p. 34.

réalisation de l'Esprit absolu tel que conceptualisé par Hegel. L'Esprit qui *se sert de la nature*, comme de son extériorisation, pour réaliser son essence, la Liberté ou le Concept – même réalité selon Hegel –, après plusieurs *moments* et *périodes* pour se libérer de son auto-aliénation, va revenir à l'immédiateté (ce qu'il n'a jamais cessé d'être) comme *Concept réalisé*:

- a) d'un côté comme « système scientifique » (que la *technologie* réalise, aujourd'hui). En effet tout se passe comme si l'Esprit absolu – qui se réalise comme savoir absolu⁹ redevient *immédiat, infini, indéterminé, abstrait*. N'est-ce pas le sens que recèle, par exemple, l'univers informatique à travers l'Internet, qui rend presque immédiates les communications entre les sujets éloignés; où l'on peut estimer que c'est l'Esprit absolu qui se déploie, grâce au micro-processeur qui est la base de l'ordinateur¹⁰. Cette comparaison n'est pas exagérée si on considère l'Esprit absolu comme *milieu*, comme intersubjectivité; la rencontre des *esprits finis* sans lesquels l'Absolu serait un vain mot;
- b) d'un autre côté à travers le Droit, L'Etat, comme le rationnel en-soi-et-pour-soi ou *réconciliation* du particulier et de l'universel, l'individu et du général. Les théoriciens et les défenseurs du Droit aujourd'hui ne peuvent légitimer leurs efforts que par l'idée de reconnaissance réciproque conceptualisée par Hegel dans le cadre de la philosophie du droit comme la situation de la fin de l'histoire où tous les hommes se reconnaissent réciproquement comme êtres de liberté, comme sujets de droit.

Si la mondialisation signifie cette possibilité de partager des expériences vécues, par une intersubjectivité, facilitée par le support du micro-processeur – intelligence artificielle ou mémoire de l'esprit –, si elle suppose l'extension du Droit et de la démocratie de par le monde, si elle conduit vers la victoire sur la faim et la barbarie; nous pouvons légitimement dire que nous sommes dans la réalisation du projet moderne, que nous vivons la mondialisation, au sens d'extension, du principe moderne de rationalité in-

⁹ Cf. Hegel, G.W.F., *La Phénoménologie de l'esprit* (T2) Trad. de Jean Hyppolite. Paris: Aubier, 1941.

¹⁰ Cf. Servan- Schreiber, J.-J. *Le Défi mondial*. Paris Fayard, 1980.

carné par la science et le droit¹¹.

Mais si la mondialisation participe de la modernité, quelle est la logique qui, depuis le début du 20^{ième} siècle, met la science et la technique au service de la déshumanisation (les deux guerres mondiales les conflits internationaux, les foyers de tension que les médias présentent chaque jour...)? Comment expliquer par ailleurs que la production mondiale couvre les besoins mondiaux et que l'on continue de mourir de faim, de soif, de maladie et de la violence des hommes¹² dans le village planétaire?

Malgré son optimisme et son enthousiasme pour *la victoire sans appel* de la démocratie libérale – qu'il présente comme le terme de l'Histoire, dans une amplification de la clôture hégélienne –, Fukuyama concède que « le premier biais par lequel la science physique détermine des changements historiques à la fois orientés et universels est celui des rivalités militaires »¹³. Et de la première guerre mondiale aux récents bombardements de l'Irak par les Etats-Unis d'Amérique, on peut facilement constater comment la science est mise au service des rivalités militaires.

Mais de manière générale, c'est d'un point de vue de la rationalité instrumentale qu'on peut expliquer le rôle ambigu de la science dans ce processus de déshumanisation. Dans l'entendement des Théoriciens de l'Ecole de Francfort, comme Horkheimer, Adorno ou Marcuse, la raison instrumentale n'est rien d'autre que la rationalité moderne elle-même qui utilise la science, le droit comme moyens pour une aliénation, une exploitation et une réification des individus tant sur le plan politique et que sur le plan socio-économique¹⁴. Sa logique est l'instrumentalisation. C'est dans ce sens que Marcuse a utilisé les expressions d'homme unidimensionnel, de société close, pour montrer comment la société capitaliste moderne intègre les hommes dans une société de consommation qui est synonyme de déshumanisation. D'où la vanité du terme d'émancipation. Car au lieu d'être au ser-

¹¹ Hegel, G.W.F., *Principes de la philosophie du droit*, Paris, Vrin, 1986.

¹² Cf. Aron, R., *Les Désillusions du progrès*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1969.

¹³ Fukuyama, F., *La Fin de l'histoire et le dernier homme*, Paris Flammarion, 1992, p. 99.

¹⁴ Cf. Jay, M., *L'imagination dialectique de L'Ecole de Francfort*, Paris, Payot, 1977; Horkheimer, M. / Adorno, Th. W., *La Dialectique de la raison*. Paris: Gallimard, 1974; Marcuse, H., *L'homme unidimensionnel*, Paris, Minuit, 1968.

vice de l'humanité conformément au *rêve moderne*, la science est mise plutôt au service du Capital financier¹⁵. Le Droit, lui-même, s'avère être la doublure de l'exploitation, de la déshumanisation, de la « répression sans terreur » (Marcuse) ou encore la grande toile d'araignée (Nietzsche) avec laquelle le Capital couvre ses intérêts. La théorisation marxiste a montré la vanité des valeurs dans ce monde où l'argent est érigé en valeur suprême et sacré – devant le quel l'humanité se prosterne chaque jour –, où les intérêts économiques déterminent même le jeu politique censé être sous-tendu par des idéaux sociaux-éthiques. Par le biais de la technologie, la culture même s'intègre dans le vaste système du libéralisme qui ne finit pas de *dévoré* le monde entier. De fait, la mondialisation se traduit comme une domination, un impérialisme du Capital financier: la science se met au service de la recherche et de la production industrielle.¹⁶

Mais la Théorie de l'agir communicationnel de Jürgen Habermas¹⁷ donne peut-être les meilleurs moyens de comprendre le processus de la mondialisation. Au contraire des autres Théoriciens de l'Ecole de Francfort, il ne réduit pas la rationalité à la rationalité instrumentale. A côté ou en même temps que celle-ci, il faut envisager la *rationalité communicationnelle* – comme chez Kant on parle de *raison théorique* et de *raison pratique*, même si la distinction n'est que méthodologique.

La raison instrumentale est en œuvre dans le travail, la science, la production, l'économie; tandis que la raison communicationnelle permet l'interaction langagière, la compréhension, le consensus entre des sujets disposés à l'intersubjectivité féconde. La raison instrumentale est productrice de lois scientifiques, de catégories, de savoirs objectivants, alors que son pendant communicationnelle donne naissance aux normes, valeurs sociales; en un mot produit des savoirs moraux pratiques pour donner sens à la vie et l'existence des hommes. D'après le paradigme habermassien, la rationalité communicationnelle a déterminé la marche de l'existence humaine jusqu'à l'avènement de la modernité ou la rationalité instrumentale est devenue le

¹⁵ Bourguinat, H., *La tyrannie des marchés. Essai sur l'économie virtuelle*, Paris, Economica, 1995.

¹⁶ Guillebaud, A., *La trahison des Lumières. Enquêtes sur le désarroi contemporain*, Paris, Seuil, 1995.

¹⁷ Cf. Habermas, J. *La Théorie de l'agir communicationnel*, Paris, Fayard, 1987.

principal facteur du développement. Cela par un processus de rationalisation que Habermas explique par les concepts weberiens de *différenciation* et d'*autonomisation*.¹⁸

Tout commence avec l'émancipation du politique, de l'Etat vis-à-vis de la Tradition, de l'autorité religieuse, grâce à la critique philosophique – qui s'est aussi émancipée –, notamment à partir des Lumières. Le droit positif remplace le droit traditionnel. L'économie reste déterminée par l'Etat dans le capitalisme mercantile jusqu'à la fin du 19^e siècle, avant que les choses ne s'accélérent avec le couplage science-technique dans le cadre de la production capitaliste. Celle-ci atteint son âge majeur au 20^e siècle quand l'économie, grâce à la science et aux performances techniques, a cessé de se légitimer par les idéaux des Lumières, pour secréter sa propre idéologie. D'où l'économie dévient autonome vis-à-vis de l'Etat et du politique. En outre elle les détermine au point où, à présent, elle conduit la marche de l'humanité. D'où l'Etat lui-même apparaît aujourd'hui comme une grosse firme, un agent du capitalisme. En effet, quel est l'Etat au monde qui réalise un programme de développement sans la bénédiction des Institutions Financières Internationales?

C'est dire que la perception ambivalente qu'offre la mondialisation est que le progrès moral – tel que conçu comme rationalisation et émancipation humaine – n'a pas suivi le progrès de la science. Et on ne peut les confondre en voulant que le premier soit réalisé par le second; Ils ne sont pas *automatiquement* liés. La science nous met en possession d'un *savoir* et d'un *savoir-faire techniquement utilisable*, mais ne saurait déterminer efficacement les relations intersubjectives basées sur la morale et le politique. Pour cela, il faut la pertinence d'une éthique.

Nécessité de cultiver l'humain

La mondialisation serait d'une certaine façon la perversion du rêve de libéra-

¹⁸ La différenciation signifie que les sphères de vie (religion, morale, politique, économie...) se distinguent les unes des autres; l'autonomisation aussi suppose que cette différenciation correspond à leur émancipation vis-à-vis des déterminations anciennes (Lire Weber, M., *Le savant et le politique*, Paris, Plon, 1959 et *L'Ethique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Plon, 1967).

tion humaine portée à bout de bras par une modernité pensante.¹⁹ Mais les hommes sont devenus *oublieux* de ce projet originel qui consistait à mettre la science au service de l'humanité tout entière. Aujourd'hui, face à la conduite des affaires du monde par l'Universel économique, la réflexion doit rebondir – à plusieurs niveaux.

Pour une meilleure intégration des hommes,²⁰ le rôle de l'Etat doit être redéfini. Car, on le voit bien, l'économie de marché tend à briser les frontières – on peut être d'une nationalité étrangère et avoir des actions dans un autre pays; alors que l'Etat continue à maintenir les hommes dans des barrières contraignantes. Par exemple, ces nouvelles recompositions économiques – Communauté Européenne, Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UMOA), Le NEPAD (Nouveau partenariat africain pour le développement) – souffrent bien du rôle des Etats qui conçoivent des programmes nationaux de développement qui ne coïncident pas toujours avec les projets de ces grands ensembles²¹. Sans compter la responsabilité importante des Etats dans des conflits multiples: questions de nationalité, problèmes frontaliers... Il faut donc trouver les moyens de briser ou de rendre moins importantes les « frontières de l'Etat ».

Il n'y a pas que les frontières, il faut aussi faire tomber les murs que nous avons construits dans nos têtes. La nécessité de dépasser les particularismes s'impose comme le moyen d'ouvrir l'humanité à elle-même: *l'interculturalité* peut-être considérée comme une des conditions indispensables pour *la reconnaissance réciproque* au sens de Hegel. Les replis identitaires, les conflits claniques ou ethniques – constatables partout dans le monde – apparaissent comme les conséquences ultimes d'un manque de médiation et de justice sociale, qui ne s'explique que par les *murs* installés en nous.

La société, le peuple, la patrie sont des notions abstraites: partout, la réalité qui les incarne apparaît comme la société civile, les composantes sociales regroupées en corporations professionnelles, idéologiques, confession-

¹⁹ A lire *Les contradictions culturelles du capitalisme* de Bell, D. (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979).

²⁰ Cf. Engelhard, P., *L'Homme mondial. Les sociétés humaines peuvent-elles survivre?* Paris, Seuil et Arlea, 1996.

²¹ Question que se posent de D'Iribane Alii dans *Culture et mondialisation: gérer par-delà les frontières*, Paris, Khartala, 1996.

nelles...Elles peuvent donner corps aux mouvements sociaux qui ont d'autres aspirations que celles proposées par la logique de l'économie libérale: le mouvement populaire, mondial à Seattle considéré comme une alter mondialisation en est un exemple illustratif.

L'ouverture de l'humanité à elle-même suppose qu'aucune valeur, aucune norme ne peut s'ériger en Valeur ou Norme universelle²². L'évolution du monde et les différentes expériences historiques, jusqu'à la *victoire* de l'économie libérale nous conduisent à rechercher ou à re-inventer des nouvelles manières d'être. Car nous sommes à peu près dans la situation du dernier homme de Fukuyama:

« le dernier homme, à la fin de l'histoire, sait qu'il a mieux à faire que de risquer sa vie pour une cause, parce qu'il sait que l'histoire a été pleine de batailles inutiles dans lesquelles les hommes ont combattu pour décider s'ils devaient être chrétiens ou musulmans, protestants ou catholiques, allemands ou français »²³.

Aujourd'hui, le sujet particulier doit intégrer véritable l'universel si tant il vrai qu'il prétend appartenir à la commune humanité. Cela s'entend comme la capacité de transcender les clivages, les limitations socioculturelles qui restent de l'ordre de la subjectivité. Notre collègue Sounaye Abdoulaye l'a bien souligné dans sa communication à la rencontre internationale de Porto-Novo (Bénin) sur le thème, *Ethique universelle à la lumière de l'expérience africaine*.²⁴

«l'homme emmuré dans ses frontières culturelles est certainement, aujourd'hui, un homme incapable. Tous les contextes (social, politique et davantage encore économique) prouvent la nécessité d'abord d'une ouverture, pour aller au-delà de son espace propre, ensuite, celle de l'intégration au fur et à mesure que la multiplicité et la diversité des hommes et des cultures se découvrent ».

L'homme est avant tout un être, un sujet moral. Il est toujours en mesure de réorienter sa vie quand les nécessités externes l'y contraignent.

²² Apel, K.O. *L'Ethique à l'âge de la science*, Lille, Presse Universitaire de Lille, 1987.

²³ *La fin de l'histoire et le dernier homme*, op. cit., p. 347.

²⁴ Sounaye, A. « Problématique de l'intégration dans un espace d'éthique universelle », Colloque International sur l'Ethique universelle à la lumière de l'expérience africaine, Bénin, Porto-Novo, 10 au 12 Mai 1999.

L'humanité doit être considérée comme un *sujet gros format* auquel le progrès donne d'immenses possibilités aujourd'hui, de s'ouvrir à lui-même. Ces quelques pistes ébauchées peuvent être empruntées par lui pour sortir du charme dans lequel le plonge chaque jour une mondialisation destructrice de l'humain.

Au bilan, la mondialisation n'est pas une nouvelle ère: elle est l'extension progressive de la rationalité instrumentale qui se fait sous la conduite de l'économie capitaliste qui met la science et la technique à son service. S'il est vrai que le monde est devenu un village planétaire dans lequel les interactions deviennent médiates, il est tout aussi vrai que c'est un village où, malgré les possibilités réelles de soustraire tous les villageois à la domination, on perçoit la barbarie. Mais on ne peut exiger de la science qu'elle apporte des remèdes à tous les problèmes.²⁵ C'est peut-être Habermas qui a vu juste lorsqu'il écrit que:

« bien que la faim règne sur les deux tiers du globe, la suppression de la faim a cessé être une utopie au mauvais sens du terme. Mais la libération des forces productives de la technique, y compris la construction de machines susceptibles d'apprentissage et de guidage qui stimulent le secteur d'activité rationnelle par rapport à une fin[travail] au-delà des capacités de la conscience naturelle et se substituent aux performances humaines, ne se confond pas avec le fait de dégager des normes qui puissent accomplir la dialectique de la relation morale dans une interaction libre exempte de domination sur la base d'une réciprocité qui est vécue sans contrainte »²⁶.

²⁵ Krugman, P., *La mondialisation n'est pas coupable. Vertus et limites du libre échange*, Paris La Découverte, 1997.

²⁶ Habermas, *La Technique et la science comme « idéologie »*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 210-211.

POPPER-WITTGENSTEIN: LA PHILOSOPHIE ET SES NOMS PROPRES

par Ahmadou Tidiane Talla¹

ABSTRACT. This article deals with the well-known clash between Popper and Wittgenstein, but told, this time, from another perspective than that of Popper and his sympathisers. The institutional context of the clash is described. Popper's account is given extensively. The author unravels two complementary themes in the clash. In the first place there is the Popperian challenge to Wittgenstein as to the nature and mission of philosophy (a). This however brings out (b) the tensions and blind spots in Popper's own approach. The latter brings him to a reductionist conception of Wittgenstein's philosophy that is, as the author demonstrates, a caricature, – especially when account is taken, beyond the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, of the *Philosophical Investigations*. The bone of contention here is the philosophical status of proper names.

KEY WORDS. Conjectures and Refutations, *Philosophical Investigations*, philosophy (its nature and mission), Popper, proper names, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Wittgenstein

La rencontre entre Popper et Wittgenstein, tissée sur le fond d'une énigme, se donne à lire comme un symptôme. Surgie d'une conjonction paradoxale de l'aléa et de l'attente elle fait signe à un événement porté par la grâce d'une prise de parole dans un champ institutionnel qui au-delà de sa tonalité anecdotique convoque la philosophie à partir d'un point de singularité.²

¹ Une version antérieure de cet article est parue dans les *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines*, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, République du Sénégal, N° 30, 2000. Nous remercions l'Editeur de cette revue distinguée, et l'auteur, pour la permission de re-publication dans *QUEST*.

² Explicitons: nous voulons pointer l'inédit de cette rencontre mémorable qui remonte selon Popper, au début de l'année universitaire 1946-1947. Elle reste particulièrement intéressante du fait de sa non-répétabilité. L'occurrence "une seine fois" en signe l'incomparabilité. Quant à l'adresse qui en est le prétexte nous partageons le dispositif axiomatique établi par Alain Badiou notamment lorsqu'il énonce que la philosophie est "sans adresse spécifiable" in *Conditions*, Paris, Seuil 1992, p. 85.

Ponctuée par l’emblème de l’exception cette adresse lui enjoint de retourner à son lieu natal, celui d’une subjectivité inaugurale prise dans les lacets du symbolique.

Matérialisons les faits: l’histoire du rapport entre les deux philosophes est bien celle d’une mise en scène orchestrée par la loi implacable de l’arbitraire qui prête à Popper le beau rôle. Cette histoire, en effet, se dévide sous la forme d’un récit délicieusement exposé par Popper lui-même dans son autobiographie.³ Mais avant de pénétrer dans le discours poppérien, marquons en le préambule.⁴

Karl Popper reçut de Cambridge une invitation écrite du club des Sciences Morales pour venir faire une communication sur quelque “puzzle philosophique.” Par devers la formulation, il reconnut immédiatement sans l’ombre d’une hésitation, la présence encore toute insistante de Ludwig Wittgenstein dont l’une des thèses les plus célèbres tient en un mot: congédier les problèmes philosophiques pour restaurer l’autorité du langage.

La situation, une toss campee, laissons à Popper le soin de poursuivre⁵

“Etant donné que cette thèse était l’une de mes bêtes noires, je décidai de me donner comme sujet: “existe t-il des problèmes philosophiques? Et j’ouvris mon exposé en exprimant ma surprise d’avoir été invité par le secrétaire à faire une communication sur un “puzzle “ philosophique. J’indiquai que celui, quel qu’il soit, qui avait rédigé l’invitation, en déniait implicitement qu’il existât des problèmes philosophiques, avait, sans doute à son corps défendant, pris parti sur une question elle-même suscitée par un authentique problème philosophique.

“Je n’ai pas besoin de dire que ce n’était là qu’une manière de lancer le défi en introduisant ma communication sur un mode plaisant. Mais, à ce moment précis, Wittgenstein fit un bond, se dressa, puis dit d’une voix forte et, me sembla-t-il, chargée de colère: “Le secrétaire a fait exactement ce qu’on lui a demandé. Il a agi sur

³ Cette autobiographie se trouve dans la *Library of living philosophers* de P.A Schilpp (La Salle 1974). Remanié dans une nouvelle version, ce texte est paru sous le titre *Unended Quest* (Glasgow 1976).

⁴ Le préambule fonctionne comme une annonce. S’il ne se donne pas dans une structure dialogique, du moins garde t-il un double privilège, celui d’installer le différend et de se poser comme le noeud de l’interprétation. Pour amplifier l’effèt du recit, le discours poppérien pourrait à lal imite se laisser entendre dans la structure d’un soliloque.

⁵ Que l’on nous permette, pour plus de clarté dans l’exposition, de suivre Dominique Lecourt qui dans le Texte original précité rapporte avec beaucoup de verve cet épisode bien connu dans *L’ordre et les jeux*, Paris ed Grasset, 1981, pp. 15-16.

mes propres instructions. Je fis mine de ne pas entendre et je continuai (...) en disant qu'au cas où je penserais qu'il n'existât pas d'authentiques problèmes philosophiques, je ne serais certainement pas philosophe; et que le fait que bien des gens, sinon tous, adoptent sans réf échir des solutions intenable à bien des problèmes philosophiques, sinon à tous, était la seule justification qu'on pût avoir d'être philosophe. Wittgenstein bondit de nouveau et, m'interrompant, parla abondamment des « puzzles » et de la non-existence des problèmes philosophiques. Au moment qui me parut approprié, je l'interrompis et donnai une liste, que j'avais préparée, de problèmes philosophiques de type: Est-ce que nous connaissons les choses par nos sens? Est-ce que nous obtenons notre savoir par induction? Ces problèmes, Wittgenstein les rejeta comme étant de nature logique plutôt que philosophique. Je mentionnai ensuite le problème de savoir s'il existe des infinités potentielles ou même actuelles. Problème qu'il rejeta comme étant de nature mathématique (...). Je mentionnai alors des problèmes moraux et celui de la validité des règles morales. A ce moment, Wittgenstein qui était assis près du feu et s'était mis à jouer nerveusement avec le tisonnier, dont il se servait par moments comme d'une baguette pour ponctuer ses assertions, me lança ce défi: "Donnez un exemple de règle morale!" Je répondis: "Ne pas menacer les conférenciers invités avec des tisonniers." Là-dessus, Wittgenstein, pris de fureur, jeta le tisonnier par terre, se précipita comme un ouragan vers la sortie et claqua la porte derrière lui."⁶

Interprétons: cette longue tirade Poppérienne semble engager une double posture.

La première posture s'indique à partir des points d'aspérité qui dessinent et marquent le différend. Aussi soutenons-nous que ce différend reste assigné par une lettre dont le nom propre est la philosophie. Cette lettre fait signe à un destinataire supposé, probable qui est Wittgenstein.

La seconde posture, insituable, quasi imperceptible déploie en sourdine à partir d'un point d'éclipse les torsions et les silences de la proclamation poppérienne.⁷

Ces postures, une fois suggérées, examinons les motifs de la controverse entre Popper et Wittgenstein. Disons d'emblée que pour l'essentiel elles sont

⁶ Soulignons simultanément que la dernière mouture de cette déclaration a été rendue possible dans une traduction en français par René Bouveresse avec la collaboration de Michelle Bouin-Naudin, *La Quête inachevée*, Paris Calmann-Levy 1981, pp. 176-177.

⁷ Nécessité s'impose de mettre au jour l'économie de cette posture afin d'en ponctuer la décentration. Notons que toute la stratégie poppérienne est là. Elle découle d'une feinte et relève de ce que l'on pourrait appeler à la suite de Jacques Derrida "le calcul du sujet" cf « Entretien » (avec J.L. Nancy), in *Cahiers Confrontation*, mars 1989, p. 91.

consignées, nous semble-t-il, dans l'ouvrage de Karl Popper⁸ *Conjectures et réfutations*. Toutefois avant d'en dégager les lignes de visibilité suivons pas à pas Karl Popper qui opère d'abord un travail d'identification des "grands problèmes" qui mobilisent la connaissance. Ces problèmes, atteste-t-il, trouvent leurs racines dans la science et consistent par la philosophie. C'est de cette compossibilité que part Popper pour se soustraire de l'interrogation initiale: "*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*"⁹. Bien plus: à cette question "vaine" selon Popper, résolument essentialiste, il substitue une autre, moins générale et plus incisive: "*y a-t-il des problèmes philosophiques?*"¹⁰ Dans la guise de cette question, Popper écrit: ¹¹

"La position actuelle de la philosophie anglo-saxonne que j'ai prise pour point de départ a selon sa source dans la doctrine de Ludwig Wittgenstein affirmant que ceux-ci n'existent pas, que tous les véritables problèmes scientifiques, que les prétendus problèmes de la philosophie sont des pseudoprobèmes, que les prétendues propositions ou théories qu'elle énonce sont des pseudo propositions ou des pseudo-théories, que celles-ci ne sont pas fausses (si elles l'étaient, leur négation donnerait des propositions ou des théories vraies) mais sont des combinaisons de termes rigoureusement dépourvues de sens, qui n'ont pas plus de signification que l'incohérent babil du jeune enfant qui ne sait pas encore parler correctement. Il en résulte que la philoso-

⁸ Karl Popper, *Conjectures et réfutations*, Paris, Payot, 1985. Cet ouvrage décisif est bien le prélude de la rencontre avortée entre Popper et Wittgenstein.

⁹ Karl Popper: *Conjectures et réfutations*. Op. déjà citée p. 107. L'intention popperienne, est, nous semble-t-il, de ramer à contre-courant de la tradition qui va de Platon à Hegel.

¹⁰ Karl Popper: *Conjectures et réfutations*. op. déjà citée p. 109. L'on constate que Popper effectue un glissement de portée heuristique qui le mène au bord de l'épistémologie. c'est ici que surgit le malentendu entre Popper et Wittgenstein. Dans une correspondance maintenant bien connue, Wittgenstein révèle que son souci est d'un autre ordre. Il est fondamentalement éthique, cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Briefe an Ludwig von Ficker", in *Brenner Studien*, Salzbourg 1909 p. 35. Reproduit, notamment dans Janik et Toulmin, *Wittgenstein, Vienne et la modernité*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France 1978 pp. 194-195.

¹¹ Karl Popper: *Conjonctures et réfutations*. op. déjà citée pp. 109-110. Ce passage plus analytique fonctionne comme un addenda. Il constitue un point d'éclairage eu égard au rendez-vous manqué que nous avons déjà rapporté. Il est en même temps, par rapport à la formalisation un contrepoint qui tempère le tragique de la situation. Dans l'épreuve de la patience du concept qui est le propre de la philosophie, il retrace le différend, lui restitue son point de vérité, ajournant ainsi l'impossibilité de la communication.

phie ne peut comporter des théories. Sa véritable nature, selon Wittgenstein n'est pas d'être théorie mais une activité. Toute philosophie authentique a pour tâche de démasquer les non-sens de la philosophie et d'enseigner à produire des énoncés qui aient un sens."

Les griefs du philosophe de la London School formulées à l'endroit de Wittgenstein tournent donc essentiellement autour de la question de la signification.

Selon Popper Wittgenstein aurait annoncé la préemption des problèmes philosophiques. Et en raison de leur absence de signification, il aurait par le même geste revendiqué leur dissolution dans le champ de la science. Il nous importe alors de poser cette question: quelle conséquence un tel acte a-t-il pour la philosophie elle-même?

A en croire Popper, la philosophie serait réduite aux yeux de Wittgenstein à un simple organon, un levier de la logique. Elle aurait comme but de chasser les non-sens qui ne cessent de parasiter ses énoncés et d'en exhiber l'envers. En somme, elle ne serait qu'un pur instrument de clarification conceptuelle. Plus concrètement, elle se donnerait comme projet d'exorciser la métaphysique, du reste non signifiante qui l'habite afin de pouvoir dire le monde et lui rendre par là son intelligibilité. Dans ce sillage, du reste, en ne retenant comme signifiants que les énoncés descriptifs particuliers vérifiables le *Tractatus* aurait assimilé scientificité et signification.¹² C'est en ce sens qu'il constitue sans conteste pour Popper le nerf du positivisme. Bien plus: Wittgenstein, sentence au demeurant très sévère, ne serait pas allé au-delà de Russell. En suivant Popper, Wittgenstein n'a jamais pu se débarrasser du lourd fardeau russelien. Eu égard à cette ascendance jusque dans les limbes de sa pensée, il reste dans l'orbe de la théorie des types qu'invoquait déjà Russell pour faire face aux antinomies. C'est de là que se détache le point de la critique popperienne: Wittgenstein a oublié la philosophie et en conséquence, peut être à son propre insu, il a cheminé en dehors du rationalisme.

Que répond alors le maître de Cambridge aux allégations popperiennes?

¹² A ce propos se référer à l'article remarquable de Renée Bouveresse: « Popper et Wittgenstein: la lecture popperienne du *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* », in Karl Popper, *Science et Philosophie*, Publication de l'Institut interdisciplinaire d'études épistémologiques, Paris, Vrin 1991, p. 90.

Dès la préface de ses investigations philosophiques, Wittgenstein dénonce avec vigueur toutes les mésinterprétations induites de son oeuvre. Sous l'accent d'un avertissement sans équivoque, il prend alors le lecteur à témoin pour en prévenir les dérives et en corriger la trajectoire. Et sous le mode d'une confiance portée à la fois par un désir de précision et de rectification, il en balise les contours en ces termes

“Jusqu'à une date toute récente j'avais proprement renoncé au projet de faire publier encore de mon vivant ces recherches. projet qui n'en fut pas moins ranimé de temps en temps; et en effet force me fut de constater que les résultats de mes recherches, que j'avais divulgués dans des conférences, des manuscrits, des discussions circulaient sous une forme moins édulcorée ou mutilée, donnant lieu à des fausses interprétations. Ma vanité s'en trouva irritée, et j'eus quelque peine à la calmer.

Cependant lorsqu'il y a quatre ans j'eus l'occasion de relire mon premier livre, le *Tractatus logico philosophicus*, et d'en expliquer les pensées, il m'apparut soudain que je devais publier dans un ensemble les anciennes avec les nouvelles pensées: ces dernières ne se trouveraient placées sous leur vrai jour qu'en se détachant sur le fond de mon ancienne manière de penser et par le contraste qui en résulterait.”¹³

Wittgenstein nous montre ainsi le chemin de l'erreur à la vérité, chemin, du reste, tout en sinuosité qui détermine le tracé de son parcours. L'on sait qu'il a eu comme préoccupation primordiale la démystification de l'Hegelianisme. Il se propose alors de partir en croisade contre ses “errements” entraînés par ses dérapés logomachiques. D'une manière générale, il se fixe comme tâche de régler les comptes à la “philosophie traditionnelle” afin de lui opposer la vérité du *Tractatus*, vérité sans doute précaire et toujours différée. Texte toujours relancé, qui ne cesse par la greffe de ses “énoncés destructeurs” de s'abolir au fur et à mesure de sa construction, neutralisant dans son cheminement tout discours déjà constitué. Il appert que dans la chair vive du *Tractatus* s'incruste un sens immanent. Mais ce sens ne se corrode pas dans la circulation du *Traité*. Et il ne s'épuise pas dans sa clôture. Tout au contraire il le déborde dans ses pages pour ainsi dire l'excède. Cet excès, tout à fait indiscernable se laisse investir¹⁴ dans les *Investigations*

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Investigations philosophiques*, cf. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* traduit par Pierre Klossowski, Paris Gallimard 1986 p. 112.

¹⁴ Nous sommes conscient de la redondance. Elle se donne seulement à lire comme un forçage du propos.

philosophiques. Somme toute, c'est dans ce lieu où la parole philosophique devient plus audible que le *Tractatus* redécouvre sa propre vérité. Mais quelle retombée un tel nouage a-t-elle pour la théorie de la signification? A ce propos, qu'est ce que Wittgenstein a vraiment dit?

Reprenons le *Tractatus* et mettons en exergue un certain nombre d'aphorismes clés.

Ces aphorismes tournent autour de l'étude de la proposition qui occupe une place centrale dans le *Tractatus*. Selon cette perspective, le point de départ de Wittgenstein est le jugement que quelques propositions sont douées de sens. En 4.022 Wittgenstein écrit:

“La proposition *montre* son sens. La proposition montre ce qu'il en est, *quand* en elle est vraie. Et elle dit qu'il en est ainsi.”

Cette percée est fulgurante. Elle révèle en effet qu'une proposition a un sens intrinsèque, abstraction faite de sa valeur de vérité. Et ce sens préexiste à toute confrontation avec la réalité. Bien plus: il en commande l'exposition par le Dire (*das Sagen*). Une proposition pourvue de sens doit donc dire quelque chose au sujet du monde, affirmer l'existence d'un fait. Toutefois elle ne saurait dire quant à sa propre forme qui se manifeste d'elle même. Cela induit l'évidence selon laquelle nous sommes d'emblée dans la bulle de la proposition. Et en un certain sens nous sommes dans le site du langage. Car

“La totalité des propositions est le langage” (4.001).

Il s'agit donc de révéler la logique de notre langage, d'en épeler l'alphabet.

Wittgenstein, d'une certaine manière commence en logicien. Il tente par le tranchant du rasoir d'occam d'explorer la proposition. Il en déplie tous les pans. Il note en 3.141:

“La proposition n'est pas une mixture de mots (*De même que le thème musical n'est pas une mixture de notes*). La proposition est articulée.”

Autrement dit la proposition est un fait structuré. Elle comporte les noms qui désignent et les expressions prédicatives et verbales qui signifient. Espace de contrariétés, ses éléments sont inertes. Toutefois prise daps sa totalité, elle est fondamentalement vivante.

Par ailleurs, en disjoignant la proposition et l'expérience sensible, Wittgenstein délimite la frontière entre le sens et le non-sens¹⁵, frontière qui est définie par la détermination symbolique du signe, c'est-à-dire par ses conditions d'usage établies selon la grammaire logique. Allons plus en avant: Wittgenstein bouscule le royaume du non-sens. il distingue comme du reste le remarque avec beaucoup d'acuité Mikael Dufrenne entre *unsinnig* et *sinnlos*, entre un énoncé absurde et un énoncé vide¹⁶

En revanche Wittgenstein pose une équation entre proposition et pensée. Au reste, dans la proposition souffle la pensée. Et Wittgenstein d'ajouter

“le signe propositionnel appliqué pensé, est la pensée” (3.5). “La pensée est la proposition ayant un sens. »(4).

Ainsi Wittgenstein nous exhorte-t-il à revenir aux motivations essentielles du *Tractatus* où il annonce que son livre

“*tracera* des limites à la pensée, ou plutôt – non à la pensée mais à l'expression des pensées car, pour tracer une limite à pensée, nous devrions être capables de penser des deux côtés de cette limite (nous devrions être capables de penser ce qui ne peut être pensé).”¹⁷

De là, une chute vertigineuse, l'impensable c'est le lieu de l'indicible” toile de fond de toute signifiante qui ne cesse de heurter les bornes du langage. Marque d'une impossibilité logique, celle d'un métalangage: le langage ne peut exprimer ses propres propriétés du moins celles qui lui sont essentielles. Et s'il n'y a pas de métalangage il n'y a pas de théorie de la logique du monde.

Ainsi:

“Pour pouvoir représenter la forme logique, il faudrait que nous puissions nous situer avec la proposition en dehors de la logique c'est-à-dire en dehors du monde” (4.12).

L'illégitimité d'un métalangage ou encore d'une métalogue constitue alors le point de butée qui impose au langage des limites propres. Wittgen-

¹⁵ Wittgenstein fait bien le partage entre le *Sinn* et l'*Unsinn*.

¹⁶ Mikael Dufrenne: “Wittgenstein et la philosophie”, in *Etude philosophique en 1965*, (20) p. 293.

¹⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstem. *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, Préface, op déjà citée, p. 27.

tein, ici tout près de Kant atteste lui même:

“La limite de la langue se montre dans l'impossibilité de décrire le fait qui correspond à une proposition (qui est sa traduction) sans justement répéter la proposition. Nous avons à faire ici à la solution kantienne du problème de la philosophie).”¹⁸

L'essence de la réalité comme celle de la proposition ne peut désormais être mise au jour qu'au terme d'une déduction transcendantale des conditions de possibilité du langage. L'on peut alors d'une certaine manière affirmer que c'est dans le roc du Criticisme que prend corps l'une des thèses les plus explosives du *Tractatus*. Thèse foudroyante de la métalangue qui sonne le glas de la théorie des types, en dissipant ainsi par ricochet la grande idée de Carnap d'effectuer une syntaxe logique du langage. Et Mikael Dufrenne de confirmer:

“Il y a bien pour le Wittgenstein du *Tractatus* un langage parfait comme âme de tous les langages empiriques, mais ce langage est unique et il exclut tout métalangage. Il dit mais il ne dit pas qu'il dit. Et c'est pourquoi la métaphysique dont le langage serait ce métalangage est impossible. On sait avec quel appétit le positivisme logique s'est jeté sur ces assertions de Wittgenstein pour dénoncer les verbal fallacies, ces fausses couches du langage. Mais la pensée de Wittgenstein mérite plus d'attention.”¹⁹

Cette attention, nous la prendrons en charge pour maintenir la tension de l'oeuvre. Après avoir soutenu à la fin du *Tractatus*

“Ce dont on ne peut parler, il faut le taire” (7),

Wittgenstein n'a pas hésité, sans doute pour se faire entendre, au delà de ce silence ultime, à reprendre la parole. Le *Tractatus* s'efface et cède la place aux *Investigations philosophiques*.

A ce point archimédique de notre analyse, respectons une halte. Remarquons le premier terme de notre trajet et redisons-le: Wittgenstein, en un certain sens, fidèle à Kant renoue avec une pensée-langage sous condition. Sous le coup de la critique, il instruit une phénoménologie du langage qui

¹⁸ *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1978) Trad. bilingue: *Culture and Value* G.H. von Wright, ed., Blackwell 1980. Trad. fr. par G. Granel, *Remarques mêlées* Mauvezin Ter 1984 p. 26.

¹⁹ Se référer à l'article déjà cité de Mikael Dufrenne p. 293.

décrit l'avènement et la constitution du sujet pensant. C'est dans le suspens de cette radicalité que Wittgenstein se tient pour traquer le "dogme de la signification."

Ouvrons dès à présent les *Investigations philosophiques* et interrogeons le Texte sans détour. Il repart du langage ou plus précisément d'un constat tout à fait singulier qui rend compte de son essence en ces termes:

"Les mots du langage nomment des objets. Les propositions sont des liaisons de pareilles dénominations. On trouve ici l'origine de l'idée que chaque mot a un signification. cette signification est coordonnée au mot. Elle est l'objet dont le mot tient lieu."²⁰

La cible est bien ajustée: l'essentialisation du langage en est la vocation. Wittgenstein dénonce l'illusion augustinienne du langage qui réduit le mot à la chose, atomisant et sublimant l'idée de signification. Sous l'éclat des *Investigations philosophiques*, Wittgenstein parachève dans une certaine mesure le tournant grammatical opéré dans les années trente.

Wittgenstein remet en question, en effet les catégories grammaticales du "nom" ou de la "proposition." Il s'emploie dans cette direction à montrer que la signification prend forme dans le mot. Elle se laisse, par ailleurs, entièrement déterminée par l'usage. Dans cette perspective, il écrit

« Notre investigation ne vise pas à trouver la signification propre, la signification exacte des mots mais nous donnons souvent aux mots dans le cours de nos *Investigations* une signification exacte » (F.467).

L'arbitraire de la signification comme activité symbolique détruit le schème figural. Il arrache le langage au prestige du simulacre et l'introduit comme un "jeu" dans un registre des jeux possibles. Du coup le langage privé s'effondre. De ses décombres jaillit une variété infinie, incommensurable de jeux de langage en fonction desquels se développent des textures de mondes possibles. Et dans le bris du miroir, les langages se laïcisent, redécouvrant ainsi leur irréductible altérité. In fine

"se représenter un langage signifie se représenter une forme de vie" (19).

Retourner au sol raboteux, tel est le mot d'ordre de Wittgenstein. Nous y

²⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Investigations philosophiques*, op. déjà cité p. 115.

voilà puisque le langage change de référent. Pris dans le vif du discours effectif²¹ il se noie dans les rapports d'existence et se perd dans le rameau de la sociabilité.

Tout épais et transi dans la temporalité, il raccorde la logique et l'ontologie, se laissant ainsi tramer sans cesse par la vérité. Et cela Mikael Dufrenne l'a bien perçu lorsqu'il note:

“Wittgenstein nous dit à sa façon que nous sommes au monde; c'est un autre aspect de ce fait fondamental et étonnant qu'il y a de l'être: nous sommes intégrés au Was, et cela signifie pour Wittgenstein que nous sommes dans le langage...”²²

Bien sûr, nous sommes d'emblée dans l'épaisseur du langage, pris dans le concept du déjà là, du *Dasein* comme dirait Heidegger. C'est de cette dépossession du langage, rendue possible par la frappe heideggerienne que Wittgenstein semble-t-il se prévaut pour rejouer la philosophie.

Mais bien plus, au-delà ou en deçà de Heidegger, Wittgenstein met en branle une philosophie silencieuse, symphonie inachevée dont les variations interminables continuent encore de solliciter notre écoute. Et Karl Popper, réellement en retrait par rapport à la rythmique Wittgensteinienne ne pouvait que rester aphone. C'est de cette surdité, croyons nous que s'institue et se creuse son écart avec Wittgenstein loin de la tyrannie des signes et de la fureur de l'Histoire.

Wittgenstein plus que tout autre, n'a cessé de glorifier la philosophie, mesurant ainsi parfaitement le mouvement de sa pensée. Aussi au crépuscule de sa vie, n'hésita-t-il pas à écrire:

“Je crois qu'aussi longtemps, que je vivrai, et dans la mesure où spirituellement j'en serai capable, je ne cesserai pas de réfléchir à des problèmes philosophiques.”²³

Pour la postérité, voilà qui est clair: réconcilier la philosophie avec sa

²¹ C'est le lieu de souligner que la pensée de Wittgenstein a sans conteste traversé un moment anthropologique. L'on peut en effet se reporter à son ouvrage intitulé “Remarque sur *Le Rameau d'Or* de Frazer”, *l'Age d'Homme*, 1982.

²² Mikael Dufrenne. Article déjà cité, p. 295.

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Le cahier bleu et le cahier brun*, Paris, Gallimard 1988 p. 419.

propre nomination, telle a été l'ambition de Wittgenstein qui demeure, malgré tout, suivant l'heureuse formule de Allan Janik une "énigme autrichienne."

A THEMATIC COMPARISON BETWEEN FOUR AFRICAN SCHOLARS: IDOWU, MBITI, OKOT p'BITEK & APPIAH

What do they tell us about the existence of 'truth' and a 'High God', and why is their work significant?

by Louise Muller

ABSTRACT. The author looks at two themes in the writings of four African scholars: E. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Okot p'Bitek and Kwame Appiah. She surveys their ideas about the existence of truth and of a High God. For each theme, she outlines the significance of each author's work. In the conclusion the coherence between both themes is shown with the help of two varieties of philosophical positions and aesthetic styles, notably: modernism and postmodernism. She shows why Idowu and Mbiti should be categorized as modernist. She argues that Okot p'Bitek's view of God-as-dead shows him to be a modernist and why his deconstruction of the work of previous scholars also makes him a postmodernist *avant la lettre*. Finally, she argues that Appiah's postmodern vision on the non-existence of one single truth has been conducive to his vision on identity as a bricolage of traditional and modern elements of culture.

KEY WORDS. African religion, Appiah (Kwame), discourse, High God, Idowu (Bolaji), Mbiti (John), modernism, Okot p'Bitek, postmodernism, truth

Introduction

In this essay I will look at two themes in the writings of four African scholars: E. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Okot p'Bitek and Kwame Appiah. I will survey their ideas about the existence of truth and of a Highest God. For each theme, I will outline the significance of each author's work. In the conclusion the coherence between both themes will be shown with the help of two varieties of philosophical positions and aesthetic styles, notably: modernism and postmodernism.

In order to understand these scholars and their work the following short introduction to these positions might be helpful.

Modernism is a position that is rooted in the Enlightenment and its belief in reason. Some Modernist scholars are looking for *absolute knowledge* in science. They believe that science is objective, universal and rational. Early Enlightenment ideals involved rational enquiry as the guiding principle for all knowledge, and the belief that only progress in intellectual method could bring about a world of order, security and social understanding. Scholars associated with this tradition include the philosophers Kant, Hegel and Voltaire. The flipside to this position is that, in believing that their values should be universally applied, Enlightenment thinkers tended to see Europe as the most enlightened and civilized part of the world. Hegel thought it was allowed morally to colonize non-Western people (Ward 2003: 9-11).

Postmodernism is a position that has developed since the 1950s. Postmodernism 'truth' only exists in relation to specific discourses, in a way that has antecedents in the relativistic truth theories of Ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical approaches, as found in the works of Protagoras, Aristotle, and Cicero).¹ For the postmodern French philosopher Lyotard this meant that scientific truth-claims could only be legitimated by reference to the scientific specific language game in which they were made (Lyotard 1987). Knowledge is never neutral and its claims serve specific interests. It also means that no account of historical reality is free of narrative. Because the past cannot be reconstructed as it 'really' happened, the only thing that can be done is telling stories about it (Ward 2003: 182).

Truth

One of the themes that is dealt with in the readings of the four mentioned African writers is 'truth'. For the Nigerian writer Idowu this meant that in the used methodology scholars should look at the social reality of indigenous

¹ Cf. Salazar, P.-J., Osha, S., & van Binsbergen, W., eds., *Truth in Politics: Rhetorical Approaches to Democratic Deliberation in Africa and beyond*, special issue of *QUEST: An African Journal of Philosophy*, Volume XVI (2002). My use the label 'postmodern' to denote a twentieth-century CE discourse-specific approach to truth, allows me to attach that label to various thinkers who, chronologically, would rather be considered postmodernists *avant la lettre*, such as Okot p'Bitek.

religions without the prejudices that come with theories about it. Idowu’s objection against theories was that they describe indigenous religions as if they are well-structured and completely coherent and consistent systems of belief.² In his viewpoint such a reflection upon the belief system of the ethnic group he studied and belonged to was false. He thought, the ideas of the spiritual world of the Yoruba-an ethnic group in Western Nigeria-were not consistent, because they were the product of a society with an oral tradition (Idowu 1962: 18-29). Illiterate societies were characterized by a lot of inconsistencies, since the necessity of consistency in these societies was missing. In text culture every inconsistency is immediately visible. Though, in oral cultures the specific context in which an utterance is used is more important than its eternal consistency. Idowu discovered a lot of inconsistencies in the Yoruba belief. He found for example different versions in their myth of origin of their ideas about a High God (Olodumare). In the earliest version it was Orisa-nla who got the instruction of Olodumare to create the solid earth. In the second version it was Oduduwa. The last version was a conflation between both: it was Orisa-nla who got the commission from Olodumare to create the world, but through an accident, he forfeited the privilege to Oduduwa, who thus became the actual creator of the solid earth. Idowu looked for these different versions because he thought that there could not be one version of an oral story that might be considered as truth. Because in an oral tradition ideas are not written down, stories can change easily while being told from parents to their children for many generations. Besides, a society changes which makes it is more or less attractive to adopt one version of a story and reject another. Or as what happened in the case of the Yoruba, to combine two myths of origin and accept the collective story as truth (Idowu 1962: 18-29). These arguments are common in the study of oral history. However, Idowu did not mention the most important argument, namely that a society is a not monolith, and different sections (classes, gen-

² The concept of consistency fits into the modernist mechanical worldview. For instance, in a factory the movements of workers have to be consistent in order to make machines. Some modernist scholars believe in an unchangeably consistent religious system. See: Boyer, Pascal, 2001. *Religions explained: The human instincts that fashion Gods, spirits and ancestors*, London: Random House. Idowu accepts that the religious belief system of the Yoruba has changed over time, and thus he does not believe in any absolute consistency of that belief system.

ders, age groups) have different interests, which are selectively suited by various versions of the available mythical material. Idowu did not put any effort in detecting different field of cultural orientation in the Yoruba society, which in these days would be unacceptable. For Idowu ‘truth’ meant studying the different versions of oral tradition in Yoruba belief, irrespective of the social contexts in which they were created. The purpose of his linguistic-anthropological study was to show how the religious belief system of the Yoruba really was. Anyhow, Idowu studied the Yoruba religion from a Christian liberal theological point of view. He believed that God had revealed himself to all people. Truth lay in the fact that if he would use the right methodology and wait patiently, God’s revelation would show itself to the Yoruba (Idowu 1962: 1-11).

For the Kenyan theologian Mbiti, ‘truth’ was also connected to the Christian belief. Christianity was part of African religions, since it was already present before the colonization of Africa (Bediako 1992: 367). Christian elements were part of the essence of African religions. Mbiti’s truth lay in looking for the complete essence of these religions. His theory fitted well with the ideas of the adherences of Pan-Africanism: a general term for various movements in Africa that have as their common goal the unity of Africans and the elimination of colonialism and white supremacy from the continent (Amate 1987). Pan-Africans thought that there were some characteristics of the African race that distinguished it from other races. One of the essential elements of this race was that religiously Africans were bound together. For that reason they should have one system of belief (Mbiti 1969: 1).³

Okot p’Bitek (1931-1982), the Ugandan poet and scholar, did not accept such a system as truth. As a postmodernist, he thought that in the deconstruction of the ideas of earlier scholars of religion, such as Idowu and Mbiti, various truths about these religions would show themselves. In order to criticize the work of other scholars Okot p’Bitek divided their studies in three related categories:

- a. The Christian apologists mounting a counter-attack on the eight-

³ By contrast to Parrinder, Mbiti thought that there were minor cultural variations within this system.

eenth and twentieth centuries ‘non-believers’.

- b. African nationalists fighting a defensive battle against the vicious onslaught on African cultures by Western scholarship: and
- c. The missionaries staging what they called “a dialogue with animism.”

I will first explore his second category: the African Nationalists. Okot p’Bitek emphasized that the work of these nationalists, such as for example Leopold Senghor, was written as a reaction on studies on Africa in Western scholarship. Senghor praised the black sensibility as opposed to the white reason as an element of the African race to be proud of. Okot p’Bitek criticizes the search for sensible elements in African indigenous religions as opposed to Christianity. He thought that it did not tell anything about African religions itself and was not more than a mirror of European societies and their religions. It showed Westerners how their societies were not, but did not show the truth about African societies and religions (Okot p’Bitek 1990: 40-52).

Under point (c) and further on in his book, Okot p’Bitek scrutinized concepts used by Western scholars of religion such as ‘animism’, which was associated with primitivism. Animism or the belief in spiritual beings was regarded with illusions which were the product of primitive minds. Okot p’Bitek saw in ‘animism’ a conceptual falsehood that originated from the anthropological tradition. In his view the anthropological discipline which originates from 1839 came into existence because it could provide an excuse for the submission of other people. In the anthropological way of reasoning it was allowed to subject African people, since they needed help in their religious development, among other things.

The Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Appiah shared Okot p’Bitek’s absence in the belief of one truth. Life is chaotic and decentred and there is no religious doctrine in African religions, which tells Africans how to live a religious life. Appiah dismissed the Pan-African idea of essentialism, which is based on the presumption that all Africans can be characterized by elements that are unique to the African race, including a common religion. He called the way of reasoning of the Black Nationalists of the 1960’s a form of intrinsic racism. An intrinsic racist distinguishes morally between different races because they hold that each race has a different moral status, apart

from the moral characteristics included in its racial essence. Intrinsic racism is based on racial solidarity on something like family feeling, promoting mutual help within a race. Yet the “family model” ultimately fails as a justification for intrinsic racism. The family is the unit through which we live what is most intimate; it is the center of private life. The importance of family lies not in biological kinship but social relatedness, i.e. the shared experiences, attitudes, knowledge and belief, and the mutual investments of time in each other that normally occurs in a family. Racial groups, Appiah says, are far too large and the shared experiences too diffuse for these groups to be considered on the model of the family (Appiah 1992: 480-82).

Appiah called the idea of intrinsic racism thus a failure. Africans are not bound to a common race, nor a common language, culture or religion and do not recognize themselves in any other African culture but their own. He believed that instead there are many African religions and identities. The truth lies in studying African religions and identities free from the African colonial inheritance. Appiah felt that Africans should not walk away from their colonial history. Though, they should liberate themselves from the image that was given to them by the Europeans and focus on the meaning of African identity and religion nowadays. He emphasized that for a long time African identity had grown around falsehoods, such as race, a common historical experience and metaphysics. Although identity is always based on invention of falsehoods, some of them are more destructive than constructive. In his search for truth Appiah was looking for more constructive falsehoods to build identity upon (Appiah 1992: 174).

1.2. Significance

Idowu studied the Yoruba religion without judging it as being barbaric, childish or non-existent such as was common in Western scholarship for many centuries. He did not approach the Yoruba from the nineteenth century theory of evolution, in which it was quoted that the Yoruba and other Africans were superstitious and had not yet reached the level of society in which a belief system could develop. Idowu’s methodology was revolutionary in the sense that he described the Yoruba from the inside, as well as his tools allowed him. He wanted to study them as subjects equal to himself, instead

of looking at them as objects that should be investigated from a distance (Idowu 1962: 1-11).

His work is as an interesting historical document of the knowledge production on African religions in the 1970s. However, nowadays his methodology would have been unacceptable. First of all Idowu had a theological instead of a scientific starting point. He wanted to study the revelation of God amongst the Yoruba and was looking for the (High) God among them. In that sense, he was prejudiced, since he presumed such a (Highest) God existed. Idowu saw in the Yoruba belief prove for God’s universal divine revelation and was very willing to find their God. Anyhow, the enquiry if God exists and what his local name will be is not an academic question. Secondly, Idowu wrote that he investigated the Yoruba belief from the inside but did not give any insight in his sources. It seems his information on the Yoruba is primarily based on linguistic sources, as he describes the etymology of concepts such as the High God (Olodumare). It is namely not clear if he interviewed the Yoruba themselves or only used the knowledge he had gathered about this belief by listening to stories of the elders in his village during his youth. That is, he says he knows what the Yoruba belief is, since he is a Yoruba believer himself (Idowu 1962: 11).

Idowu’s work is thus both revolutionary and prejudiced. However, I think there should not be too much emphasis put on his prejudices, since in comparison with the ways in which African religions have been studied in Western scholarship for many centuries he was relatively little prejudiced. This becomes clear if we compare his work with for example Voltaire’s *Philosophy of history*, 1766, in which the French philosopher wrote:

‘The majority of mankind were for a long time in a state of imbecility, and that, perhaps the most imbecile of all were those who wanted to discover a signification in these absurd fables, and ingrained reason upon folly’ (Voltaire 1766).

From this background I feel it would be anachronistic to value too negatively the methodology Idowu used. We cannot impose the methodological ideas of later scholars upon the work of their scientific predecessors.

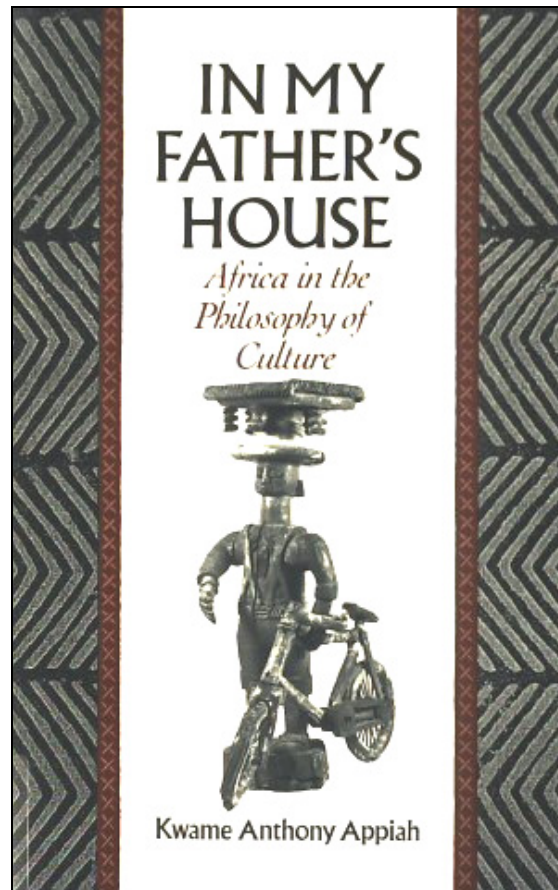
The same remark can be made for the point of departure of Mbiti. As a theologian, he was looking for the essence of African religions. This essence showed itself by comparing African religions with Christianity. By arguing that Christian elements were part of indigenous African beliefs, he argued

against the evolutionary idea that African belief would be primitive or non-existent. For this reason Okot p'Bitek assigned Mbiti to the category of African nationalists, who were fighting a defensive battle against the vicious onslaught of Western scholarship on African cultures. However, given the background of ways of thinking about African religions, I think such a battle was necessary and Mbiti's work was relatively little prejudiced. Therefore, even after Okot p'Bitek's severe criticism on the work of both Idowu and Mbiti, I think my judgment about the significance of their work should be positive.

With their work Idowu and Mbiti gave an alternative way of thinking to the ideas of the conservative theologians, who thought that the Christian belief was the only acceptable religion. Mbiti and Idowu were liberal theologians who believed in the revelation of God in Africa and therefore in the great value of African religions. However, some critical points on the work of Mbiti remain. In my opinion it is a disadvantage that Mbiti's description of African beliefs is more or less abstracted from its cultural and historical context. It looks as if Mbiti has first thought out, from first principles, a model of African religions, only later to use the fieldwork of other scholars of African religions in order to prove that his model was an adequate reflection on the social reality. I think that if he had worked the other way round and had collected more data himself, his research results would have had more value.

The significance of Okot p'Bitek's work in relation to truth is that he showed the falsehoods in the way of thinking of his forerunners on African religions in Western scholarship. However, Okot p'Bitek himself was similarly 'guilty' of a falsehood in his efforts to de-Hellenise African religions (Van Rinsum 2001: 90). His opinion on religion was that it was a social phenomenon. It was a phenomenon of the mind that was used to regulate social intercourse. However, in his effort to secularize African religions he was westernizing them as well. He said that traditional Africans could be regarded as atheistic since they did not hold belief in any deities similar to the Christian God (Okot p'Bitek 1990: 90-102). This is a Westernization of the beliefs of Africans, because it presumes that every belief in a transcendental phenomenon that is not indicated with the word 'God' is a form of atheism. Based on the negative definition of atheism this way of thinking is

false.⁴



Appiah deconstructed the idea of an African identity of his predecessors. He searched for many African identities, which should show themselves once the so-called otherness-machine would be destroyed. With this he meant that the discourse on identity should not be nationalistic or anti-colonial as was the case in the 1950s and 1960s. It should be postcolonial instead. In Appiah's opinion Africans could deny their history of being colonized, but this did not mean that every effort to describe the African

⁴For in its negative sense atheism means that someone is not a theist (Flew 2000: 36-42). But what a theist exactly believes is not based on knowledge, in the conventional sense of 'justified true belief'. Since it is not known if the belief of theists is true, the only thing people can do is to use a concept such as the word 'God', so that it can be seen to be at least more or less probable. Since this existence of 'God' is thus an idea and not a scientifically proven fact, I do not agree with Okot in his use of the label atheism for all representations of God other than Christian ones.

identity should refer and react on this history. He wanted to look at how Africans are rather than looking at who they are in the mirror of the 'Other'. For both Appiah and Okot p'Bitek this meant that Africans should dissociate themselves from the Pan-African movement and its essentialist ideas. Appiah's deconstruction of the Pan-African idea of one truth, an African identity instead of many identities of African people, showed itself in his search for the identity of the Asante: his own ethnic group. In Appiah's viewpoint an Asante is someone who constructs his identity out of apparently contradicting elements. He is loyal to both the chiefs and the state. He consumes palm wine but also Coca Cola. As the above dust jacket of Appiah's book *In my father's house* shows,⁵ such an Asante person can be characterized as a man who is traditional and modern at the same time, leading a bicycle on one hand and having a golden stool hover above his head; the latter is the traditional symbol of unity amongst the Asante (Wilks 1993: 96-126).⁶

2.1 The existence of a High God

Idowu and Mbiti believe that Africans know that the High God exists from the moment they are born, since He is responsible for all life. For Idowu, with his Western theological background, it was obvious that the Olodumare was the most important element in the Yoruba belief. In his opinion the ancestors and ancestral worship were not even part of the religion (Idowu 1995: 107-129). The same concerned for Mbiti. He was looking for local names of the One God in the African religion and gave attributes to the local High God, such as omniscience and omnipresence, as if it was the Christian God (Mbiti 1969: 20-25 and Idowu 1962: 38-48).

The postmodern works of Okot p'Bitek and Appiah show that the presumption that Africans originally believed in a High God is not shared by all present-day scholars of African religion. Okot p'Bitek experienced the ideas

⁵ Courtesy <http://www.wtamu.edu/library/books/images/appiah3.jpg> .

⁶The Asante is an ethnic subgroup of the Akan: the major ethnic-linguistic group in Ghana and the Cote d'Ivoire. In the myth of origin it is said that the Akan kingdom was founded in 1701 when a golden stool fell from the sky. This stool became the symbol of the unity of the Akan monarchy. It is said to contain the okra or consciousness of all the Akan. If the golden stool is destroyed, this would be the end of the kingdom.

of Idowu and Mbiti as a distortion of realities of African religions and was especially irate by what he called the ‘Hellenizing’ of African gods. By this he meant the process of attributing a metaphysical dimension to these deities. Instead of describing African religions as such, theologians had tried to present an African alternative to Western Christianity, but still in a Christian format. In the process of Hellenizing Mbiti presented African traditional religions as hierarchical structured wholes in which the top position of all divine beings was reserved for the High God. Idowu had the advantage over Mbiti that he did not present the Yoruba belief as an entirely consistent system, but still his work was Hellenized. For he presented Olodumare as a High God with Christian attributes. However, for Okot p’Bitek it was clear that there was no High God in any African religion. He categorized theologians and liberal missionaries such as Idowu and Mbiti under point (a) and referred to them as Christian apologists.⁷

Scholars of that description served the agenda of Westerners, who were looking for an apology for the colonization of Africa. They legitimated the colonization by emphasizing that it was a necessary step for Africans to see the light of God and become converted to Christianity. Therefore, they should first show that God had revealed himself over African people and that they could be tutored and receive the Christian belief. Their search for a High God served this goal (Okot p’Bitek 1990: 70-80). This line of thinking was started by the comparative religionist Max F. Muller. He was convinced that there was already a look-alike Christian God among African people before Christianity reached Africa. Okot p’Bitek showed that Muller’s idea of a universal revelation was wrong by studying the exact meaning of local divine words in African religions such as Yok. He was convinced that these words were used by missionaries to transform them in the idea of a High God (Okot p’Bitek 1990: 58-70).

Appiah had another starting point in his approach to African religions. He was not looking back at pre-colonial history and cleansing African religions from their colonial elements as Okot p’Bitek did. Instead, he emphasized how African religion is experienced nowadays in different ethnic groups. Appiah described the Asante rituals of these days as being syncretistic. Traditional African religious and modern world religious (Christianity,

⁷ See my Section 1.1.

Islam) elements dominate Asante religious rituals. As an example he gave the wedding of his own sister, which was held in a Methodist church in Kumasi. In the marriage ceremony, a Catholic archbishop was overseeing libation to his family ancestors, carried out by one of the king's senior linguists. Appiah explains this ceremony from the belief in the plurality of invisible spiritual forces and its practical character. In this ritual the emphasis lay on the practice of invoking God. God can be addressed in different styles – Methodist, Catholic, Anglican, Moslem and traditional – and the ancestors can be addressed also. Certainly, for the present-day Asante there is thus no such a thing as one High God! (Appiah 1992: 107-136).

2.2 Significance

Idowu's and Mbiti reacted on the ideas of their predecessors that African people were superstitious and had an underdeveloped religious belief. They wanted to show the world that they could do better without their colonial masters and emphasized the richness of their own culture. I agree with Okot p'Bitek that it was not very strategic of these African scholars in this effort to copy the line of thought of Western missionaries and adopt the belief that Africans should have a High God. In their attempt to show that Africans religions were indeed developed, they copied the Western idea about what this meant and were still writing in a Western discourse.

Okot p'Bitek was successful in developing a discourse of decolonization instead. By deconstructing the ideas of his predecessors he cast doubt on the assumption that the High God was part of African indigenous religions. Unfortunately, he was not entirely free from a Western discourse either. In his endeavor to attack the idea of the existence of a High God in African religions he locked himself up in a model that was derived from a discussion on Western theology, the God-is-dead movement of the 1960s (van Rinsum 2001: 90). However, various specialists have advanced ethnographically based arguments to reject his idea of the non-existence of a High God in Africa. Considering for instance the fact that Yoruba had an agricultural society, it is more likely that something like an approachable Rain God would have been the most significant element in the Yoruba belief than an abstract High God. This Rain God for which the people could pour libation and who

was close to the people's imagination was probably more important than a God that lived in Heaven and did not communicate with human beings through the ancestors.⁸

Obviously, the postmodern scholars Okot p'Bitek and Appiah have their disbelief in a High God in common. The difference between them is that Okot p'Bitek, in his resistance towards African colonial religious history in Western scholarship, converted himself to another Western-rooted belief, that of atheism (van Rinsum 2001: 85). Appiah, instead, accepted the common colonial history and tried to unravel the essence of untraditional syncretistic religious practices that take place in Africa today (Appiah 1992: 107-137).

Conclusion

The African scholars Idowu and Mbiti were writing in the margin of modernism. They were influenced by modernist ideas in Western scholarship, but were criticizing it as well. On the one hand they were looking for a system of belief in African religions that would contain the absolute truth about the character of these religions. In this sense, Idowu and Mbiti can be called modern scholars. On the other hand, they were fighting against the negative implications of the Enlightenment ideas. In this struggle they adopted the Christian idea about God to prove that African religions were developed. The existence of a High God became thus part of their idea on what was truth about African religions.

Okot p'Bitek and Appiah are postmodernists. Okot p'Bitek was fully aware of the interests that were served with the introduction of the idea of a High God in African religions. He wanted to show his readers that the way in which for instance Idowu and Mbiti had presented African religions was not as neutral and as objective as they made it appear. This awareness led him to the above categorisation of three groups of scholars studying African

⁸ Austin J. Shelton *Man*, Vol. 64. (Mar.-Apr. 1964), pp. 53-54; also: 'Change in Anaguta traditional Religion', by Elizabeth Isichei, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1. (1991), pp. 34-57.

religions, all of which he severely criticized. His truth lay in the deconstruction of the ideas of these scholars so that different truths about African religions as they were purified from colonial cultural influences would show themselves. Appiah did not want to put all his effort in reconstructing the past as it was before the colonization. Instead of filtering the past, he wanted to emphasize the identity of Africans today. African religions have been an important element of that identity. Appiah's truth lay in the study of non-traditional forms of religion, in which divine beings, irrespective of their name, could take many forms.

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ETRUSCAN ADDS FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF HISTORY TO AFRICA AS A NAME, A CONCEPT AND A CONTINENT

by Fred C. Woudhuizen*

ABSTRACT. Customarily the beginning of the history of a nation, an country, an institution etc. is marked by the availability of written sources. Thus the history of the concept of Africa – so central to the identity of Africans and African Americans – is usually made to begin in the third century, in the context of Ancient Rome's Punic Wars. However, the author, international specialist on the languages of the Ancient Mediterranean including Etruscan, presents the case for reading a late 7th century BC Etruscan text as an attestation of the word 'Africa' – thus adding four hundred years to African history.

KEY WORDS. Africa, African history, Ancient Mediterranean, Etruscan, Hellenistic Period, history, identity, Iron Age, prehistory, San Giovenale, written sources

On the front side of a stone bed with decorated legs in a chamber tomb from San Giovenale (near Vetralla, Central Italy) dated to the late 7th century BC, the following text has been incised in retrograde direction of writing and *scriptio continua*, starting at about the top middle side of the bed and running downwards to the left leg near the end for lack of space:¹

mihanϕinasiavhircinasimuluvana

On the basis of dedicatory inscriptions of similar type on vases dating from about the same period, like *mi mulu kaviiesi* (Tarquinia, c. 650 BC) and *mi hirumesi mulu* (Caere, late 7th or early 6th century BC)² we can easily divide the given sequence in four distinct entities:

mi hanϕinasi avhircinasi muluvana

* My thanks are due to Wim van Binsbergen and Frits Waanders for references and linguistic aid.

¹ Colonna 1984: 290-1; cf. Rix 1991: AT 3.2.

² Rix 1991: AT 3.1; Cr 3.12. Cf. Woudhuizen 1992: 104 (no. 6); Woudhuizen 1998: 157 (no. 42). For further inscriptions with *mulu*, see Rix 1991: index, s.v.

Of these four entities, the first, *mi*, is the nominative of the pronoun of the 1st person singular “I”, which characterizes archaic dedicatory inscriptions being usually conducted in the first person singular as if the object itself speaks to the reader (so-called “iscrizioni parlanti”). Next, the last word, *muluvana*, is obviously related with *mulu* of the given vase inscriptions and therefore likewise denotes the object being dedicated. Now, the root *mulu-* or *muluva-*, which is also present in the central verb of dedicatory inscriptions, *muluvanike*, *muluvanece*, etc., “(s)he has offered as a vow”, ultimately originates from Luwian hieroglyphic *maluwa-* “thank-offering”, derivations of which are attested for Sidetic in form of *malvam₁a*, corresponding to Greek *kharistēria* in a bilingual inscription, and Lydian in form of *ml₁ve₁ndai₁* (dative plural in *-ai₁*), bearing reference to mobilia in the grave.³ What strikes us in the present form *muluvana* is the preservation of root-final *-va-* in like manner as in the related verb, which, in the light of the Luwian background, forms an integral part of the root and hence has been dropped in the abridged *mulu*. Furthermore, it is characterized by an additional element *-na*, which likely classifies it as a nominal or adjectival derivation in the same manner as *śuthina* or *suthina* “grave-gift” is derived from *śuthi* or *suthi* “grave”, in short as something pertaining to the thank-offering. Finally, the two corresponding forms in the middle render the name of the deceased person for which the bed was intended, both elements of which show the adjectival genitive in *-si*, originating from Luwian *-ašši-*.⁴ In sum, this leads us to the following translation:

“I (am) the (...) pertaining to the thank-offering of Hanphinas Afircinas”

As far as the name of the deceased person is concerned, the first element, *hanφina-*, recalls the family name or gentilicium *hamφna-* as attested for later inscriptions primarily from the region of Perugia. Contrary to the opinion of the editor of our inscription, Giovanni Colonna, however, I do not think that it actually constitutes the first name or praenomen, which would collide with the given comparative evidence, but rather maintain that the

³ Woudhuizen 1992, s.v. *mulveni*.

⁴ Woudhuizen 1992: 79; 81-2.

latter is omitted.⁵ This inference coincides with the fact that the second element of the name, *avhircina-*, is not a family name or gentilicium, but an ethnonym of similar type as *tursikina-* as attested for a dedicatory inscription on a gold fibula from Chiusi dating to the last quarter of the 7th century BC.⁶ The latter form shows the root *tursi-* “Etruscan” in combination with the element *-kina-*, which is paralleled for *vestirikina-*, and in variant form *-cina-* or *-cena-*, for *katacina-*, *melacina-*, *peticina-*, and *atacena-*, *laricena-*, respectively. As rightly stipulated by Carlo de Simone, the morpheme *-kina-*, *-cina-* or *-cena-* probably bears testimony of Celtic adstrate influences on Etruscan, and therefore may likely be traced back to Proto-Indo-European **ǵenh₁-* “to procreate” – a root frequently applied in kinship terms.⁷ Accordingly, we are left with the residual element *avhir-*, which, as Colonna keenly observed, should be compared to the root of the family name *afrcna-* and *afrc-* (note that 7th century BC *vh* = later *f*) as recorded for the region of Chiusi, and as such actually confronts us with an unsuspectedly early reflex of the ethnic designation *Africus*,⁸ based on the root *Āfer* “African” or *Āfrī* “an African.”⁹

To be more precise: our Etruscan inscription attests the ethnonym “African”, four hundred years before the earliest attestation of *Afer* (viz. as a cognomen of the Carthaginian born Publius Terentius Afer, a playwright in the 160s BC)¹⁰ or *Africa*¹¹ (used by the poet Ennius who lived from 239 to 169 BC) in Latin! Given the fact¹² that in its earliest use Africa refers to the re-

⁵ Colonna 1984: 291; cf. Rix 1991: Pe 1.42; Pe 1.43; Pe 1.143; Pe 1.619; Pe 1.1217; etc. For gentilicia in *-na-*, see Woudhuizen 1992: 81.

⁶ Rix 1991: Cl 2.3. Cf. Woudhuizen 1992: 104 (no. 10).

⁷ De Simone 1978; cf. Woudhuizen 1998: 141; 191.

⁸ Colonna 1984: 291 (“insospettata antichità”); cf. Rix 1991: Cl 1.2593; Cl 1.558; Cl 1.2437; Cl 1.550; Cl 1.1321.

⁹ Lewis & Short 1975, s.v. *Āfer*.

¹⁰ Hornblower & Spawforth 1996, s.v. *Terence*.

¹¹ Vahlen 1903: 55 (*Annalium* 310); 205 (*Saturarum* 11); cf. Hornblower & Spawforth 1996, s.v. *Ennius*.

¹² Ashmore 1961, s.v. *Africa, Roman*. Cf. the surname *Africānus* attributed to P. Cornelius Scipio major after the defeat of Hannibal at Zama in 201 BC, and to P. Cornelius

gion of Carthage, it may reasonably be inferred that our African buried in the chamber tomb at San Giovenale originated from the latter region, with which Etruria was in close contact from the very beginning of the Etruscan civilization during the late 8th and early 7th century BC onwards.¹³ However, the Etruscan nature of his family name, showing the characteristic element *-na-*, should warn us against oversimplified conclusions: the person in question may well have been fully Etruscanized already during his lifetime.

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Scipio Aemilianus minor after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC. Note also that the Roman province Africa, later Africa vetus, consists of the region of Carthage.

¹³ One may think in this connection of the mythical visit of Aeneas on his trip from Troy to Latium to the Carthaginian queen Dido, considering the fact that Aeneas is not only a Roman hero, but also an Etruscan cult figure. Archaeologically, the relations of Etruria with Carthage are reflected in the attestation of Etruscan bucchero in Carthage during the period of 630 to 580 BC, whereas epigraphically they are further underlined by an Etruscan inscription on an ivory plaque found at Carthage, dating from the 6th century BC (Rix 1991: Af 3.1); historically, finally, the Etrusco-Carthaginian alliance against the Phokaians at Alalia also in the 6th century BC may serve as a telling example.

QUEST laboratory

AFRICAN NOTES ON THE UNESCO STRATEGY ON PHILOSOPHY

by Wim van Binsbergen

ABSTRACT. On the occasion of the 2004 Day of Philosophy as organised by the United Nations Educational and Scientific Commission (UNESCO), a questionnaire on UNESCO's strategy on philosophy was circulated among selected philosophers world-wide. In the present article the Editor of QUEST: An African Journal of Philosophy / Revue de Philosophie Africaine fills out the UNESCO questionnaire from the specific perspective of philosophy in Africa. He seeks to define the role of UNESCO in the field of philosophy, particularly in the light of interculturality, globalisation, and reconciliation; these three topics he considers to be philosophically at a par with UNESCO's recognised goals of poverty alleviation and human rights. He stresses how UNESCO as a (powerful and elitist, global) formal organisation may need profound self-critique before it is ready to serve the case of philosophy in the South. Philosophy's contribution to global justice is to be largely situated in the South; here also some of humankind's most vital philosophical traditions have originated and may still be encountered outside the academic and bureaucratic sphere (that is most congenial to UNESCO). Involvement of philosophy in decision making and the media may help promote philosophy as a subject world-wide; special importance should be given to UNESCO's role in acknowledging and protecting language diversity as an obvious model for interculturality.

KEY WORDS. bureaucracy, Day of Philosophy, decision making, formal organisation, globalisation, human rights, interculturality, language diversity, media, philosophy, poverty alleviation, reconciliation, self-critique, South, UNESCO.

The UNESCO Strategy on Philosophy: QUESTIONNAIRE

*Introduction*¹

UNESCO was borne out of a philosophical, ethical and moral interrogation about the

¹ The text in small typeface, and the questions in bold typeface, are taken from the UNESCO questionnaire as circulated in 2004 – *QUEST* hereby acknowledges the UNESCO copyright; the author's responses appear in italics.

condition of the world. The need for an Organization which aimed to defend and foster the values of justice, democracy and human rights for the maintenance of peace was clear to the founding thinkers in 1945. Enduring peace and stability was to be built in the minds of men through intellectual co-operation, exchange and development, and UNESCO was to be the intellectual and ethical arm of the United Nations system.

This is why a Philosophy Programme, a unique programme within the United Nations, was created in 1946. Philosophy at UNESCO has since been geared towards the four following tasks:

- 1) Fostering Philosophical Research and Scholarship:
Example: Research programme on the 'Birthright of Man' (1968) to analyze the universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Fostering research on the link between philosophy teaching and democratic development (1990)
- 2) Promoting Philosophy Education:
Example: 1. Programme on Teaching Philosophy and Democracy (1951, 1952, 1980, 1983, 1985, 1990); 2. Programme on Curriculum Development with Special Emphasis on Africa (1996)
- 3) Creating a Forum for Intellectual Debate and Philosophical Exchanges:
Example: 1. Philosophy Colloquiums (since 1978), for example, a colloquium on the 23rd centenary of the death of Aristotle; 2. UNESCO Philosophy Forums (1995, 1996, 2003)
- 4) Stimulating Philosophical Reflection on World Problems:
Example: Series of Conferences on "*Reflection on the Post-Conflict Society*", with presentations by Jean-Paul Sartre, A.J. Ayer, Emmanuel Mounier, Pierre Bertaux (1964); Series of publications on *The Philosophy of Science and Culture of Peace* (1951) concerning the responsibility of scientists to promote a culture of peace

Today, the Philosophy Programme covers the following activities:

- **Philosophy Day**, celebrated in over seventy countries;
- **Philosophical Dialogues: Asia and the Arab Region**: a new programme launched this year, which will aim to foster philosophical dialogue and research between the two regions;
- **UNESCO Philosophy Forums**;
- **Pathways of Thought**: a programme which provides a forum for interdisciplinary debate on key philosophical issues;
- **Philosophy Facing World Problems: Poverty**: a programme launched in 2002, which aims to give philosophical analysis, rigour and reflection on the problem of poverty and human rights.

Aims of the Strategy

The development of a UNESCO Strategy of Philosophy was requested by the Executive Board at its 169th Session. The Executive Board requested the Director-General to propose to its 171st session, an intersectoral strategy on philosophy to be drafted in close consultation with the Member States and their National Commissions, relevant NGOs and eminent personalities.

This Strategy will define the key areas of work for the Philosophy Programme for the next six years.

Questions:

1. What should be the role of UNESCO in the field of Philosophy? [please tick one or several options]

- **Promoting Philosophy Teaching** √
- **Fostering Philosophical Reflection and Research** √
- **Strengthening the academic cooperation** √
- **Supporting Philosophical Debate and Dialogue** √
- **Creating and supporting networks of Philosophers** √
- **Supporting the mobility of young researchers** √
- **Other comments:**

I applaud UNESCO's initiative in identifying some of the most pressing and pertinent questions that constitute the challenge for philosophy today, and in my extensive answers I have sought to live up to the seriousness and relevance of these questions.

However, the pre-coded categories of this first question take the current disciplinary definition of philosophy for granted. There are more urgent and more important matters for UNESCO to consider in the context of philosophy, even if that means redefining philosophy:

- *how can we think diversity and unity at the global scale;*
- *how is such thinking to be informed by a re-thought concept of culture, one that is capable of dealing both with diversity and*

unity at the global scale?

- *how can we overcome the obvious differences, inequalities and historical grievances between continents, nations, etc.*
- *how can we think global institutions, like the UNESCO, in that framework*
- *the notion of ‘intercultural philosophy’ sums up these concerns rather effectively*

2. Throughout the various consultations, many scholars have recommended that Philosophy at UNESCO should focus on fostering philosophical analysis on contemporary world problems. Currently, the Philosophy Programme has a project on poverty and human rights. In your view, what kind of themes should Philosophy at UNESCO concentrate on, and what would be the best methodology?

Poverty and human rights are important topics, obviously, but these topics are largely outside most philosopher’s academic competence or experience. Imposing these topics as central concerns for philosophy, may reduce the philosophers to studied ineffectiveness – or may even invite a superficial form of mercenary window-dressing that is in nobody’s interest. I would rather advocate the topics I listed under question 1, which seem to me more properly and recognisably philosophical, and in fact more fundamental than poverty and human rights in the sense that a reflection on the latter two problems can easily be accommodated within the more overarching topics I identified.

3. What is the best way for UNESCO to foster an intellectual movement with philosophers in order to contribute to social change or social transformation based on social and global justice?

In the first place, UNESCO must be congratulated on identifying this task (‘to foster an intellectual movement with philosophers in order to contribute to social change or social transformation based on social and global justice’) and giving it priority.

However, UNESCO must also realise that if it seeks to take a leading

role in initiating and fostering such an intellectual movement, numerous contradictions in UNESCO's organisational format and its constituency will threaten to defeat the purpose of such a movement: with its emphasis on representation, legal formality, bureaucracy, excellence, luxury conditions of salaries, travel arrangements, per diems etc., UNESCO-associated scholars tend to constitute a global and national elite, more representative of the status quo, in class terms, than of the kind of social change and transformation so central to the movement we are talking about here.

In Africa, usually well-trained intellectuals are struggling under conditions that for most philosophers in the North Atlantic are inconceivable, from a point of view of economic, social and political security, work load, resources, etc. I know that similar conditions obtain in some other poor countries in other continents. Rather than condescendingly stooping down (temporarily and selectively extending, to such South scholars, the perks that would make them join the UNESCO circuit), a fundamental rethinking of bureaucracy, funding and participation must first be done within UNESCO before UNESCO is in a position to help realise its, very laudable, dream of 'foster[ing] an intellectual movement with philosophers in order to contribute to social change or social transformation based on social and global justice'. This rethinking should primarily be done by South scholars, in South locations (and not just South Africa, which whatever its achievements is not really in the same league), under South conditions shared by visiting scholars from all over the world.

Moreover, one or a series of conferences is not enough to foster an intellectual movement. After glorious beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, philosophy is by and large on the decline in African universities, and many intercontinentally significant African philosophers have left their original countries either for South Africa or for the North Atlantic (especially the USA). An intellectual movement without material means has great difficulty surviving – while, on the other hand, the best way to smother an intellectual movement is by abundance of foreign funds and of global bureaucratisation.

So a way must be found to make South (not exclusively African) intellectual institutions the focus of such a transformative movement, to en-

dow professorial chairs (some of them permanent ones, but especially rotating ones), and to ensure that they have some funding for first-rate PhD projects of their most promising students. And rather than creating new growth points out of the blue (with the risk of another form of dependency upon the North), UNESCO must scout for already existing growth points and initiatives in the South, and prudently subsidise those. In the near future, an effectively Africanised QUEST could be among such growth points.

4. How can UNESCO best link current research in Philosophy (political philosophy, philosophy and policy, moral philosophy) to policy-making and to decision-makers?

In the first place, to the UNESCO list of ‘political philosophy, philosophy and policy, moral philosophy’, Intercultural Philosophy should be added.

More importantly, if UNESCO is seriously determined to play a role in linking ‘current research in Philosophy to policy-making and to decision-makers’, a number of ways are open:

- *UNESCO itself represents a major laboratory for policy making and a context for decision-makers, based on once topical philosophical principles (those that could negotiate an intercontinental consensus in the 1930s-40!) and that urgently need rethinking – as is very clear, for instance, in the case of UNESCO’s stance on humankind’s Intangible Cultural Heritage (which now, in my mind, seems to revolve on the reification, elite appropriation, bureaucratisation and commodification of culture); such rethinking could make policy makers aware of the potential of philosophy to inform and enlighten policy makers’ predicaments, and would make UNESCO more credible as a broker in philosophical relevance*
- *UNESCO could experiment with a subsidised scheme where, on a rotation basis, philosophers of proven capability and experience would function as formal advisors of international and interconti-*

mental bodies; and where prominent policy-makers would take up rotating professorial chairs in philosophy departments

- *UNESCO could initiate an intellectual process bringing policy-makers and philosophers together through conferences, a journal, etc.; here it is important that quality of contents goes hand in hand with relatively low-threshold levels of specific professional technicality, so that philosophers and policy-makers can learn from each another and their, unmistakable, negative stereotypes vis-à-vis one another can be broken down.*
- *Meanwhile one of the earliest great names in the Western philosophical tradition, Plato (with his much-criticised idea of putting philosophers at the helm of the state, and his Sicilian adventures) reminds us not to expect too much from philosophers in policy-making*

5. How can UNESCO effectively reach the general public in promoting and fostering philosophical reflection?

Among academic subjects, philosophy scores relatively low in general public visibility, awareness and esteem, incomparable with literature, physics, or medicine. There is no Nobel Prize for Philosophy (some philosophers have won the Literature one), and in many countries (including e.g. The Netherlands) philosophy is not or hardly taught in primary and secondary schools. The great majority of people do not realise that – to the limited extent to which individual human agency informs the course of history – it was philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Voltaire, Diderot, Hegel and Marx who, more than statesmen or religious leaders, through their ideas, have had a determining effect upon the course of North Atlantic history (and, given North Atlantic hegemony since the 18th century CE, upon world history) throughout the Middle Ages and for much of the Modern Age. In the same way, the impact of philosophers like Lao Tse, Kung Fu Tse, Śankara, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, over even longer periods and even greater collectivities of people, is not generally recognised by the general public, especially not in the North Atlantic. Even basic philosophical training can be a power-

ful tool to help organise one's individual existence and to negotiate the contradictions between generations, classes, nations, cultures, identities, and religions. In the globalising world of today, such a tool is well-nigh indispensable. The above implies a number of courses for action:

- *UNESCO should produce attractive and effective teaching material on philosophy at primary and secondary school level as well as at the introductory university level, in a sufficient number of major languages*
- *Such a project would already bring out what seems to be one of the most fundamental contradictions of philosophy today: without being explicitly organised around an explicit and consensual theory of linguistic and cultural specificity, of translation, and of the challenges of universality, in the world today most classical philosophical traditions continue to have some impact on ongoing professional philosophising mainly through the medium of translation (from African languages, Ancient Greek, Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, French, English, German, Japanese, Latin, etc.). Translation is tacitly taken for granted, and – against all evidence – considered to be unproblematic. This means that, in today's dominant philosophical discourses, the problems and the possibilities of interculturality tend to be already dissimulated before they are consciously registered. Inside and outside the specifically philosophical field, UNESCO has a substantial role to play here, in supporting the diversity of languages, protecting the many endangered languages, promoting bilingualism and multilingualism as humankind's typical historic situation, and exploring linguistic diversity as a paradigm for productive tolerance in the fields of diversity of cultures and worldviews.*
- *UNESCO should persuade national education authorities to give more room to philosophy*
- *UNESCO should persuade national communities of philosophers to make themselves widely seen and heard in their national societies, with relevant debates on topical issues, and phrased in a language accessible to non-specialists*
- *UNESCO should make publicly use of the analyses and advice of*

philosophers

- *UNESCO should create an impressive, intercontinental and low-threshold media event around some annual UNESCO Philosophy Prize*
- *UNESCO should complement such a unique event by regular popular media broadcasts highlighting the potential and the achievements of philosophy – in the same way as, e.g., the popularisation of the natural sciences enjoy extensive media support*

6. In what ways can UNESCO promote the world traditions of philosophical thought, as well as to foster the research and teaching of ‘lesser-known’ philosophical traditions?

The leading idea behind many UNESCO initiatives and activities in the cultural field, seems to be that official listing, registration, recognition, canonisation, subsidising, representation, – in short, bureaucratic appropriation and reformulation – is the best way to preserve local, national and continental cultural achievements, to prevent them from dying out, and to make sure that they are not eclipsed in the process of North Atlantic hegemony, the onslaught of technology, globalisation and commercialisation, etc. For reasons indicated above in connection with UNESCO’s programme on humankind’s Intangible Cultural Heritage, this idea is naïve and in need of serious rethinking: it does not take into account the fundamental shifts in aesthetic and performative format, internal and external power relations, and the attending financial consequences, that are inevitably involved when a historic local or national cultural achievement is subjected to the process of appropriative embedding in a world-wide bureaucratic organisation. Cultural policy risks killing with one hand what it preserves with the other. Therefore my intuitive response to this question would be: world traditions of philosophical thought can very well look after themselves – their intercontinental implementation in the hands of scholars, disciplines, universities, reflects a historical process of emergence, confrontation, and obsolescence that is in the nature of cultural history.

However, we have to admit that under modern conditions of hege-

monic globalisation there are a number of specific threats that scarcely have had parallels in history, and that therefore require more systematic countering than just the historical play of cultural forces.

In the past hundred years, the formal organisation after West European 19th century model (primarily, but far from exclusively, in the form of the bureaucratic modern state) has been incredibly successful in spreading all over the world. It has gained absolute dominance as the standard way of organising religion, politics, the economy and industry, education, media, medicine, sport and recreation; it has thus become the principal social technology for the creation and management of power – including power through self-organisation, but mostly power by organising and controlling others. The formal organisation has managed to eclipse most other pre-existing formats of social organisation. It is increasingly encroaching on intimate domains of the family and the person. In the process, the modes of thought enshrined in and transmitted through these pre-existing local forms of social organisation, risk to disappear without a trace; or if they are more or less salvaged, then most likely only in a form (e.g. scholarly North Atlantic descriptions as in ethnography, or condensed and bowdlerised Internet entries; or as certified UNESCO sites) that entails a radical change of format, content, and power relations in the management of these forms of thought; here UNESCO has a role to play, in identifying suitable contexts for the identification, preservation and management of historic modes of thought.

Largely as a result of the success of the modern formal organisation, most forms of thought in the world today (either practical or theoretical, either informal or academic, either ephemeral or canonised) are implicitly embedded in one converging type of particular context: that of the rationality of the modern formal organisation. Even if the formal organisation has been informally defined so as to adapt to local conditions, its essentially hegemonic, North Atlantic ideal of a particular kind of rationality hovers over all historic local forms.

Now, UNESCO is not an impartial outside observer to these fundamental processes of redefinition and domination. UNESCO is a formal organisation among the others. The processes of redefinition and domination therefore are likely to be part of the UNESCO as a massive, global formal organisation in its own right. Probably it is only through a

process of profound self-critique and intercultural counter-hegemonic reflection that UNESCO can become aware of, and can steer away from, the undesirable implications of its own formal organisation. For UNESCO's role in 'promot[ing] the world traditions of philosophical thought, as well as [in] foster[ing] the research and teaching of 'lesser-known' philosophical traditions?' this means:

- *in addition to recognised exponents of these traditions, also outsiders, non-academics and non-bureaucrats (e.g. sages, midwives and girl's puberty teachers, shamans, diviners, healers, community priests, prophets, sacred kings etc.) may be recognised as being among the authentic bearers of vital philosophical traditions of mankind,*
- *forms must be sought to enlist their participation at the global level, in a way tangential to UNESCO, but without encapsulating them, in their turn, in the bureaucratic fold just described and critiqued.*

7. What kind of capacity-building programme would best support philosophical research and scholarship in the Least Developed Countries?

I have already touched on this point in my answer to question 3.

8. How can UNESCO best promote the teaching of Philosophy in the world? Furthermore, at what level should the teaching begin?

I have already touched on this point in my answer to question 5.

9. What would be the best way to preserve, teach and promote oral traditions of philosophical wisdom and thought?

I have already touched on this point in my answer to question 6.

10. Many scholars have noted that Philosophy at UNESCO should be the backbone for the work of the entire Organization, as well as for the whole United Nations system. Do you agree, and if yes, how could such an idea be realized?

Yes, I do agree in principle, although the term 'backbone' suggests a centrality that I (contrary to Plato in The Republic) would not yet entrust philosophers with, considering their endemic inaptness in public affairs, and their endemic lack of experience in striking compromise (without which no human group can function). In the UNESCO context, I would enlist philosophers as advisers, and I would give them the power to ask critical questions and to produce advice and fundamental criticism precisely when not asked to do so. But I have already touched on this point in most of my previous answers.

11. Please use this section to note other comments, ideas or suggestions that you may have:

The above will do.

THE SOCIETY FOR AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY (GESELLSCHAFT FÜR AFRIKANISCHE PHILOSOPHIE – GAPH) INTRODUCES ITSELF

Since its founding in 2002, the *Society for African Philosophy (Gesellschaft für afrikanische Philosophie – GAPH)* with its base in Berlin, Germany, has been trying to make more widely known the various ideas and theories of African philosophers and thinkers, both in the academic life of the Federal Republic of Germany, and in that country at large. To achieve this goal, the Society organizes weekly readings, when texts of African philosophers are discussed. Furthermore several renowned philosophers and scientists have already been guests of the Society in order to lecture about their work in the contexts of African philosophies and their concepts. Also, the Society for African Philosophy organizes, twice a year, a colloquium about topical political and sociological questions concerning the African context. One of the purposes of these meetings is to demonstrate that these questions can meaningfully be analysed in a philosophical manner.

The Society for African Philosophy does not want favourize any particular school of philosophical thinking, neither inside the African context nor outside. It is open to any opinion or theory. Our point of departure is that there were and are many and multifarious philosophies in Africa, and that intercultural philosophical inspiration may be gathered from the thoughts of African thinkers past and present.

Apart from the above mentioned activities, also an international conference on African philosophies is planned in Berlin.

More information about the Society of African Philosophy is available from: www.gaph.org (exclusively in German, as yet). There also the postal address and the e-mail address of the Society may be found.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Any association or organisation directly relevant to philosophy in Africa may present itself in QUEST in a manner similar to the GAPH above

Reviews Section

FOREGROUNDING AFRICAN SEXUALITIES

Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa, Signe Arnfred, ed., Uppsala, Nordistika Afrikainstitutet, 2004, 276 pp.

A Review by Sanya Osha

There was indeed a large void on discourses relating to sexuality/ies in Africa. This disturbing silence is not unrelated to the violence and humiliations of colonialism. As so many scholars such as Ann Laura Stoler, Anne McClintock, Sander Gilman, Megan Vaughan, Robert Young etc. have demonstrated, the colonial event in its various dimensions and reverberations was shot through by very powerful sexual undercurrents. The colonial drive, in other words, was essentially phallic (and thus penetrative) in which the adventurous agents of empire – the soldier, the administrator and the missionary – penetrated a seemingly passive geographical space, a virginal wilderness that was awaiting the thrust, domestication and eventual upliftment of Euro-modern civilization and modes of rationality. From Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespusci to the Japanese invasion of China during the Second World War, the colonizing gesture was a manoeuvre of powerful phallic drives, a violent act of copulation that is often difficult to disguise.

Signe Arnfred, the editor of the volume hints this in her introduction but drives the point harder in her chapter, “African Sexuality/ Sexuality in Africa: Tales and Silences” which reconfigures sexology with colonialism. Edward Said’s work on the orientalizing of the orient by the Western gaze and reason is well known. Employing the same tropes and striving for perhaps similar effects, Arnfred renarrativizes two famous tales of colonial copulation: Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and the tragic figure of Sarah Bartmann. Haggard’s famous story of the colonial quest is set in Southern Africa and Bartmann was the unfortunate black South African woman carried off from Cape Town in 1810 to be exhibited in mainly Lon-

don and Paris on account of her steatopygic attributes. In these two accounts of sexual conquest and denigration, the black subject is the victim. The sexualization of the black subject has always been marked by violence and menace and Arnfred's chapter foregrounds this knowledge. She also reminds us that apart from the unusual case of Amina Mama, a scholar of gender studies who attempts to tackle the topic of African sexualities, other scholars with similar concerns such as Ifi Amaduime and Oyeronke Oyewumi have on their own part avoided it. Heike Becker adds more insights as to why the issue of African sexualities remains problematic:

"Africans and their sexuality were savage; at issue was merely whether African sexuality was of the noble or the ignoble savage variety. (...) protagonists agreed that it had to be contained" (p. 37).

These views obviously evince why the discourses revolving around African sexualities have had such a hard time getting off the ground.

The volume does a lot to reveal the range of African sexualities and the multiple ways in which they can be addressed, problematized and conceptualized. After the lingering effects of colonialism on the black sexual subject, there is the need to rehumanize the very domain of black sexuality and one of ways to do so is to recognize as Liselott Dellenborg points out in the volume that

"besides being a very individual experience that is difficult to measure and compare, sexuality and sexual pleasure are culturally and socially constructed" (p. 88).

Furthermore, regional agendas on how to conceive of, and mobilize discourses on sexuality need not be similar and are in fact often oppositional in nature. Indeed,

"at the United Nation's Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980, for instance, Western feminists vexed women from the Third World countries by debating on the quality of clitoral and vaginal orgasm" (p. 90).

Of course this did not go down well with participants from the South as other more pressing concerns such as the

"lack of clean water and fuel, and high maternal and child mortality" (Ibid.)

were more to the point for them.

Undoubtedly, some of the ideas and concepts explored in the volume are controversial. Kopano Ratele, in a contribution aptly titled “Kinky Politics” begins by modestly claiming that

“many people around the world still find inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-religious, or inter-ethnic coupling irritating or at best titillating...” (p. 139).

And then within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, he argues that

“young men and women should be encouraged to have good, ‘normal’, sexual intercourse at the earliest opportunity with another person race or ethnic group before they reach a certain age. It may be one way of attaining liberated masculinities. Most crucial, though, good interracial sex could have a deep significance for reconstructing our national politics” (p. 144).

Ratele correctly admits that his suggestion is indeed provocative. Perhaps it is only possible to advance this line of argument in post-apartheid South Africa. Certainly, it would be a very difficult argument to conceive and project in mainstream America where the history of racial violence and oppression is no less violent.

Another concept is explored in the book which though slightly less controversial also nevertheless deserves our attention. In the mid-nineties, Jane Guyer, the anthropologist theorized what she termed *polyandrous motherhood*. In her words,

“polyandrous motherhood is a liaison consisting of women cultivating co-parental ties with more than one father of their children” (p. 224).

Guyer’s ethnographic locale for the concept is South-west Nigeria but Liv Haram in an exceptionally revealing contribution demonstrates how it works in East Africa, notably Tanzania. In relation to how the concept works in South-west Nigeria, I would want far more concrete empirical evidence. This is not say to that such cases are not to be found in the region. But we need to know more about the frequency of such cases, the modes of cultural resistance and acceptance it encounters and also the social strata in which it is most manifest. One gets an idea of these details in Haram’s chapter but perhaps Guyer’s work which serves as the primary conceptual model perhaps ought to have been better highlighted so that we get a fuller picture of the social significance of the concept.

A number of the contributors to the volume rehash the usual debates about women's liberation in Africa. Perhaps this is not the kind of volume to address such preoccupations; sexuality is the central concern here. However, we get quite a broad picture to African reactions to the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. There are also competent explorations of themes of female genital mutilation. And as for sexuality itself, we are reminded in several instances, notably by Jo Helle-Valle,

“not only that different people relate to and practice sex in different ways, but that sexual mores and practices in fact mean many different things for each and every individual, depending on the socio-cultural contexts they take place within” (p.206).

If this tenet can be incorporated with African political projects, it means a source for unnecessary human contestation and conflict would have been addressed.

A SHORT HISTORY OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY, BY BARRY HALLEN

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002, 134 pp., ISBN 0 – 253 –
21531 – 5

A Review by Frederick Ochieng'-Odhiambo

African philosophy is a relatively young discipline whose existence started receiving recognition in some universities (mostly in Africa) in the late 60s/early 70s. What gave impetus to this recognition were the publications of John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*, Janheinz Jahn's *Muntu: An Outline of the New Culture*; the translations of Marcel Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* and Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*. What was common in the texts was their explicit assertion of the existence of African philosophy and more importantly, their unpacking of it. These texts changed the course of the then ongoing debate from whether there existed African philosophy to the question of what the exact nature of African philosophy was. Today, African philosophy has tremendous amount of relevant literature to draw from. These include comprehensive anthologies and detailed monographs meant to situate African philosophy in its historical context and discuss major figures and traditions in it. Some of them identify and focus on specific themes and issues relevant to African philosophy, and in some instances make comparative studies with similar themes in Western tradition. Besides the anthologies and monographs, there are countless numbers of well researched and written articles that are published in journals all over the world.

Among the myriad of literature on African philosophy, Barry Hallen's *A Short History of African Philosophy* occupies a special position; a position it shares with D. A. Masolo's *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. Samuel Oluch Imbo's *An Introduction to African Philosophy* is not far off from this location. Like Masolo's text, Hallen's publication, as its title suggests, is an exercise in the history of African philosophy. However, Masolo's text is more detailed and rigorous in its approach and analyses of issues. Nevertheless, Hallen's publication is just as encyclopaedic. It presents a commend-

able panorama of African philosophy. It incorporates the views of a wide variety of African philosophers, scholars and intellectuals. Anyone with an interest in joining the field of African philosophy will no doubt find Hallen's publication to be most useful and quite resourceful. For those already in the field, Hallen's text is refreshingly novel. This is largely due to the concise fashion in which he has unpacked and coherently repackaged the various discourses on African philosophy.

The text consists of nine chapters. Chapter one is basically an explication of the documented reflections of African figures of historical importance. These are: the Egyptian Ptahhotep (lived around 2400 BCE), the Abyssinian Zar'a Ya'aqob (1599–1692 CE) and Ghanaian Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703–1765 CE). This chapter acts as a good and appropriate starting point to the study of African philosophy in that it serves to show that philosophical thinking in Africa predate the so-called 'modern' era. However, Hallen does not engage the Afrocentric argument that ancient Greek philosophy and science were directly derived from Egyptian civilization. Given the historical purview and interest of the chapter, it would have been fair for Hallen to give some concentration on the discourse rather than the single paragraph that he accords the debate.

Chapter two titled "Twentieth-Century Origins" revolves round four texts: two from the Francophone (Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* and Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*), and the other two from the Anglophone (Abraham's *The Mind of Africa* and Mbiti's *Africa Religions and Philosophy*). Horton's two-part essay "African Traditional Thought and Western Science" is also touched upon, and according to Hallen it is the belief of several philosophers in the African context that this essay is what

"led to a more deliberate development of African philosophy as an independent academic discipline" (p. 180).

This chapter is fairly brief, perhaps unacceptably too brief especially if one has in mind a reader who is trying to find some grounding in African philosophy. The views of the authors are mentioned just in passing without any substantial and meaningful explication, yet the works of the authors play a central role in the history of African philosophy.

Chapters three and four titled "Rationality as Culturally Universal" and "Rationality as Culturally Relative" respectively, actually constitute the

backbone of the text. The two chapters are antithetical and accurately capture the old and ongoing debate as to whether philosophy is (or should be) universal or relative. Chapter three consists of the views of those philosophers considered to argue for a model or paradigm of cognition or understanding that is universal to every human culture. This chapter therefore explicates the thoughts of those who defend the thesis of rationalism as a cultural universal. These are Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye and 'Segun Gbadegesin. Chapter four, in contrast, is an explication of the view that holds rationalism as culturally relative. Defenders of this view believe that there are elements of African cognition that are sufficiently unique or distinct to somehow set it apart.

The major complaint against the so-called Universalists is that by placing undue emphasis upon the supposedly common or universal elements of African cognition, these uncommon features are underrated and fail to receive the recognition they deserve and the credibility they merit as alternative pathways to understanding (p. 35).

The thoughts of Godwin Sogolo, Akin Makinde, V. Y. Mudimbe and Kwame Anthony Appiah are presented as representative of this view. Barry Hallen is quite sympathetic to this view and locates two of his texts (*Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* and "*The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful*": *Discourse about Values in Yoruba Culture*) within this tradition.

At the end of chapter four Hallen cautions that the distinction between the universalists and the relativists is one of emphasis rather than that of kind (pp. 44-45). The universalists, the reader is told, prefer to begin their analyses on the basis of a presumption that there must be a shared rationality. The relativists, on the other hand, believe that this kind of commitment should be avoided or delayed until sufficient piecemeal, detailed, concrete, empirical analyses of specific elements of the African intellectual heritage have been undertaken and the results assessed. This, Hallen believes, would put on hold the ever-pervasive influence of the paradigm of rationality that is treated as a virtual sinecure of Western philosophy. A good number of readers are bound to find Hallen's distinction between the universalists and the relativists quite intriguing for it seems to run counter to the conventional understanding of the two terminologies.

Chapter five "Ethnophilosophy and Philosophic Sagacity" is devoted to

the views of Paulin Hountondji and H. Odera Oruka. This chapter, just like chapter two, is fairly brief. Though the title of the chapter has the word 'Ethnophilosophy' as one of its major conjunctive components, this is somehow misleading for what Hallen actually does is present Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy. One would wish that he spent more time explicating the views of the so-called ethnophilosophers rather than just mention their names since, at any rate, his treatment of their views in chapter two is also merely passing. There is no question that Hountondji's critique of ethnophilosophy and Odera Oruka's philosophic sagacity would be more appreciated if reasonable amount of time had been devoted to ethnophilosophy.

The chapter titled "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" is a follow up of the discussions in chapters three and four. More accurately, the chapter shows that there are some fundamental convictions in common between African analytic philosophers who defend relativism and their hermeneutic colleagues. To introduce the chapter, Hallen ably presents the views of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. This is something positive given that phenomenological-hermeneutical methodological tradition has frequently been criticised as excessively dense and difficult to interpolate. The views of some three philosophers who advocate a hermeneutical approach to African philosophy is then explicated. These are Theophilus Okere, Okonda Okolo and Tsenay Serequeberhan. Relevant works of three African philosophers Lewis Gordon, Lucius Outlaw and Robert Bernasconi are also briefly discussed. The starting point of most hermeneutic philosophers is the conviction that European imperialism and colonialism violently and profoundly disrupted Africa's social, cultural and political continuity and integrity. In order for Africa to redeem itself, African philosophers must define and interpret African values. They should not let the "other" continue playing the leading role for them. More specifically, they should

"...single out what aspects or elements of the *mélange* are to be valued and reaffirmed as a social basis for a progressive African social, political, and cultural heritage that will be a worthy tribute to that remarkable continent" (p. 61).

In the last paragraph of the chapter, Hallen advises African analytic and hermeneutic philosophers not to follow the antagonistic footsteps of their

Western counterparts, but to work together given that they share common concerns and interests. These should be explored to the mutual benefit of both approaches (p. 71).

In chapter seven titled “Socialism and Marxism”, Hallen discussed the category of philosophical thinking by African philosophers, intellectuals and political figures who have been identified as socialists or Marxists. This includes the thoughts of Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amilcar Cabral, Oladipo Fashina, Olufemi Taiwo and Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba. While the thoughts of Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral and Wamba-dia-Wamba are presented as being fundamentally concerned with the question of political and economic emancipation of Africa using Marxism or socialism as a passage, those of Fashina and Taiwo are general scholarly exercises in Marxist theory. It is therefore not surprising that the referred to works of Fashina and Taiwo hardly get space in discussions of African philosophy unlike the referred to works of the other four.

Chapter eight titled “Philosophy and Culture” is an attempt to present the views of those scholars, most of whom do not have academic qualifications in philosophy, who argue that Africa should define itself in or on its own terms regarding methodologies, subject areas and issues without reference or deference to any alien culture. For then, and only then, will Africa’s cultures be on a position to speak for themselves about what philosophy should or should not mean to them (p. 91). Hallen then very briefly mentions the views of Asmarom Legesse, Wole Soyinka, Okot p’Bitek and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Thereafter he goes ahead to give a fairly elaborate exposition of the views of Paget Henry, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Ifi Amadiume and Nkiru Nzegwu. Besides Henry, the views of the other three are presented from the standpoint of the issue of gender. Despite some differences amongst them, they concur that in (some) African societies, unlike the Western society, gendering is not of fundamental importance, and hence the West has misunderstood and misrepresented Africa given their conceptual framework that assumes that gendering is the fundamental social distinction. A drawback of this chapter is the brief manner in which the views of Soyinka, p’Bitek and wa Thiong’o are presented. Given their international stature and standing in academia, it would have been only fair if more space were allocated to them. Otherwise the chapter is quite interesting and those philosophers and scholars who have not had the benefit of living for a considerable period in the continent would

without question learn something about matters of gender in Africa.

Besides the views of philosophers and scholars explicated in the previous chapters, in chapter nine, Hallen presents other texts on and of African philosophy. The list is quite exhaustive. It includes texts by D. A. Masolo, John Pittman, Emmanuel Eze, Richard Wright, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Parker English and K. M. Kalumba, Albert Mosley, P. H. Coetzee and A. P. Roux, and Samuel Oluoch Imbo. He also gives a list of journals on African philosophy (some of which are still on print and others that are out of print). He also points to some Web sites that are devoted to African philosophy.

Barry Hallen's *A Short History of African Philosophy* is not just another addition to texts on African philosophy. As already indicated in the second paragraph, it occupies a unique position; a position it shares with D. A. Masolo's *Africa Philosophy in Search of Identity*. Both beginners and experts in African philosophy would find the text to be very resourceful because of its extensive coverage. I can immediately see that any course in African philosophy would find it to be irresistible. A weakness of the text that I have already mentioned more than once, is that the views of some philosophers and scholars are not sufficiently presented and discussed. The excuse given by Hallen in the introduction of the text is that when he embarked on the manuscript, he meant it to be a chapter in a text that was to be edited by Kwasi Wiredu. The length of the paper turned out to be unacceptably too long and upon advice and encouragement from Wiredu, Hallen turned the overweight chapter into *A Short History of African Philosophy*. I would now encourage Hallen to seriously consider the possibility of further turning *A Short History of African Philosophy* into *A (Long) History of African Philosophy*. By so doing he would do justice to the views of those philosophers and scholars whom he just mentioned in passing.

Everything considered, Barry Hallen should be commended for the objective and consistent fashion in which he presents the diverse views and ideas of so many philosophers, intellectuals and political figures. Despite the fact that he is more sympathetic to some views and standpoints, he has desisted from joining head-on in the debates. His major objective being to present the reader with unbiased explications and information so that the reader may engage his or her rational scrutiny.

RIGHTS AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION IN AFRICA, BY
ENGLUND, HARRI, & NYAMNJOH, FRANCIS B. EDS.,

Zed Books Ltd, 2004. pp. xiv, + 283.

A Review by Mohammad Hossein Seifikar

This book explores the politics of recognition in post-colonial Africa. It also deals with the various ways Africa is dealing with democratization and the claims for rights. The politics of recognition refers to the grievances which minorities bring up in the public realm concerning lack of recognition or misrecognition. The contributors in this volume demonstrate that the contemporary African politics are immersed in the politics of recognition no less than are the politics of Europe and the United States. They present a number of case studies from a wide range of Sub-Saharan countries which show that currently there is a torrent of identity politics in the African public sphere, with demands for ethnic and regional representation. The early post-colonial African leaders suppressed difference in the name of national unity. The politics of recognition in post-authoritarian Africa aims to rectify this situation.

The contributors often use the politics of recognition as an entry point to confronting what forms of liberal democracy are best suited to Africa. They claim that currently the popular African demands for ethnic and regional recognition and representation are expressed in terms of rights and democracy. They argue against one-size-fits-all conception of liberal democracy and try to form local alternatives to it. Some of the chapters in this volume critically examine the liberal insistence on a dichotomy between individual and society, citizens and state.

What sort of liberal democracy and conception of rights is best for African nations? The chapters in this book argue that the answer to this question always depends on the local and specific empirical realities on the ground, such as, the economy, the political situation, the way people relate to each other, and even the way the people perceive the world and their own sense of

self. The contributors argue that democracy will only thrive if we take into consideration and understand historical particularities and not by imposing 'difference-blind' models which do not correspond with local realities.

The essays in this volume are arranged into three parts. The first part is called 'The Rhetoric of Rights.' It includes essays by Francis B. Nyamnjoh, Fidelis Edge Kanyongolo, Krista Johnson & Sean Jacobs, and Ulrik Halsteen. They describe and assess the various intermediate communities and loyalties which can exist between the individual and the state. They also argue that the rhetoric of rights (particularly social and economical rights) do not match the difficulties many people have in securing and exercising them because they are too poor and powerless. The authors are concerned that in some contexts rights talk may be more rhetorical than a means of emancipation. The essays discuss these ideas and develop them in the contexts of the democracies of Botswana, Malawi, South Africa, and Uganda.

The second part is called 'Disadvantage, Misrecognition, Subjection.' It includes essays by Marianne Andersen, Sheila Bunwaree, and Bjorn Enge Bertelsen. These essays seek to uncover the politics of recognition and representation in Kenya, Mauritius, and Mozambique. They focus on the way the official rhetoric of ideologies of democracy repress group identities not following the existing subject categories. The authors look closely at the claims and attempts of the Kenyan Deaf community to be recognized as a cultural and linguistic minority, the marginalization of the Creoles women of Mauritius, and the way memory and cosmological dimensions pose a challenge to liberal politics for the Honde community of central Mozambique.

The third part is called 'Elites and Communities.' It includes articles by Sten Hagberg, Redie Bereketeab, Peter Geschiere and an Epilogue by Richard Werbner. The essays discuss the roles voluntary associations play in the politics of belonging and in the process of transforming identities into rights in Burkina Faso, the way identity claims can clash with the project of nation building and state formation in Eritrea, and the way the new forest law in Cameroon can intensify the issues of group identity, promote worrying forms of exclusion and xenophobia, and weaken national citizenship. Finally, the Epilogue goes over some the aims of the book and some of the re-occurring issues from the previous chapters.

Overall, I think that this book is a good contribution to understanding the politics of recognition. The essays in this volume manage to generate new

insights into a whole range of issues related to liberal democratic theory, such as, citizenship, civil society, civil rights, and ultimately, personhood and subjectivity. What makes this volume very unique is that the essays are marked by a plurality of analytic approaches to their subjects and they often present some very diverse perspectives on the issues they are dealing with.

I found that many of the essays succeed in opening up new perspectives on Africa's democratization and that they show much flexibility in imagining the institutional forms that democracy may take in Africa. This volume is bound to contribute to the debates and discussions surrounding the alternative forms liberal democracies can take.

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